I am very pleased to say that the Russian Club annual Halloween dinner went off with a bang! Though Russians don’t actually celebrate Halloween, we are proud to remind you that two years ago the Russian Club invented a Russian version of this holiday (our own innocent contribution to globalization). It was a truly memorable night that included dancing, singing, authentic Russian food, and Russian music!

A lot of preparation took place in order to have had such a wonderful night, and I would like to thank Drs. Paul Mitchell and Irina Goncharenko for preparing such delicious meals for the Russian Club Halloween dinner. Students also pitched in with the food preparation and serving, and beautifully decorated the lodge to give it the proper Halloween aura of black and orange—but of course the white, blue, and red Russian flag was the centerpiece, in keeping with the cross-cultural spirit of the event. Some other students also lightened these labors by playing the piano till the food was ready to be served and the area well decorated.

The night started off at 6 p.m. with music, tea, and of course food. There was an abundance of salad, soup, шашик (shish kebab), tea, and kvass, the most popular non-alcoholic Russian beverage (delicious, bubbly, and healthy). While the party participants were finishing up the main courses, this year’s club president presided over a little ceremony honoring Katie Swift, who in the past served first as Vice-President, then most effectively as last year’s President of the Russian Club. Two Russian Club
When I decided to take a course in Russian here at Miami, I thought it would be a breeze. After all, I was born in Russia, and I speak Russian with my parents and relatives all the time. However, I completely underestimated how hard it would be for me to renew and develop my Russian skills. After moving to America at the young age of seven, I never even considered that I should keep practicing reading and writing in Russian, and I quickly forgot how to do it. I knew it would be difficult to relearn but I never imagined just how much trouble I’d have. So, if you’re not a native speaker and are having a hard time learning the language, don’t worry - you’re not alone. Native speakers like me may be able to speak pretty well, but the Americans in my Russian 301 class can, in some ways, write better than I do!

There are many different aspects that need to be mastered in order to become expert in the Russian language. Luckily, the Russian program at Miami does a great job of teaching them all. When my friends found out that I got a “C” on my first Russian exam, they laughed at me. “Shouldn’t that be an easy ‘A’ for you because you are Russian?” they said. Well, the answer is no. Russian is extremely difficult to learn for everyone, and it’s important for people not to get discouraged if it gets very hard at times. If you have a great interest in the Russian language, you have to stick with it and keep trying. Even though I’ve spoken it all my life, I’m still having a lot of trouble in Russian class. However, everyone in my class, native speakers and Americans alike, support each other a lot. This is what makes Russian classes at Miami great, and the more I take, the better I will be able to read, write, and speak!

Check out these Russian Web Sites!

www.orgs.muohio.edu/russianclub/
www.russianinternet.com/radio.html
www.rbcmp3.com

Above: Everyone enjoying Russian Halloween
Miami University
Intensive Russian Program in
Novgorod the Great
Plus Touring Sites of Interest in Moscow and St. Petersburg

June 1 - July 4, 2004

6 Credit Semester Hours from Miami University
Open to all -- no previous knowledge of Russian required.

Tours and excursions in Novgorod three afternoons per week. Longer tours to Moscow, to St. Petersburg, and its environs, to the ancient city of Pskov Dostoevsky Museum at Staraya Russia, and to the Pushkin estate at Mikhailovskoye.

For additional information and application, please visit the Miami University website:
http://montgomery.cas.muohio.edu/greal/forst/novgorod.html
or contact Prof. Irina Goncharenko, Dept. of GREAL, Miami University, Irvin Hall 127, Oxford, OH 45056; telephone (513) 529-2526; e-mail: gonchai@muohio.edu

