

Westminster officials prepare for first delegation to arrive from Estonia By Megen Wessel, Times Staff Writer Thursday, September 19, 2002

Since late 2000, leaders from Westminster have visited Estonia to build a relationship with officials across the 1,800-square-mile country. But the partnership between the two is still in its early stages, due mainly to changes on the City Council in 2001, which included the election of a new mayor and two new councilmembers.

Westminster's interest in creating a relationship with Estonia grew from a program called Partners for Peace, a once-military program that started out in 1991 to help the newly independent country become stable, train management and improve communication between civilians and military personnel.

The program, headed by the Army National Guard, developed into a partner-city program in 1993 and now includes several Maryland municipalities, as well as 14 other states.

At first, Westminster officials thought they may be paired with the Estonian city of Rapla, but now two years later they are working to strengthen their ties to Estonia's oldest municipality - Paide.

The mayor and council chairman of Paide will arrive in Westminster on Saturday and spend five days touring area businesses, such as Lehigh Portland Cement, Marada Industries, Kohn Design and Printing Company, Carroll Lutheran Village and Human Services Programs of Carroll County, and eating in downtown restaurants, touring sites in Annapolis and Baltimore and attending Westminster's Fallfest.

This is the second step in relations between the two cities.

The first official step came in June when two Westminster staff members - Thomas B. Beyard, director of planning and public works and Ronald Schroers, supervisor of recreation and activities - visited Estonia and learned that Westminster and Paide share many similarities.

Paide got its name from the white building material - limestone - used when the town was constructed.

This is a similarity shared with Westminster, which also has ties to limestone with a limestone quarry located just outside the city.

Other similarities between the two municipalities include tree-lined streets and a prominent Lutheran church in the downtown area, Beyard said.

Paide Mayor Tonis Koiv said the city is interested in cultural affairs and has visions of new industrial and housing areas and hiking-biking trails. In Westminster, some of those ideas are already happening, such as the restoration of the Carroll Arts Center, the building of the Wakefield Valley Community Trail, the development of new industrial areas and the restoration of the Fenby Farm Line Kiln, said Beyard.

The next step in the partnership is to outline how the two cities will work together in the future to create cultural, educational, governmental and philanthropic exchanges, Beyard said.

Reach staff writer Megen Wessel at 410-751-5909 or mwessel@lcniofmd.com.