Уважаемые коллеги!

Американский Совет Преподавателей Русского Языка и Литературы отпраздновал знаменательную дату—40-летие своего существования.

Много интересных событий произошло с момента основания организации. Усилиями учителей и преподавателей русского языка и литературы изучение и распространение русского языка в США расширилось и приобрело систематический характер. Разнообразные образовательные и культурные программы, языковые соревнования, организованные Советом, вдохновили многих школьников и студентов продолжать изучение русского языка и культуры, а для многих изучение русского языка стало делом всей жизни.

В этом издании газеты вы найдёте статьи об истории становления Совета и его образовательных программ, узнаете об одной из самых первых программ русского языка в американских школах и многое другое.

Я хочу выразить глубокую благодарность Зите Дабарс за её помощь в нахождении и обработке материалов для этого номера газеты, Марку Троттеру, Джейн Шафелтон, Мартину Дойлу, Марьян Волтерза за статьи для номера, и всех вас, уважаемые коллеги, за ваше терпение в ожидании выпуска номера.

Редколлегия газеты поздравляет всех членов организации с 40-летним юбилеем!

Творческих успехов, уважаемые и дорогие коллеги!
Ваши усилия, энтузиазм, желание делиться с другими вашими знаниями и опытом, сделали возможным существование Американского Совета Преподавателей Русского Языка и Литературы!

Спасибо за вашу кропотливую работу в распространении русского языка и культуры! Елена Фаркас
The Olympiada of Spoken Russian is an annual series of state and regional competitions held for pre-college students of Russian in the United States. They are sponsored in the U.S. by the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR). International Olympiadas, held mostly every three years in Moscow, are sponsored by MAPRIAL (International Organization of Teachers of Russian Language and Culture), founded in 1967.

The Olympiada fits greatly within the expressed goals of ACTR: to be a professional organization that advances research, training, and materials development in the field of Russian; strengthen communication within and between communities of scholars and educators in language, literature, and area studies in the United States and Russia, and further educational reform through training, institution building, and technical assistance. The Olympiadas traditional components that foster communicability and knowledge of area studies mesh with these goals.

The early years of the Olympiada are intimately tied to the efforts of Claire Walker, Russian language teacher at Friends School in Baltimore. It was she who oversaw the early regional Olympiadas in the U.S. She represented the U.S. on the international committee to organize the first High School Olympiada in Moscow, sponsored by MAPRIAL. And in 1972 took the first American team to participate in it. Three years later she organized the first official ACTR participation in the International Olympiada in Moscow. The five American students were led by Elizabeth Neatrour. Among the students was the current ACTR President, Betsy Sandstrom. ACTR was founded in 1974, partly in order to provide an umbrella organization under which the Olympiadas were to be administered. None of the existing Russian/Slavic organizations were interested in assuming this role, i.e. of participating in a cultural exchange with Russians in the USSR.

Walker was one of the founders of ACTR (together with Dan Davidson and Irwin Weil). She was also its first Executive Secretary as well as the founding Editor of the ACTR Letter.

In acknowledgement of her contribution for fostering interest in Russian Walker was the first American to be presented in 1981 the prestigious A.S. Pushkin award from MAPRIAL.

Since the 1970s ACTR has provided an opportunity for American students of Russian to distinguish themselves with their knowledge of Russian language and culture. When students prepare to participate in the Olympiada they are practicing communicative skills as well as learning about Russian culture.

The preparation of the materials used in the Olympiadas originally was overseen and distributed by Walker through “The Russian Packet,” a service to teachers emanating from Friends School. Through the ensuing years materials were developed and revised and distributed under the auspices of ACTR. A thorough materials development endeavor took place at the NEH/CORLAC Institute at Bryn Mawr College in the summer of 1986.

During the current academic year a committee of ACTR Board members are examining these materials to ascertain if changes/improvements are warranted. Through the years the materials have been used successfully as sources in classroom situations or individual student learning. A new webpage for the Olympiada contest is on the American Councils website under “Programs.”

What Walker founded in the 1970s continues to inspire and challenge Russian language students in the 2000s.

Submitted by Zita Dabars
ACTR History in Photos
История Американского Совета учителей русского языка в фотографиях
(Zita Dabars’ photo archive)


Zita Dabars, Pushkin Medal, Colleague from Germany, Dan Davidson, Pushkin Medalist.

There she also was Director of the Center of Russian Language and Culture (CORLAC) (1985-2007), a nationwide resource for teachers. Dabars followed Claire Walker as Secretary of ACTR and a member of the Board of Directors (1982-87). She became Vice-President and then served as president from 1991-1995. In later years, she was also secretary of ACTR during the presidential terms of Jane Shuffelton and Robert Channon. In August 1990 in Moscow Dabars was presented the A. S. Pushkin award from ACTR’s international umbrella organization, MAPRIAL. This award was followed by the Joe Malik Service Award, AATSEEL, San Francisco, December 1991 and the ACTR/ACCELS Distinguished Service Award, Toronto, December 1997.

While at Friends School, in January 1989 Dabars and her students were part of a landmark program with the Soviet Union. Sponsored by ACTR, it involved students exchanging homestays and studying in one another’s schools.