A Russian Journey
By Ben Partee

My interest in Russian is unusual, I think. I’ve studied different languages for quite some time now but they’ve all been Romance languages: Spanish, French, and Portuguese. I decided one day that I wanted to try something else, something unique, so I started Chinese in the fall of my junior year. It started off well but went downhill quickly because I got caught up in the characters and could never remember any of them, which eventually led to my failure in the language. Disappointed at my failed attempt to start a new language outside of the world of Romance languages, I began searching once again. After examining the different languages courses that Miami had to offer, I found Russian. It was great, I thought. It was just the language I had been searching for. It was something new and different to me and it had just the uniqueness I was looking for. Above all, I knew it would be challenging, especially when I learned that Russian 101/201 could only be offered in the fall and Russian 102/202 could only be offered in the spring. Here I was, a new student of Russian, ready to begin the Spring 2003 semester and not wanting to wait until the following year. After speaking with Dr. Goncharenko and Dr. Mitchell about my plans to join the 102 class with no prior knowledge, I began my quest to conquer the language on my own. It was sometime in late November at that point, so I had just under two months to get myself up to par. Winter break came and just like any good student I had yet to touch my Russian book. I finally decided that it was time and the book was then opened for the first time. Well, it certainly was challenging indeed, and that first Russian session I had I think only lasted about 10 minutes.
before I set the book down, completely confused. Imagine learning a whole new 33-character alphabet with only a book’s phonetic pronunciation of the letters. Added to that difficulty I found myself not understanding the fact that the pronunciation of a letter may depend on its position in the word and where the stress is. For example, the “о” isn’t always an “o”: sometimes it’s an “а” and the “е” (which makes a sound like “yeh” in Russian) isn’t always an “е”: sometimes it sounds like the English ee. Moreover, the Russian equivalent of the English letter “g” changes to the sound of a “v” when in between an “е” and an “о” or an “о” and another “о”, but don’t forget that those “о”s aren’t really “о”s; they’re sometimes more like “а”s. Those who know nothing of Russian may now read this and feel exactly how I did. It was chaos in a sense, but I pushed on and finally conquered the alphabet just before the start of the semester. The class started and I still lacked much of the grammar and vocabulary that others in the class had obtained in 101. However, with my determination it wasn’t hard to finally catch up and end the semester well.

Throughout that semester I spoke with Dr. Goncharenko frequently about the possibility of furthering my education in Russian by taking her summer workshop. I thought it was crazy, but at the same time I saw it as my next challenge, as well as an adventure. I kept thinking about the opportunity of living with a Russian family while studying there and I just couldn’t pass it up, not to mention touring many of Russia’s greatest sites at the same time! After signing up for the workshop we all had a paper to fill out about what type of family we wanted to live with, and one of the questions inquired whether we wanted to live with a family that knew English well. “Nope” was my answer, as I knew right away. Where’s the fun in living with a family that can speak English? I was looking for excitement, not a month-long tea party with people who speak English. Besides, imagine how much fun it must have been to have to ask for more toilet paper when you didn’t know the word for toilet paper in Russian. OK, maybe it wasn’t exciting at the time, but it’s definitely something one could never forget. Moreover, things like continually forgetting the word for toilet paper until it was finally written on the bathroom wall were just the start. The adventure that I was looking for came from everywhere. It was on the crowded buses and in the discotheques, at the Russian university and the little shops where I bought vodka. It was the reality that I was living the other world, not just living in it. Something I was only used to seeing on TV was staring me in the face.

The weekends were packed with “dostoprimechatelnosti,” a word I came to know very well while I was in Russia, and which is still the longest Russian word I know. It means “sights worth seeing.” I saw old towns dating back to medieval Russia; I saw the Kremlin and Red Square in Moscow, and many of the famous churches that Russia is known for. One weekend in Moscow

Above: Novgorod: The Yaroslav’s Court. The Cathedral of St. Nicholas (1113)
and four days in St. Petersburg were only teasers that would leave anyone craving more. My last night in Novgorod was probably the one I’ll best remember.

My family all came together and celebrated my last day there. They gave me gifts and even cried a little. It was only a short time that we spent together, but it was as if they were giving up their one-month-old child. Every moment has been worth it. Every step, every little conversation and book. It has been a collective experience, something that couldn’t have existed with any one of its parts missing. Sometimes I think back to how it all started: I had a simple desire for something new, I was naive and I thought it was all strictly academic. Little did I know the extent of my journey in Russian and all of the places it would take me.

"The Russian language surpasses all European languages, since it has the magnificence of Spanish, the liveliness of French, the strength of German, the delicacy of Italian, as well as the richness and conciseness of Greek and Latin."

(Mikhail Lomonosov)

**Why Study Russian?**

By Dusty Wilmes

It’s a valid question, one that many people ask me when I tell them that I am considering minoring in Russian. I will do my best to explain my thought-process in the matter. Hopefully in doing so I will shed some light on why typical middle-American college students might choose to study the Russian language.

