

## State and Local

# B-C-S residents initiate 'sister cities' program to help Soviet relations

By Catherine Zudak  
Reporter

Bryan-College Station residents are reaching out to cities a half-world away to promote understanding between people of the United States and the Soviet Union and facilitate better relations between the two nations.

"There are heavy issues the United States and the Soviet Union have to deal with," Scott Thacher, president of the Bryan-College Station Sister City Project, said. "It would be nice if we could know something about the Soviets."

The sister city project hopes to establish a long-term relationship between B-CS and Vladimir-Suzdal, twin cities in the Soviet Union. The relationship would include exchanging visits with residents from the two cities.

"Friendly relations require that people know each other, see the things they have in common," said Thacher, a Texas A&M assistant professor of biochemistry. "That's possible with a sister city relationship because you go back and forth (visiting) over a number of years."

Though the project began only eight months ago, it has already made a significant step forward.

Oliga Cooke, a member of the B-CS project and an assistant professor of Russian at A&M, visited with representatives of Vladimir and Suzdal last month.

Cooke led a group of 16 A&M students and one student from Boston to the Soviet Union for intensive language study. However, the trip served to initiate the program, she said.

"The trip was a Department of Modern Languages study tour," she said. "But I just combined the trip to the cities with the trip to the Soviet Union."

Cooke and the student group presented "keys to the cities" of Bryan and College Station to Mayor Vladimir Kuzin in Vladimir and Yuri Nikanorov, assistant to the mayor of Suzdal.

Mayor Kuzin stressed the need to improve relations between the two countries by encouraging bilateral ties, a Soviet Novosti Press Agency story said.

"I must say that the distrust that has existed between our peoples is beginning to wane," Kuzin is quoted as saying, "and in order to stimulate that process we should start bilateral exchanges of delegations, organize meetings between citizens of our towns and exchange school and college students."

But Cooke said there is no guarantee that either city will become a sister to Bryan or College Station because the decision to become sister cities is made by the major city governments.

Bryan and College Station city councils already have issued proclamations supporting the sister city project. Now the Soviet cities must decide.

"Once we've made the overtures," Cooke said, "it's out of our hands. I've been told it could take six months to two years before a decision is made."

She said she spoke to Yuri Menshikov, director of sister city relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, in Moscow before meeting with the Soviet city officials.

"He let me know they don't view cities as twin cities, they don't have that concept," she said. "Vladimir and Suzdal are actually an hour apart."

Cooke said Vladimir and Suzdal often are referred to as "Vladimir-

Suzdal" because of their historical and cultural significance as well as their relative proximity.

"They are part of the golden ring of Russian cities," she said.

The "Golden Ring" is several cities in northern Russia around Moscow that are famed for their cultural and historical monuments and statues.

Some similarity exists between the "Golden Ring" in Russia and cities that are significant in the history of Texas, Cooke said, which was one reason for selecting Vladimir-Suzdal as prospective sister cities.

"If you connect the cities of historical significance in Texas, Austin, San Antonio, and, well, the Brazos County area," she said, "they're kind of golden cities."

Thacher said other similarities exist between B-CS and Vladimir-Suzdal that made them attractive sister-city candidates.

"They are in an agricultural area," he said. "There are several technical institutes in the area and Vladimir is an industrial city a little like Bryan."

Though the project must wait to find out if and who will be their sister city, Thacher said, much remains to be done to prepare for a sister city relationship.

"We need a hospitality committee, a fund raising committee," Thacher said. "We hope to get a high school student committee to be involved in the planning."

The project has about 20 members now, but Thacher said this group doesn't want to direct the project.

"We want to facilitate community involvement," he said.

In order to recruit interested B-CS residents the project organizers are holding a benefit at Brazos Landing Thursday at 8:30 p.m. A \$3 donation is requested.

# Texas Forest Service reports damages caused from fires Official blames blazes on drought

By Mary Huron  
Reporter

The Texas Forest Service has reported more than 1,344 forest fires covering more than 25,000 acres so far this year because of drought.

Just one cigarette tossed out of a car window or one careless strike of a match could set thousands of acres on fire.

Prolonged dry weather when precipitation is less than 75 percent of the average annual rainfall creates drought, range specialist Barron S. Rector said.

"The best alternative for dealing with drought is proper planning and management," he said.

Dr. B.J. Ragsdale, a range specialist with Texas Agricultural Extension Service, said Bryan-College Station is 10 inches below average

rainfall this year and would still be behind even if the area got more rain soon. This is because it is already too late in the season to plant vegetation.

Ragsdale said high winds, little rainfall and low humidity in the spring made it the worst time for area fires.

Due to unusually dry conditions, vegetation was unable to grow and now little is left on the ground to burn in the summer months, he said.

"East Texas is a more hazardous area than we are and those ranchers in native grazing lands have had to reduce their number of livestock and restore their feed supplies in attempt to take pressure off grazing pastures and to survive the drought," Ragsdale said.

"We have only a small area of

acreage here so local ranchers have recovered considerably well on little rain," he said. "The biggest concern of fires here is with homes and buildings rather than with farms and ranches."

The main causes of fires at this time of year are lightning and man's misuse of fire, such as leaving a vehicle's engine running on dry grass or being careless with campfires, he said.

"Fire is a natural phenomenon and can be a good tool only if it is used properly and with care," Ragsdale said.

The service is educating itself by working with various agencies and distributing information to make this area as safe as possible during these critically dry months, Ragsdale said.

# Elections of state district judges get challenged in federal lawsuit

AUSTIN (AP) — Texas' method of electing state district judges was challenged Monday in a federal lawsuit charging that the at-large voting system makes it more difficult for Mexican-Americans and blacks to be elected to the bench.

The League of United Latin American Citizens and other plaintiffs said many counties have large minority populations but only a tiny number of minority judges, and they said minorities often are appointed as judges only to lose subsequent elections.

"There are many, many counties within this state that have multiple judicial districts within the county, and many of those counties have substantial minority populations," William Garrett, lead attorney for the case, said. "But the number of actual minority judges sitting presently in those counties is miniscule."

The suit was filed in U.S. District Court in Midland by three groups on behalf of LULAC, two local LULAC councils and two individuals.

It seeks to have judges elected from single-member districts rather than at large.

The foundation was joined by the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project and Texas Rural Legal Aid in bringing the suit.

Lawyer Rolando Rios said the suit focuses on approximately 20 counties but that more may be added later.

According to the suit, those counties contain 190 state judicial districts and a combined minority population of nearly 30 percent, but only 10 of the judges — 5.3 percent — are minorities.

Garrett said he can point to many cases "where a minority judge, either black or Hispanic, has been appointed by the governor and when they've been required to run in an at-large situation. The almost universal result is that they've been defeated by the at-large system."

In the at-large system, all the judges in a county are elected by the voters of the whole county. If a county is mostly white, that makes it more difficult for a minority candidate to win, the suit argues.

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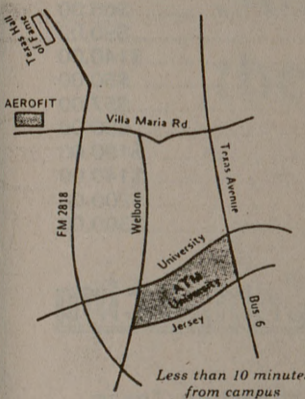
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