Since its origins in 1985, and until Dabars retired in 1997, CORLAC raised 2.2 million dollars. Much of this money was gained with CORLAC working with ACTR in cooperation with Dan Davidson. The two most significant efforts were eight summer teaching institutes held at Bryn Mawr College, with significant financial support from National Endowment of Humanities. The second was the development of teaching materials that are now used in high schools and colleges. These materials were supported with significant financial support by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. The authors of these materials were teams of Russian and American scholars, working together, a first. These materials were published by (and were available from) the National Textbook Company (now McGraw Publishing Co.) and the Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company.
January 20, 1975

Dear Colleague:

At the meeting convened at the Statler-Hilton in New York on December 29, for the purpose of setting in motion the successor organization to GTR: - The 33 people present, plus several who could not be, gave the revitalized group their blessing under its new name as above (American Council of Teachers of Russian, ACTR). The mail ballot election of Dan Davidson as president and Irwin Weil as vice president was confirmed. A draft Procedure for ACTR was painstakingly revise several times and finally adopted, with copies directed to be made available to members who send their stamped addressed envelopes. (These copies are ready now; one 10-cent stamp is enough, but an extra is always a welcome donation!)

In accordance with the Procedure the following were named as the first Board of Directors, subject to their acceptance of the post for a term of one, two or three years each:

- Robert Baker, Middlebury College
- Joseph Conrad, U. of Kansas
- Peter Fischer, U. of Houston, Clear L.
- Lynn Fisher, Columbia U.
- Robert Lager, Georgetown U.
- Jan Perkowski, U. of Va.
- David Robinson, Ohio St. U.
- Stephen Soudakoff, Indiana U.
- Charles Townsend, Princeton U.

Also included as voting members of the Board are the President, Vice President, and Executive Secretary-Treasurer, which latter office Claire Walker agreed to fill for 1975.

The purpose of ACTR is stated in the Procedure: “The ACTR is a non-political, non-profit organization dedicated to fostering the study and teaching of Russian, Russian linguistics and literature”. At the meeting in New York Irwin Weil, founder of the group, gave a historical summary of this effort to enter into constructive professional and non-political cooperation with the International Association of Teachers of Russian and Russian Literature (MAPRIAL). He and Dan Davidson discussed with the group the function of ACTR as a somewhat autonomous link with the international organization in which a place is now held for an American vice president, which is developing expanded facilities for student and scholarly exchange, and through which new possibilities for collaborative work and access to new material are becoming available.

So ACTR is in intent entirely and solely a service organization. It becomes my first official duty to invite all who are involved in teaching Russian at any level to join forces with ACTR. Dues for 1975 were fixed at $5. Those who sent in part or all of this amount just before December may be credited against the 1975 dues. We agreed that it would be good to have a membership directory as soon as
feasible, and I will get the first one out in April if by March 31 we have 100 or more paid members; otherwise – in October.

ACTR need you now, - and you may need ACTR. Especially if you are a high school teacher, since these were much under-represented in New York, we urge you to act promptly to be in touch with ACTR. Also, please be generous. –As it was the wish to keep dues low, which could mean that mailing costs would absorb a disproportionate percentage of the treasury. I should like to beg a bit for stamped envelopes, - or just an extra stamp or two – to help with postage.

In early February we expect to have a newsletter for members bringing them up to date on the high school Olympiada in Moscow in July 1975, plans for a high school honorary society now in the making, student exchange prospect and the outlook for the Pushkin Institute, collaborative American-Soviet language work in progress and any other items which come up. Send your dues and send your news!

We are especially anxious to have items of information on any regional contests in spoken Russian which may reveal possible American contestants for Moscow. Teachers in the mid-West are; invited to write to Mrs. Margaret Tower, 1050 Burton Terrace, Glenville, Ill. 60025 for information on a proposed Olympiada in that area, —at once: the deadline is in February. To qualify for the Moscow competition students must be at least through third-year Russian, not yet started in college, and native American speakers of English who have not come from Russian-speaking environments. Materials used in the first Olympiada in the Baltimore Olympiada are available for the one-dollar Xeroxing cost from the Russian Packet. Given the limitation of the American delegation to five students it seems the most practical to consider to consider as our delegates the first five names sponsored from different regions of the country as the result of participation in speech contests, for whom expenses of transportation can be handled. This will be the big problem, as so far there are no funds in hand and no special rates yet offered, so that either candidates will have to be able to pay their own way, or they will have to have the support of local groups. I will try to coordinate information as it comes in and keep interested teachers abreast of our progress, especially if I have stamped addressed envelopes from them.

Sincerely yours,

Claire Walker

Please snip off and send with your dues of $5 for 1975

Name …………………………………….Already credited with……...
Enclosing herewith
Address for directory

………………………….. ……………………………. ……………………………
Tel.no.

Primarily involved in college ….high school….elementary…..teaching. Interested in job news at college…..high school….elementary…level. Willing to carry responsibility in the ACTR …„„ (Indicate what kind.)
Dear Member:

Welcome to several new members, including new subscribers, newly paid-up members, and the participants in the first two rounds of the Pushkin Institute program. A fringe benefit the latter receive is a year’s membership in ACTR, included in the cost of the program.

