

Westminster delegation shares ideas with partner community in Estonia By Maria Tsigas, Times Staff Writer Monday, July 28, 2003

As part of an ongoing exchange of cultures between the city of Westminster and Paide, Estonia, a Westminster delegation spent two weeks in July sharing ideas on recreation, philanthropy and culture with the locals in Paide.

Westminster's interest in creating a relationship with the city of Paide grew from a program called Partners for Peace, a one-time military program that started in 1991 to help the newly independent Soviet-block countries become stable.

The program, headed by the U.S. Army National Guard, matched Maryland with Estonia in 1993. The partner-city program developed after that, and in 2002, Westminster was partnered with Paide.

Thomas Beyard, Westminster director of planning and public works, said in recent years the program has promoted an exchange of ideas and activities, and a relationship that has focused on nonmilitary areas, such as government, education and health.

This recent trip covered a lot of ground and accomplished several goals, said Beyard, who has been a part of the program since its inception.

Ronald Schroers, supervisor of recreation and activities for the city of Westminster, was part of the employee swap program. His objective on the trip was to evaluate Paide's recreation and leisure-time activities.

Schroers said he toured all the local attractions, assessed leisure activities and made recommendations on how the city could improve its programs. He recommended tangible ideas that Paide's officials could enact immediately to provide additional activities for their citizens.

He also took notice of a few programs in Paide that Westminster could benefit from.

Schroers said Paide has culture and hobby schools, which the town subsidizes and people pay fees to participate in. These schools provide classes such as woodwork and sculpting.

"Experiencing someone else's culture and ideas is a great advantage," Schroers said.

Audrey Cimino, executive director of the Community Foundation of Carroll County, conducted an all-day workshop on building community foundations.

Paide has two pilot foundation projects in the works, but Beyard said it will take time to get them started because the philanthropy of the projects and volunteerism are relatively new concepts in Estonia.

While in Estonia, Beyard also traveled through the country visiting six different cities.

The goal was to develop new partnerships among cities in Maryland and Estonia and to support

Estonian cities that were already part of the program, Beyard said.

Also along on the trip was Eric Byrd, director of the McDaniel College Gospel Choir, who performed with his jazz group, the Eric Byrd Trio, during a Paide summer festival.

Beyard said Maryland's partnership with Estonia is noted as one of the most successful.

Since the Paide-Westminster partnership began, several cultural exchanges have occurred, including Paide's mayor and council chairman visiting Westminster and a visit from the Estonian girls choir.

Beyard said he is excited about the future of the partnership, which includes plans for a student exchange program, a possible business delegation exchange and a children's performance tour of Estonia.

As part of the employee swap program, an Estonian will be visiting in September.

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