

## Ukrainians in Moraga?

By Cathy Tyson



The Ukrainian delegates and their Moraga host families

Moraga residents welcomed a delegation of eight prominent Ukrainian officials for a week's home stay. Most spoke little or no English and had never been to the United States before. They were in town to meet with local California officials to discuss economic development. The Center For Safe Energy in Berkeley hosted the group and arranged all of the meetings and transportation. On their agenda were visits to see the Mayor of Berkeley, Tom Bates, Berkeley Energy and Sustainable Development Officer Neal De Snoo, Berkeley Director of Economic Development Michael Caplan and representatives from Oakland's Housing and Economic Development Department.

It wasn't all work and no play for these visitors, one of the highlights of their trip was going to Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland to tour the facility. The delegates were surprised to see sports fields as part of the campus. In Ukraine, sports facilities are never located on school grounds. They politely asked if they could borrow some bats and balls and try to play baseball. A good time was had by all.

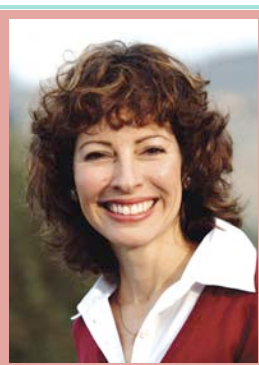
The group was impressed with the semi-rural nature of Moraga. Miroslava Svistovich, Mayor of Irpin in the Kiev region, was surprised to see deer, she imagined more concrete and skyscrapers like she had seen on television and in movies.

Another highlight according to Oleg Ivanovich Vitvitsky, Deputy Director of the Ternopil District Council, was getting souvenirs from Alcatraz. He thought that would be funny bringing back T-shirts and lighters for his friends from, "the Rock." Vitvitsky mentioned his top three impressions of the U.S. are, "hospitality, punctuality, and fog." Ukraine was part of the former Soviet Union and has only been a democracy for 16 years.

How did they get here? It all started with Moraga resident, American Association of University Women (AAUW) member and community activist, Ellen Beans' association with Fran Macy and Enid Schreiber, Co-Directors of the Center For Safe Energy. Beans' job was to rustle up host families willing to take a total stranger, or two, who speak little or no English, into their homes.

She had to make quite a few phone calls this year, because the delegates visited over the Labor Day Holiday. Many of her AAUW friends volunteered. She and her husband hosted Igor Rachinsky, the Mayor of Novodnistrovsk. "It worked amazingly well, even though Igor has the least ability to speak. Igor is quite a stamp collector and so is my husband Larry," says Beans. She has a little Russian dictionary and had made up some flash cards, which helped.

Sandy Read hosted two people, and one of them was a translator. Veronica Zhuravlov, a facilitator and one of the group's translators, works for a public relations firm in Kiev, and Elena Solovyova a strategic planner of an association of 12 cities stayed with her. "It wasn't much of a burden at all," recalls Read. "We mostly just saw them for breakfast, then they were out all day with the group. It was fun." Read and her guests made an early morning trip to Safeway with two other delegates to get ingredients to make Borscht, a famous vegetable soup from Eastern Europe. They barely had time to prepare the labor-intensive soup, before heading out for the day. It was later served at their farewell dinner, to rave reviews all around.



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