Any member who has not previously received a Directory of Members should be getting one with its supplemental sheets with this mailing, and other members should find two supplemental sheets with this letter. Charter and By-Laws copies are available. Please let me know what you have not yet received that you would like. Feel free to enclose stamps any time you wish.

Our policy this year is to take full advantage of the postage being used to send you a tidbit of some kind when possible, so you will always know how to explain an apparently irrelevant enclosure. Sometimes you may get a promotional blurb from the Russian Packet, as this time; rejoice then for ACTR is thereby saving some postage, while you may discover something your want to know.

Your Board of Directors held a meeting in St. Lois during the AAASS conference there, on October 8. They worked steadily from 9:30 to 1:30, except for fleeing the room when the air conditioner began to attack with what felt like poison gas. Several pieces of business were accomplished, mainly the thorough revision of our announcement of the spring semester at the Pushkin Institute in Moscow. The Board expressed the hope that many of our members would be in attendance at the Annual Meeting of ACTR during the AATSEEL sessions December 27-30 in New York. At the time of the Annual Meeting reports on the Warsaw Congress and the General Assembly will be given.

The fact sheet on the third round of the Pushkin program is herewith. Please help us get word out to interested people. This time they should write to me for additional copies and application blanks when the near-at-hand supply runs out. From the Resident Director Marty Lang in Moscow we are getting good reports on the fall group of 18, - 12 girls and 6 boys. The group left New York September 17 and is expected back December 31. During the summer Professor Kostomarov gave out some figures which appeared in a New York Times article (July 25). The Pushkin Institutes has 2,500 foreigners taking its correspondence courses. At present 2,000 Soviet teachers are teaching Russian in 87 foreign countries. In two years the new Russian Language Publishing House has produced over 6,000,000 copies of textbooks and dictionaries. Western statistics give Mandarin Chinese first place in number of speakers now with 750,000,000 persons; English second place with 300,000,000; Russian third with 200,000,000. However, Soviet estimates are that up to 400,000,000 people now have some ability to use Russian as a scientifically, culturally, politically significant language.
Dear Member:

If you are a paid-up member you should have received ACTR LETTR #5 by this time, with its voluminous enclosures. All members since ACTR’s inception have been listed in the new Directory, which was sent out loose-page so you could put it into your old cover. New members and late payers who did not receive the Directory and other enclosures with #5 can nevertheless receive all the materials that were sent, by including an extra dollar with their dues to George Morris, 3109 Yale Blvd., St. Charles, MO 63301. If we made a mistake and you were entitled to #5, please let me know directly. We welcome your wish to participate in important decisions about ACTR coming up this year. The dollar will almost pay the extra clerical and special mailing expense. (How it costs just to turn around these days, and what a professional bargain ACTR still is!)

AMERICAN STUDENTS  Henry Ziegler took out team of six high school regional TAKE 3 MEDALS winners to Moscow for the Third International Olimpiada in which 300 students from 35 countries participated. Henry got home in time for the July Board meeting and was able to report in some detail. He expressed the team’s appreciation of the travel fund supplied by ACTR, and said that besides travel cost within the U.S. each person had less than $ 100 of cost to cover personally.

Thinking you might like to see the material and perhaps share it with students, I am reproducing the releases from Moscow in full. At the annual meeting Henry will have additional materials on scheduling and program if they are of interest to teachers. David Herman of Ohio and Paul Natkin of Seattle have our congratulations for their gold medals, and Robert Musto of Massachusetts for his great adventures. I quote from a letter to ACTR from James Heneghan of New Orleans, who hopes Olimpiadas “will continue indefinitely”:

“As one of the American delegates… I would like to sincerely thank you for the support and funds that ACTR has given to this program. I consider it one of the best experiences of my life. Not only do I feel that I have strengthened ability in the spoken Russian language, but also I feel I have a better understanding of people and their feelings. The brotherhood and companionship that was evident throughout the trip will remain with me for a lifetime… The program that the Russians had set up for us was, in my opinion, well-chosen and interesting. …I found the Russian people to be friendly and genuinely interested in America. In fact, all the people— from America, from the Soviet Union, and from other parts of the world— were wonderful people. …”
Henry Ziegler received the unanimous and enthusiastic thanks of the Board for his tremendous work of organization and leadership. As American Olimpiada chairman, he concluded with four recommendations:

1. That state and local contests be held in late spring, 1979, even though this is an in-between year, and that local groups arrange attractions like prizes, hospitality, perhaps entertainment.
2. That colleges and universities organize some invitational contests.
3. That ACTR members express any interest in working on clarification of objectives and the role of the commissions.
4. That the Olimpiada Fund be re-built for 1981. (At this time the Fund has built back from zero in June to $156 now.)

Henry also indicated a hope that we might have a list of high schools presently teaching Russian to make available at cost before the end of ’78.

