

The City in a Park

“Dough-boy den.”

“No, no. It’s dough-brie den.”

Waiting at the airport, we were practicing the Ukrainian greeting. For several weeks, Vera Glywa of the Prairie Village Sister City Committee had been teaching conversational Ukrainian to interested citizens. Now came the acid test. A delegation from our sister city in Dolyna, Ukraine was coming to visit.

This was the second visit arranged through the Open World Program of the Library of Congress. This visit was administered by the U.S./Ukraine Foundation and hosted by the International Visitors Council of Greater Kansas City. The visit is unusual for several reasons. Such visits usually bring people from many different cities in another nation. This one featured people exclusively from Prairie Village’s sister city, Dolyna. Last fall, another delegation from Dolyna visited Prairie Village. It was altogether remarkable that a second such visit was following so closely on the first. This sister city relationship was clearly getting attention and being encouraged at national levels of government.

And now they were here. “Dobry den” we greeted them, waving U.S. and Ukrainian flags and introducing ourselves. The delegation consisted of 5 members of the Dolyna city council, and a “facilitator,” a Ukrainian graduate student at Kent State University in Ohio. The group’s unofficial leader was Viktor Goshylyk, the Secretary of the Dolyna City Council. As Secretary, his functions are very similar to the City Manager here. With Viktor were Nadiya Popovych, the city Comptroller; Volodymyr Spodar, the Head of the Department of Education; Yaroslav Shyyak, Head of City Construction and Architecture (Public Works); and Tetyana Seniv, Director of the City Museum. Igor Sivash served as the facilitator. They were met by members of the Greater KC Visitors Council, the Prairie Village Sister City Committee and the home-stay hosts. Open World Program participants stay in the homes of people in the communities they visit. In this way, they have a continuous learning experience, seeing how Americans live on an everyday basis. No sooner had they settled into their rooms than they were off to a cookout at Mayor Shaffer’s house with members of the city council and the sister city committee. On Sunday, members of the group attended church services with their host families and then had free time to see the sights with their hosts. Some went on a driving tour of Mission Hills. Others went to the Prairie Village art fair and the Nelson-Atkins Museum.

The agenda for the visit was set by the Visitors Council and followed the theme of “accountable governance.” The visitors spent a day observing Prairie Village government operations and saw a meeting of the City Council. At that meeting they gave presentations about their city and its operations. Also on the agenda were visits to the Prairie Village Public Works, BWR, the Prairie Village city architects, Johnson County Community Services and Board of Elections, and meetings with local state legislators. On Wednesday, the group visited the State Capitol, the Kansas State Museum and Library, and KU’s center for Russian, Eastern European and Eurasian Studies. To

observe the interaction between government and media, the group also visited KCPT television.

In the evenings there was time to spend with the host families. On Wednesday evening, sister city committee member Rod Atteberry hosted an informal question and answer period in which the Ukrainians got to ask questions of someone other than elected officials or government representatives. At the same time, the host families and sister city members were able ask the guests questions. Since other groups from Dolyna had visited Prairie Village, we knew that they had learned much about us before they came. When asked what most surprised them about Prairie Village, Viktor replied: "We were surprised at the way in which you have kept so much green and natural beauty in your surroundings. You have so many beautiful trees and everywhere you look it is green. Prairie Village is a city in a park."

On Friday afternoon we held a short meeting to talk about plans for the future. We are planning an exhibit of Ukrainian art next year. Tanya Seniv, director of the Dolyna museum, is interested in collecting children's drawings from Prairie Village for display. The art should depict their home cities, state or nation. We also hope that students in the two cities can communicate and learn from each other.

After a very busy week, it was time for a farewell picnic in Harmon Park and time to pack bags for the return trip to Ukraine. "Having Viktor stay with us has been great," said Prairie Village resident Phil Needham. "He's a great guy." Dough-poe-bah-chen-ya we say: until we meet again. That meeting will come soon as Mayor Shaffer prepares a delegation to visit Dolyna in late August. Until then we will keep communications open through e-mail, Skype, and our Facebook page.

The sister city committee meets at City Hall at 7 p.m. on the second Monday of every month. Everyone is welcome to attend, to learn more about our efforts, and to contribute your own ideas. Watch for our booth at Villagefest where we will be selling Ukrainian treats.