Let’s get the silly reason out of the way first and then I will move on to more legitimate things. One reason I chose to take Russian is precisely because it is so strange and esoteric relative to other languages like Spanish or French. If you said to someone, “I speak Russian,” they would probably reply, “Wow! That is impressive!” (for a conformation of this point, watch “A Fish Named Wanda”). And just imagine how impressed your date would be if you struck up a Russian conversation with an immigrant at an adjacent table. Something about being able to speak Russian is amorphously cool and interesting. Perhaps it is because, in many ways, Russia seems more foreign to Americans than even East Asian cultures. This is probably due to the fact that Russia has been isolated and repressed by hundreds of years of totalitarianism.

A number of other things led to my interest in Russia. I had read literature by Dostoevsky and Gogol, works that I liked a great deal. Something about these stories painted a romanticized picture of Russia in my mind. Images of unhappy government clerks, hunger, frayed overcoats, drunkenness, cold, and struggle stuck with me. And yet there seemed to be an overall sense of transcendence, as if these people somehow overcame their hardships and found a great deal of meaning in their lives. In fact, the concept that happiness and understanding are achieved only through suffering is known to be one of the main themes in Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment.

Another more practical reason for my interest in the Russian language is that it could lead to some opportunities with international companies in Russia, or even with tech companies that might develop in Russia’s future. Although Russia is currently in poor economic straits and is certainly not known for its computer industry, it is a massive country with a wealth of natural resources and well-educated
people. Such a large pool of educated laborers, especially those that are eager for more jobs and will work for low wages, is likely to catch the eye of the computer industry.

I am currently taking Russian 101 and will take Russian 102 next semester. I am also eager to participate in the Summer Language Workshop in Novgorod, Russia this summer. I really like what I’ve learned of the Russian language thus far. It seems Mikhail Lomonosov, a great Russian philosopher, poet, scientist, and linguist of the 18th century, aptly assessed the Russian language when he said: “The Russian language surpasses all European languages, since it has the magnificence of Spanish, the liveliness of French, the strength of German, the delicacy of Italian, as well as the richness and conciseness of Greek and Latin.”

At this point I am very intrigued by Russian culture, but I am also fairly ignorant of it. I think most people are, due to its hitherto isolated history. But it certainly seems to have a mysterious charm that is almost impossible to put into words. I hope that my preconceived notions of Russia come to fruition. But if not, at least there will be one less American who can only speak English.

RUSSIAN HALLOWEEN - Continued from Page 1

members, Chris Pullella and Marisa Bowersox, who attended the Novgorod program this past summer, led the group in the Topa-Topa, which literally means “stomp stomp.” This was a huge hit and was followed by another Russian dance where people dance in a circle holding hands.

Following the fun and eventful Russian dance lesson, there was a delicious cake, which said “Viva русский Клуб!” (“Viva Russian Club!”) brought by Professor Goncharenko. (The Italian word Viva that is used the world over was inscribed on the cake because there was no space for the Russian equivalent Да здравствует).

In keeping with the eclecticism of a “Russian” Halloween, the cake was decorated with black cats, ghosts and fall leaves. Everybody loved the cake that was such a great ending for a wonderful night. There could not have been a more enjoyable group than the forty plus people who attended the Russian Club dinner, and hopefully they will continue to enjoy Russian Club events throughout the year.

Keep tuned in for the announcement of our annual Russian Easter dinner on April 7!

Thank You Note

The Russian Club would like to say thank very much to those students who submitted articles for this issue. We are very thankful to Dr. Goncharenko, Dr. Mitchell, Dr. Rose, and Daniel Meyers for their help with the newsletter. We would also like to specially thank the Havighurst Center for financing this publication.
On a bright, beautiful July day, I visited the dacha, or country house, of my host family. It was only twenty minutes from the city where they lived, Novgorod, but the countryside home was where they looked forward to relaxing. The host built the two-story country house, banya (bathhouse), deck, and garage. The side porch with built-in bench looked inviting. In front of the house was a large well-tended garden of which my hostess was very proud.