CAMP PROJECT
ACTR’s Board laid this project down, and cleared Henry who is President to draw upon the entire membership of ACTR in appointing committees. Key people in ACTR’s work are not required to be chosen from Board members, but they must be voting members (i.e., paid-up).

PUSHKIN PROGRAM
ACTR has a group ready to leave for the Pushkin Institute on September 30 until January 13. More details on this group in #7 LETTR. Right now please note two new features for applications for the spring group: undergraduates can apply, and the deadline is October 15. A qualifying examination may be introduced.

BERLIN CONGRESS
We have a second announcement of this congress on the “Theory and Practice of Teaching Russian and Russian Literature: the role of the teacher in the process of education”. It is a 16-page small pamphlet plus registration forms and travel advice. If you need the 10 xeroxes which it would take to copy the material, will you please send me your own addressed envelope with 28 cents postage on it.

NEW MATERIALS
Have you seen our member’s 1978 publication? — Maury Levin’s Russian Declension & Conjugation, Slavica Pub., Columbus, Ohio. (Slavica offers (illegible word) with no prices.)

The Regents of the University of California invite checks made out of them and sent to the Curriculum Inquiry Center, Graduate School of Education, UCLA, 405 Hilgard Ave., L.A., CA 90024, for the Teacher’s Resource Handbook for Russian & E. European Studies—an annotated bibliography of curriculum materials preschool through grade 12, with 633 entries, $3.


Have a good year, all! We have much more news, but it will have to wait for ACTR LETTR #7. Maybe you have something for #7, too?

Yours,

Claire
Since 1975, the ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian, one of the organization’s signature events, has provided thousands upon thousands of pre-college Russian enthusiasts with the opportunity to converse with native speakers of Russian, mingle with students and teachers of Russian from other institutions, and demonstrate their prowess and achievements in Russian language study at annual competitions held across the country. In 2014, the ACTR Olympiada featured competitions in 13 different states and regions: Alaska, Washington, Texas, Minnesota, Illinois/Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware Valley (Philadelphia area), New Jersey, New York City, New York State, and New England. Initially a contest for students who were learning the language in high school programs, the ACTR Olympiada now includes students from elementary school and middle school programs as well as home-schooled students and those who study Russian in community-based heritage programs and on-line. The 1,111 students who competed in the ACTR Olympiada in 2014 represent participant growth of more than ten percent over the last two years.

The ACTR Olympiada is divided into three separate commissions that focus on everyday conversation, poetry recitation, and Russian civilization. Contestants participate in one of five different skill levels and in three different divisions: one for those who study Russian as a foreign language, one for heritage speakers of Russian, and one for native speakers of the language. Many of the state/regional competitions feature performances of Russian music, Russian refreshments, Russian-themed t-shirts, and other enhancements. The ACTR Olympiada also serves as a forum in which institutions of higher education reach out to pre-college students of Russian and their teachers. Organizers, sponsors, or hosts of state/regional Olympiadas in recent years have included Russian and foreign language programs at Drew University, George Mason University, Harvard University, Indiana University, Kingsborough Community College, Ohio State University, Purdue University, Temple University, University at Albany (State University of New York), University of Chicago, University of Illinois, University of Texas, University of Washington, and University of Wisconsin.

“The students at Pritzker (College Prep in Chicago) rarely have the opportunity to interact in Russian in authentic situations, and the Olympiada was a fantastic way for them to take their study of Russian to the next level, speaking with other students, interacting with heritage speakers, and performing for the judges,” commented teacher Sofi Fedushchenko following the Illinois/Indiana ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian that took place March 2014. “My students were also excited to challenge themselves by preparing for a competition at a higher level than their studies in class and conquer their anxiety about speaking a foreign language in front of native speakers. One of them nearly quit the competition the day before, due to nerves, and ended up earning a gold medal. Asked how he felt afterward, he responded with a huge grin, ‘I feel awesome!’”

What could be better than that?” Pritzker.
Olympiada participants “really enjoyed bonding with each other in Russian, mingling with other high school students of Russian, and developing a sense of pride and camaraderie,” according to Fedushchenko’s colleague, Phillip Stosberg, who is confident that many of them will go on to study Russian in college.

Every three to four years, successful participants in the regular category at state/regional ACTR Olympiadas can vie for a spot on the U.S. delegation to the International Olympiada in Moscow which draws top students of Russian from all around the world. In addition and on an annual basis, at each regional Olympiada an outstanding contestant in both the regular and heritage categories is chosen for special recognition in the form of a book prize and personal letter of congratulations from ACTR Executive Director Dan Davidson. Juana Granados was so honored in March 2014, shortly before her graduation from Pritzker College Prep. Now a student at Claremont McKenna College, Granados attended the Lesnoe Ozero Russian program at Concordia Language Villages in the summer of 2013 and studied Russian in Nizhny Novgorod during this past summer as a recipient of a National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) scholarship. “I felt that the Olympiada would be more interesting this year because I would be able to converse more naturally and in more detail,” she remarked. “I knew that if I did the Olympiada, I would have such a fascinating story to tell not only my sister, who also speaks Russian, but also my future Russian host family. To prepare for the event, I engaged in weekly conversations with my sister Clarissa, a former 2010 Olympiada participant, who [at the time was] studying abroad in St. Petersburg, Russia. She would randomly ask me about myself in Russian, and I would create a sentence as detailed as possible for a response. In my Russian class, we prepared in the most engaging way possible. We were given a Blok poem to memorize and were told to interpret it as best we could. I still remember staring into everyone’s eye’s as I recited the poem that would be used in the Olympiada. Everyone had their eyes on me as I emphasized every accent and rolled every ‘r’ sound.”

