

Ensembles from sister cities exchange musical notes on stage Sunday By Stephen Snyder, Times Staff Writer Friday, February 20, 2004

For Thomas Beyard, it's no mystery why Westminster has the most successful partner city program in Maryland.

"It's successful because there's great interest," said the Westminster director of planning and public works about the city's partnership with the Estonian city Paide.

On Sunday, the partnership continues with a performance by the Estonian group Rondellus at Winters Mill High School.

Proceeds from the concert will go to the Westminster/Paide Partner City Fund and to the Children's Chorus of Carroll County, which will travel to Estonia, as well as Sweden and Finland, in July.

Rondellus performs Medieval and Renaissance music using period instruments, said Diane Jones, director of the Children's Chorus, which will also perform Sunday.

"People who enjoy any kind of history are going to be interested in this concert," she added.

According to Beyard, of the 10 partner city programs in Maryland, the Westminster/Paide partnership has been the most active. The city will even lead a workshop about the program at the Maryland Municipal League's annual convention in June.

The partner city program was first initiated shortly after Estonia gained its independence from the former Soviet Union in the early '90s. Maryland became partners with the country in 1993, taking over for New York.

"Mostly in the beginning it was a military-to-military exchange," said Beyard, who, as a member of the Maryland Army National Guard, first traveled to Estonia in 2000.

Upon returning, Beyard floated the idea that Westminster should partner with a similar city in Estonia and begin an exchange. The hunt for a comparable city turned up Paide, which shared with Westminster a heavy emphasis on agriculture, a commensurate population - Paide is about 10,000, Westminster around 17,000 - and a geography rich in limestone.

In June 2002, Beyard, along with Ron Schroers, administrator of recreation and activities for Westminster, visited Paide to explore the possibility of a partnership, which was officially declared that September.

So far, the partnership has sponsored a benefit concert of the Estonian Television Girls Choir last February in Westminster. In return, Audrey Cimino and the Eric Byrd Trio traveled to Estonia to



CHRIS AMMANN/STAFF PHOTO

Diane W. Jones conducts the "Voce Viaggio" chorus during a dinner meeting of the Estonian Committee at Johansson's on Wednesday evening in Westminster. The chorus, the traveling group of the Children's Chorus of Carroll County, leaves July 10 for a trip to Finland, Estonia and Sweden.

perform in the Paide Shanty Festival and the Haapsalu Sea Music Festival.

The city governments have participated in an employee swap program and this semester, Carroll Community College also received its first exchange student from Estonia. Community Foundation of Carroll County also helped Paide set up a charitable community fund for its own county.

In addition, Random House provided a number of children's books and other books that were sent over to the sister city.

On Wednesday, Estonian ambassador Jüri Luik attended a meeting of the Westminster, Maryland/Paide, Estonia Partner City Fund Advisory Committee.

Beyard is hoping that now businesses can start some sort of exchange between the cities in terms of investment possibilities and information sharing.

"That is probably the piece that is the most important," said Beyard. "It is where you really start getting the value back."

Beyard hopes that as the two cities become more familiar with each other, the business opportunities will flourish.

"These tourism type things are a good first step because they breed familiarity," said Beyard.

The largest cultural exchange so far will be when 24 members of the Children's Chorus of Carroll County travels to Estonia this summer.

"The kids really are going to be ambassadors," said Jones.

The concert Sunday is one of many fund-raising events the chorus plans to do in the near future.

The group Rondellus performs regularly all over the world. The day after performing in Westminster, the group is scheduled to travel to Paris, said Jones.

"That's the kind of schedule they have," she said.

Jones said that to have a high-caliber group like Rondellus performing in Westminster is a really boost to the city.

"It's neat for the town to have this kind of notoriety over there," she said.

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Meeting of musical cultures

The city of Westminster, the Community Foundation of Carroll County and the Children's

Chorus of Carroll County present the Estonian musical group Rondellus, along with the Children's Chorus, in concert at 3 p.m. Sunday at Winters Mill High School at 560 Gorsuch Road in Westminster.

Tickets to the performance are \$15 for adults and \$10 for children and students. Proceeds go to benefit the Westminster/Paide, Estonia Partner City Fund and the Children's Chorus of Carroll County.

Tickets can be purchased in advance at the Westminster City Recreation Office, Westminster City Hall, Coffey Music, the Pour House Cafe, the Hickory Stick, Dutterer's Flower Shop and the Community Foundation of Carroll County.

For more information about the concert, call 410-848-9000. For more information about Rondellus, visit the Web site at www.rondellus.ee.