My host and hostess insisted that I enjoy their banya. Entering the bathhouse, my hostess and I were in a mid-size room with a built-in table and benches on the right side, with hooks to hang clothing on the left wall. My hostess told me that they often had friends or family over to use the banya. After undressing and hanging up our clothes, we proceeded to the next room, where there were benches against two walls. The floor was made of slats so water could run out easily. There was a large hot water basin attached to the heating unit that extends into a smaller sauna room. We entered the sauna room where the heat was moist and intense. It is like stepping into a large oven with the heat turned up high. There were three wide wooden shelves like bleachers, and I climbed to the top, not thinking that heat rises. Almost immediately I moved down to a lower seat. The air seared my lungs and I began to sweat profusely. My hostess periodically flung water onto the stones in the heating unit in order to keep the atmosphere moist. I gradually became accustomed to the heat. This experience reminded me of the health club at home, especially of the women sitting in the sauna talking. After a short while, my hostess told me she was going back to the other room to cool off and I followed her. Previously we had carried a couple of buckets of water into the bathhouse. She poured cold water from a bucket over herself to cool off. I did the same and let out a yell. It felt as if I had jumped into a frigid ice flow because of the difference in the temperature of the hot sauna and the water. I must admit that I felt extremely refreshed and invigorated. It was time to repeat the procedure so we entered the sauna again. This time, to uphold the tradition, I slapped my arms and legs lightly with birch switches to bring the blood to the surface and improve circulation and help remove toxins from my body. After cooling off again, we decided that it was time to cook supper. We left the sauna and stepped into the next room where we used soap and warm water to bathe.

As I entered the house, my host greeted us with “Za vashe zdorov’e!” (To your health!). I could see why my host firmly believed the banya improved his health, because upon walking out of the banya I felt a renewed energy.
Orthodox Christmas
By Rachel Smith

While Easter stands out as the main holiday in the Russian Orthodox Church, the Christmas celebration comes in at a close second. The holiday season unofficially begins on December 6th with the celebration of St. Nicholas the Miracle Worker. Children find small toys in their socks or shoes in the morning and a special song is sung in remembrance of St. Nicholas. Traditionally in the “Old Style” Julian calendar that the church follows, Christmas, or Рождество, falls on January 6th and 7th, but many churches in America have adopted the Western December 25th date. Unlike the situation found in most churches, Christmas Eve, Сочельник, is a serious, solemn occasion and a strict fast day, meaning that neither meat nor dairy products are allowed to be consumed. In the evening, before leaving for church, families gather together to eat a special meal called the Feast of the Nativity. While it varies from family to family, the traditional meal consists of twelve dishes, each one symbolic of the twelve Apostles and the coming of the Christ Child.

The traditional meal consists of: the main dish кутья [kutya], a type of porridge, mushroom soup, Lenten bread, cloves of garlic, honey, baked cod, prunes, apricots, or oranges, nuts, peas, parsley potatoes, пирожки [pirorzki] – small stuffed pies, seasoned kidney beans, кулебяка [kulibyaka] – cabbage pie or poppy-seed pie with honey, and red wine. The meal is eaten on a white tablecloth, symbolic of the blanket Christ was wrapped in upon birth, and lit by a 100% pure beeswax candle, symbolic of the Light of Christ. Any icons in the house are displayed and lit. A prayer is said by the father or man of the house and the meal begins. Following the Holy Supper, families go to a late church service, sometimes returning back home as late as two or three in the morning.

The holiday continues until Крещение (Epiphany), on January 6. The entire two week period Святки [Sviatki] is a time for parties. The following day after Christmas Eve breaks the fast and begins a joyous celebration. People greet each other by saying “Христос родился” [“Christos Rorzdaietsya!”] (Christ is Born) and responding with “Славьте еро!” [Slav’te evo!”] (Glorify Him).

Russian Christmas
(An Appendix adapted from The Russian’s World by Genevra Gerhart)

The major feature of Christmas day is food. Among the peasants this day provides the most lavish meal of the year: possibly a suckling pig is served. The lavishness is one of the remnants of pagan custom to assure a good harvest.

The Christmas tree was an innovation of Peter the Great. It became a part of the city Christmas celebration fairly soon but was not so common in the peasant hut until much later. In the Russian countryside celebration of Christmas includes singing, dancing, Ряжение (mummery), and гадание (fortunetelling). Young people, especially children, put costumes and disguises, most often in animal shapes, and go from house to house, receiving small gifts for their performance (as close as Russians get to Halloween). The fortunetelling relates only to the prediction of when and whom a girl might marry. Therefore only unmarried girls are engaged in гадание. All sorts of vehicles are used for prophesying: the number of grains of wheat a rooster consumed indicates how many months until the wedding takes place. Shoes thrown over the fence indicate the direction from which the beloved would come.

If one stares in a mirror just the right way, one could see the image of the future husband, and so on. Though гадание can be engaged in almost any evening during the Christmas holidays, it is especially popular on New Year’s night and Крещенский вечер (Epiphany eve).