The Alaska Olympiada of Spoken Russia is one of the most active state/regional competitions, accounting for more than 10% of all U.S. participants in 2014. Michele Whaley, who teaches Russian at West Anchorage High School, extols the event's benefit to students, teachers, and their communities. “Students realize that they are part of a larger group studying language,” she observes. “They gain motivation and aspire to be the ones commended at the most advanced level. Teachers are able to assess their students' abilities in a setting beyond the classroom, with Russian speakers who are not necessarily used to conversing with language users at the introductory level. Native Russians appreciate the efforts that students are making to learn their language, and if they are recently arrived to the United States, they get a model of how volunteerism enriches the community. Russian language students at Anchorage high schools are not always aware that there are many native Russian-speaking adults and students who reside in the state. The Olympiada gives them a chance to meet students whose first language is English, as well as those who are happy to have a reason to polish their native Russian or congratulate other learners. Students fly from Unalaska and
ACTR Letter
40-Year Anniversary Edition

ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian, continued from p. 12

Juneau into Anchorage, or drive eight hours from Fairbanks to participate. A community benefit has been that newly-arrived Russian adults have participated as volunteer judges. At Olympiada, they get to meet a wide variety of Russian speakers, and the event has led judges to later thank us (Russian teachers) for helping them make connections in their new home.”

“The Olympiada of Spoken Russian has been of unique and incalculable value to my students and students from all over Texas,” enthuses Mary Bordes, World Languages Magnet School Coordinator at Brackenridge High School in San Antonio and former chair of the Texas Olympiada. “It has allowed them to interact with Russian the language and with Russia the country in ways that fundamentally altered their worldviews, creating globally-competent citizens. It was always fun for my students to learn the poems, talk to the judges and of course to meet the native and heritage speakers of Russian at the contest. ‘But the chance to win a trip to Russia? Now that’s worth giving up an entire Saturday for!’ [direct student quotation] Many of my students had never been outside of San Antonio, never had a passport, never been on an airplane, never spent the night away from home. But as a result of the Olympiada trip, they returned confident and eager to get out there again and change the world. The safety and security, both physical and emotional, provided by the outstanding organizers and chaperones of these trips has had an effect on my students, turning them into life-long learners and enriching their high school experience intensely.”

Lisa McLendon, who teaches Russian at Bellaire High School, a magnet school for foreign language in the Houston Independent School District, also served as chair of the Texas Olympiada and continues to bring students to the competition. “We sent groups of students to the Olympiada in the seventies and eighties as the contest was growing in force,” she recalls. “Some of those early contestants (one is now with the World Bank, others are in international business or law or medicine) come to speak to the classes today to motivate them to continue competing in the state and then national Olympiadas! Just being there with other Russian language students has been so much fun for my students, but winning awards and ultimately, trips to Russia, has provided the icing on the Olympiada cake!” Speaking for pre-college Russian teachers across the United States, McLendon adds that “the enthusiasm for this competition helps our Russian programs grow and the ensuing publicity at the local, state, and national levels encourages others to study Russian and let the community know the growing importance of Russian language on the world stage.”

Знакомьтесь
Mark Trotter is Associate Director/Outreach Coordinator of the Russian and East European Institute at Indiana University (Bloomington, Indiana). He studied at McGill University (B.A. in Russian) and the University of Michigan (M.A. in Slavic Languages and Literatures) before teaching Russian language, Russian culture, and general linguistics at Grinnell College in the late 1980s and early 1990s. From 1993 to 2004, Mark lived for the most part in Hungary, where he conducted courses in English, Russian, and linguistics at the Dániel Berzsenyi Teacher Training College in Szombathely. In 2004, he relocated to Saint Petersburg to serve for three years as Resident Director/Academic Coordinator in the newly initiated Flagship Program in Russian Language, based at Saint Petersburg State University. Mark has also taught Russian conversation and listening comprehension for more than 15 years at the Indiana University Summer Language Workshop (formerly SWSEEL). He sits on the ACTR Board of Directors and is a national co-chair for the ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian.

Alex Grinevich and Yekaterina Teryokhina, students in the heritage program Charodei (Skokie, Illinois), perform at the Indiana/Illinois Olympiada of Spoken Russian held at Purdue University in 2013. Both also competed in the heritage division.
In 1973 at the AATSEEL Convention, Russian instruction pioneers Henry Ziegler, Zita Dabars, and Constance Curtin founded SLAVA, The National High School Slavic Honor Society, as a means of rewarding those Russian language students who excelled in the classroom and to encourage their continued study of Russian.

The original operations manual and constitution provides academic guidelines for membership, a sample induction ceremony, sets fees for charter application and for membership (which have not changed since its founding!), and also provides for the establishment of a National Duma—representatives from 4 regions: East, South, Midwest, and West—who approve charter applications and aid in conducting the affairs of SLAVA. The two remaining officers are President (currently Halina Danchenko) and Executive Secretary/Treasurer (Marian Walters).

In 1992 the constitution was amended to include pre-secondary programs and special certificates, pins, and membership cards were designed for this group.

Over the years, 131 schools have been granted working charters of SLAVA. Currently 39 schools actively induct members.

Not only does SLAVA provide instructors with the opportunity to offer honor society status equal to those offered students in the more commonly taught languages, but in 1998 because of concern that many high school students who won their regional Olympiadas of Spoken Russian were unable to go on the summer trip through ACTR/ACCELS to Russia due to financial difficulties, it was agreed that SLAVA would provide up to 3 scholarships a year. These scholarships were not to exceed $500 each and teachers were required to verify financial need. The numbers and amounts have been adjusted occasionally to meet specific needs. To date, 34 students have received scholarships of up to $500 to help defray the cost of the trips.

For more information about your school’s charter—its history, how to reactivate a lapsed charter, or how to apply for a charter contact Marian Walters: <Babamasha@aol.com>.

ACT TODAY! Become a SLAVA Chapter!

Give your students a chance to become members of SLAVA and challenge them to add a National Honor Society Award to their high school resumes!
September 1983 was the beginning of a bold experiment in education. A new technical pre-engineering high school was established on Staten Island, one of the five boroughs of the city of New York. A unique feature of this new school was that there would be only one language offered to its students: Russian. We used to say, "You can study any language you want here, as long as it’s Russian."

Initially, the school was named McKee Tech, but after a few years the name was changed to Staten Island Tech. The first teacher of Russian was Ida Grober, a better choice you could not make. I came on board in 1985 and was thrilled to be part of such a program. I had previously taught Russian in a private school in Brooklyn for 17 years. The classes were usually small and recruitment was difficult. Here recruitment was not a problem. But there was pressure to change the policy. Our response was to make Tech’s Russian Language program an excellent one—a program that all could be proud of.

This is the point where ACTR came to the rescue. ACTR had a new competition called the Olympiada, in which students from regional schools with Russian Language programs would compete for medals. Our students did quite well and we were able to publicize their success in the local press. Our new principal, who wasn’t so sure about the Russian, liked the publicity a lot. We were a new school and not so many residents of Staten Island knew about us. Publicity was key. We also began an awards program where we invited the students and their parents on an evening after school and presented the awards to all. This was good recognition for the students and gave some positive feelings about Russian to the parents (no, Russian wasn’t “too hard” and their children could do well in it). Of course, we sent information about the awards ceremony to the local press.

In 1987 I was awarded a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship and as part of my study I went to Leningrad Pedagogical Institute for six weeks study. Again ACTR to the rescue as this was an ACTR program. Before I left we went to the press to announce my plans. Near the end of the program our group of teachers of Russian went to Moscow for a few days. There we were invited to the Central Committee offices of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and met Mikhail Gorbachev. He shook everyone’s hand and had us sit down at that long table I had seen so often in Pravda. He chatted with us about our stay in the USSR and since it was my birthday I told him that this meeting was a great memory for my birthday. He wished me a Happy Birthday and everyone clapped. Our entire meeting was shown on the news program Vremya. Next day our pictures were on the front page of Pravda, Izvestiya, and Komsomolskaya Pravda.

Thanks to the ACTR program and Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev we had a lot of good news to bring home to the Staten Island press. And so, we did. That same summer Ida Grober arranged a student trip to Moscow and Leningrad. Their picture on Red Square and their story also made the local papers. Ida invited the principal along, and he got a better appreciation of Russian culture. Staten Island Tech was becoming more well known, thanks to our Russian program.

While I was studying in Leningrad I heard about the possibility of an exchange program with the USSR. Back in Staten Island I told the principal about it and he liked the idea. It came to be and we were ready. It was managed by (you guessed it) ACTR and a national principal’s group. Our school was selected to help publicize the exchange. We were invited with two students to a press conference at the National Press Club to announce the program. The event went well and we even were published in the New York Times. The local papers ran it too. We were very happy with all the positive publicity.

We were chosen to host the first school ever to come from the USSR on a student exchange. And what better occasion could there be to host another press event. CBS, NBC, ABC and FOX sent reporters and camera crews. New York City newspapers came too. A big assembly was held in the gymnasium where the Russian students and their hosts were introduced. Cameras and reporters were all over, and they stayed and took pictures throughout the building. We made quite a splash and Staten Island Tech was famous! One of our

Russian Language at Staten Island Technical High School —by Martin Doyle
students and a Russian exchange student were interviewed on Good Morning America! Thanks again, ACTR. Throughout the month-long stay of our guests the local papers made a few visits and interviews and pictures were taken. The New York CBS station sent their man Maury Alter to do a “Maury Story” about us. It was a nice piece and good publicity.