The last day of Святки and one of the major church holidays is Крещение (derives from крестить, to baptize). On that day after the church ceremony, the priest leads the flock to the local river where a hole is broken in the ice. The priest blesses the water and then some of the especially faithful (and tough!) can take a dip.
Poets’ Corner:
Treasures of Russian Poetry

With this issue we are initiating a series of short poems by major Russian poets. Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) is the greatest of all Russian poets. The major part of his lyrical poetry was written between 1820 and 1830, but some of his poetical masterpieces were composed in the last seven years of his life, when he turning his attention to prose. The beauty of Pushkin’s style depends of the choice of words, on the adequacy of Rhythm to intonation, and on the complex texture of sound, so elusive and so all-conditioning. This time The Poet’s Corner presents one of the greatest and most famous masterpieces of Pushkin’s love lyrics – the stanzas to Mme Anna Kern (“I remember a wonderful moment”). The poem was written in 1825. Pushkin’s life was made difficult by his conflicts the authorities who disapproved of his liberal views. Pushkin was killed in a duel in 1837.

Я помню чудное мгновенье:  
Передо мной явилась ты,  
Как мимолетное виденье,  
Как гений чистой красоты.

В томленьях грусти безнадежной,  
В тревогах шумной суеты,  
Звучал мне долго голос нежный  
И снились милые черты.

В глуби, во мраке заточенья  
Тянулись тихо дни мои  
Без божества, без вдохновенья,  
Без слез, без жизни, без любви.

Душе настало пробужденье:  
И вот опять явилась ты,  
Как мимолетное виденье,  
Как гений чистой красоты.

И сердце бьется в упоенье,  
И для него воскресли вновь  
И божество, и вдохновенье,  
И жизнь, и слезы, и любовь.

I remember a wonderful moment:  
you appeared before me  
like a fleeting vision,  
like a spirit of pure beauty.

As I languished in hopeless melancholy,  
amid the anxieties of the noisy and restless world,  
your tender voice long echoed in my mind,  
and I dreamt of your beloved features.

Years passed. The storm’s turbulent gusts scattered the dreams of yore,  
and I forgot your tender voice  
and your heavenly features.

In a remote corner of the earth, in darkness of exile,  
my days dragged slowly on, without divinity,  
without inspiration, without tears,  
without life, without love.

Awakening came to my soul:  
and lo, you appeared again,  
like a fleeting vision,  
like a spirit of pure beauty.

And my heart beats in ecstasy,  
and once more within it  
divinity, inspiration, life, tears,  
and love are born.
Speakers Spice Teas
By Marisa Bowersox

The Russian Club has dubbed some of its club meetings as Meetings with Interesting People. Since this was enacted in the fall of 2002, the Russian Club has had people who specialize in Russian history, music, architecture, business, and many other interesting fields. The meetings have been incredibly successful, and the attendance has never waned for lack of interest. Meetings with Interesting People is something that is not to be overlooked, but rather embraced, for it is a forum where intellects can gather and share their knowledge of Russia.

We want to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to our guest speakers Professors Tamara Mikhailova, Robert Thurston, and Paul Mitchell, and also to Andrew Moody!

Please join us on the following Wednesdays 5-6 p.m., in 142 Irvin, for our Russian Teas.

January 21 • February 4 • February 18 • March 3 • March 24 & April 7 (annual Russian Easter Dinner)

Intercontinental Cooperation Links Loren, ex-Presidents, and Prokofiev

Sergey Prokofiev’s Peter and the Wolf is a unique collaborative project that demonstrates the power of music to bring people together. This famous classic orchestral piece is narrated by … Italian superstar Sophia Loren. The wolf, who is no longer a fearsome creature, but a powerful image about the imperative to cherish and protect natural resources, is narrated by … American President Bill Clinton. The Introduction and Epilogue are narrated by … Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev.

All narrators’ royalties are to be donated to charity. The recording is now available in stores and at www.russianarts.org

Contact Information:
E-mail: miamirussianclub@hotmail.com
Website: www.muohio.edu/russianclub/

Word to the Wise from Russian Wits

Дружба дружбой, а служба службой.  Don’t mix business with pleasure.
В гостях хорошо, а дома лучше.  There’s no place like home.
Лучше поздно, чем никогда.  Better late than never.
Нет худа без добра.  Every cloud has silver lining.