When our students returned from their stay in Moscow, more articles were published about them and of course, Staten Island Tech. Our school was on its way to becoming a prominent feature in the Staten Island Educational scene, thanks to the Russian program and a tip of the hat to ACTR. We continued participating in the exchange until 2011.

Of course language contests and exchanges do not alone make for a substantial program. Hiring excellent teachers was an important factor in our success as was offering a good curriculum and course offerings. Besides our standard three year mandatory study we were able to offer a fourth year of College Credit Russian through State University, Albany, NY. Later we were also able to offer Advanced Placement Russian when ACTR and Maria D. Lekic were developing a new test. We are also able to offer Russian Language for “Native” speakers, or Heritage speakers, if we have enough students to make up a class.

So Staten Island Tech is celebrating over 30 years of a successful “Russian Only” program as ACTR is marking its 40-year jubilee. A job well done ACTR and a job well done teachers of Staten Island Tech: Ida Grober, Martin Doyle, John Callahan, Isabelle Stern, Betty Karpman, Sophia Buyanovsky, Nataliya Ushakova, Olga Dobry, Veronika Maslyukova, Natalya Levina, Elena Sokolovski.

Special mention must go to Dan Davidson, the prime mover at ACTR. Thank you for your dedication, hard work and encouragement. ACTR has been an invaluable resource for us Russian teachers.

STО ЛЕТ!

Знакомьтесь

Martin Doyle began teaching Russian in 1963 and taught until 2003. He received his B.A. and M.A. from Fordham University. He also studied Russian at Dartmouth College, Indiana State University, Moscow State University and the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute. He has been to Russia 10 times for study, travelled with students, and travelled on the ACTR exchange program with students. Highlights: He and his fellow exchange participants met Mikhail Gorbachev at the Central Committee offices of the Communist Party of the USSR at which meeting Gorbachev wished him a Happy Birthday! His picture with the group appeared the next day on Pravda, Izvestiya and Komsomolskaya Pravda. He had also participated in 4 exchanges with a school in Moscow; at the end of his career it was calculated that he had taught more students Russian than any other teacher (due in part to the “Russian Only” policy at S.I. Tech and a long career).
ACTR Letter

ACTR’s National Russian Essay Contest has been in existence for most of the organization’s forty-year history. In November 2014 pre-college students will be writing essays for the 33rd contest. The origins of the essay contest are fortunately not lost in the mists of time, but are very much alive in the memory of the first contest administrator. David Burrous was serving on the ACTR Board of Directors in the early 1980s when he came up with the concept of an essay contest, based on one that existed for language learners in Colorado, where he was living and working. He proposed to the Board the idea of an Olympiada of Written Russian that would complement the Olympiada of Spoken Russian already in existence.

The premise behind the Written Olympiada was that students of Russian should be encouraged and rewarded for their proficiency in the language. The contest was always conceived of as a way of recognizing as many students as possible for their accomplishments—not choosing the one best essay, but awarding as many deserving essayists as possible. According to Burrous, the expectation was to award multiple gold and silver essays. The name of the contest has changed so that it is now officially the American Council of Teachers of Russian National Russian Essay Contest. The underlying goal of the contest has remained the same.

Some other aspects of the event have changed over the years, of course. For one thing, the first contest had a registration of 177 students and one judge, Regina Avrashova of the University of Colorado at Boulder. For the most recent rendition of the NREC, ten judges awarded essays written by 1,261 students. Initially, there was no division of students according to levels of proficiency or years of study, nor were native speakers encouraged to participate. That changed so that by the seventh contest in 1988 there were 73 Native Speakers registered.

From the beginning, essays were forwarded to Moscow for a reading by members of MAPRIAL. My basement files include a letter dated 10 February, 1983, that begins “Дорогой Дэвид! Мы с большим удовольствием выполнили Вашу просьбу. Нам понравились сочинения ребят; свои комментарии мы написали на обложках тетрадей. Благодарим Вас и всех членов олимпийского комитета за Ваш труд и любовь к русскому языку. Уверены, что такие олимпиады нужны девушкам и юношам, которые изучают русский язык.” The letter is signed by V.G. Kostomarow, General Secretary of MAPRIAL and M.N. Vyatyutniev, President of the International Committee on Olympiadas. The reference to notebooks refers to the “blue books” then used to administer college exams and also used for writing the Russian essays for a number of years.

Participation grew rapidly, jumping to 343 students in 1983. That year saw the division of essays into separate levels for Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced students. By the fifth year of the contest over 600 students registered. Students were registered on three levels (Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced). Ten essays from that year received gold medal awards at Advanced level and were sent to the Pushkin Institute in Moscow for a second round of judging. That practice continues, although now gold medal essays at Advanced Heritage level and Native Speaker level are also sent to Moscow. A total of 59 essays were forwarded to Moscow this year for a second round of judging.

1,104 certificates were given in 1987, including over forty awarded to native speakers. Jane Barley had succeeded David Burrous as contest Chair. Her successor was Dan Desmond, who served as Chair until 1991 when Jane Shuffelton took on the position. In 2004 Beverly Ignatovicz agreed to share the administrative duties as Co-Chair. George Morris supported the contest for a number of years, spending hours of his time issuing certificates and medals until he retired after the 30th NREC. The 30th NREC was the last one chaired by Ignatovicz and Shuffelton. Bozena Szulc then served as Co-Chair for one year with Paavo Husen. When she stepped down, we were fortunate to have two people agree to replace her. Contest responsibilities are now shared by Paavo Husen, Evgeny Dengub, and John Rook.

Registration hit a high mark in 1997, when 1,630 students were registered. More typically it has ranged from around 1,100 to 1,300. It continues to be a meaningful experience for essayists and their teachers. Topics are selected so that writers on all levels can handle them with an appropriate degree of proficiency. Examples of topics from recent contests include “Что мне важно в жизни,” “Где лучше жить,” “Замечательный человек,” “За чем путешествовать,” “Наша школа.” An expanded

ACTR National Russian Essay Contest, continued on p. 18
writing prompt gives students some suggestions about ways to approach the topic, but they are free to handle the prompt as they wish. Judges are instructed to rate essays according to a set of guidelines that focus on the essayist’s ability to communicate on the topic in a way that is comprehensible, with appropriate vocabulary and syntactical control for the level.

Few changes to the administration of the contest have been made over the years. The college style blue books are no longer used, with students now writing on lined paper provided for them. Their essays are limited to the two sides of that paper. Essays must be in ink and must be written in school, in a supervised setting and within a two-hour time limit. As more heritage students entered pre-college programs, it became apparent that their writing skills were considerably different from those native speakers more recently arrived in the US. Since the 25th NREC in 2006 there has been a separate heritage track at Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced levels for students who came to the U.S. before age 10 or were born in the U.S. This designation applies to students from families where Russian, Belorussian, or Ukrainian is spoken in the home. The Native Speaker category still exists, but is considerably smaller. In the most recent NREC (32nd), there were 21 Native Speakers, and a total of 123 medals awarded to heritage learners.

The ACTR essay contest came into being just as ACTFL produced provisional proficiency guidelines and more than a decade before the publication of Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century. From the beginning it has embodied some of the major tenets of both. Students involved in the contest write to communicate at an appropriate proficiency level for a reader or readers beyond the walls of their classroom. They write on a topic where they presumably have something meaningful and personal to say. In Standards terminology they are performing presentational communication, and they are using Russian in the wider community beyond the classroom. They are showing the judges what they can do with Russian.

The history of any undertaking is always more than a compilation of facts and numbers. Personal experiences fill out the narration, adding stories and meaning to the basic facts. No doubt many teachers reading this newsletter will have their own stories of students and incidents related to the essay contest. As contest administrator for 20 years I could relate many, but will include just a few from memories of administering the NREC to my own students. Contest day in Brighton High School always began with my handing out the lined essay paper and asking: “What are you going to write about this year?” To that, the answer was always “We don’t know, you wouldn’t tell us.” A few incidents stand out over the years. One was watching a second-year student bouncing down the hall after the contest, stopping everyone he knew to exclaim excitedly “I wrote an essay in Russian! I actually wrote an essay in Russian!” Another was a group of students who asked the day after the contest if they could talk about what everyone in the class had written. We had a fine – communicative – class with students exchanging their thoughts about the topic. That year it was Настоящий герой/настоящая героиня. I can still picture the huge ear to ear smile on a native speaker’s face when he heard that he had received a gold medal from Moscow. And finally, equally memorable, was the young man who received an Honorable Mention certificate at our special Russian awards evening and told me afterwards that he knew it was the only award he would ever get in high school.

In conclusion, my thanks to David Burrous for sharing his recollections of the origins of the contest. My deep gratitude to Zita Dabars, who agreed to search her archives of ACTR Board of Directors minutes for references to the early contest. She promptly sent me copies of extremely helpful material. Thanks also to the judges who commit their time and talents to thoughtful readings of the essays.

Jane Shuffelton taught Russian and French at Brighton High School in Rochester, New York. She is currently a consultant on test development with American Councils for International Education. She is a past president of American Council of Teachers of Russian and a member of its Board of Directors. Her Russian class is featured as part of the ACTFL sponsored video library of classroom practices at <www.learner.org>, in a lesson called “Russian Cities, Russian Stories.” She has facilitated at several Startalk workshops for teachers of Russian. Shuffelton served as one of the authors of the Standards for Russian Language Learning and is working on a revision of those Standards. She has received several awards, including the Pushkin Medal awarded by the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature.
Dates and Programs to Remember

- **1974** – The organization was founded;
- **Mid 1970s** – Olympiada of Spoken Russian – Middle and High Schools;
- **1980s** – National Russian Essay Contest (NREC) – Middle and High schools;
- **1999** – National Post-Secondary Russian Essay;
- **2005** – Russian Scholar Laureate Award – High Schools;
- **2007** – Post-Secondary Russian Scholar Laureate Awards.

Publications:
- ACTR Letter
- Russian Language Journal

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**ACTR Letter**

Newsletter of the American Council of Teachers of Russian

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