



A nurse at a feeding station in Dzhambul, Kazakhstan, gives parents a month's food supply for the children, as Southern Baptist workers Brian Grim (c) and David Bishop (/) help. A "collective" farm the government closed, the village cannot offer its young people jobs. Still the population grows because other towns in the famine-stricken region cannot offer workers any hope either.

Perestroika 'Kazakh-style'

by Michael Chute, photos by Don Rutledge

Read the amazing story of lasting friendships created when American volunteers with many skills got together with people of Kazakhstan for a festival.



Dawning rays frolicked through nearby mountain passes, bathing Alma-Ata airport in streaks of magenta and gold. The sunlight splashed American and Kazakh faces, highlighting a tear as it traced another's path down a flushed cheek. An American woman clutched a single flower, a parting gift from her new Kazakh friend.

A white jet brandishing "Aeroflot" on the side waited to whisk the American team away from Kazakhstan, second largest of the Soviet Union's republics. The Americans had come to make friends, to see how they could help and to share their faith. Now they were going home. Time had run out on the first Kazakh-American Cultural Festival.

Representatives of the Kazakhstan government welcome the American team at the Alma-Ata airport, exchanging greetings with Stan Smith (l). Smith represented the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey, sponsor of the first Kazakh-American Cultural Festival—its official logo is shown above—with the Central Asian Foundation and Kazakhstan's Golden Apple Foundation. The two-week festival drew 330 Americans and more than 100,000 Kazakh participants around the theme "From Trust to Cooperation in Culture, Linguistics and Economy."



PerestroikaKa



ikahazakh-style

By Michael Chute ■ Photos by Don Rutledge

Yet leaving caught everyone in an emotional tug of war. So much had happened in two weeks. It seemed as if festival participants were looking over God's shoulder. The Americans weren't ready to go. The Kazakhs didn't want them to leave.

"[The Soviets] didn't expect to love us as much as they do, and perhaps we didn't expect to love them as much as we do," said Paige Patterson, committee chairman for Cooperative Services International (CSI), Southern Baptists' humanitarian aid organization. "The rapport was incredible. We were overwhelmed."

The first large-scale, multi-faceted cultural exchange between Americans and Soviets in Kazakhstan exceeded all expectations, resulting in an array of humanitarian, environmental, business and social projects.

Work across the republic—a region the size of the eastern United States—involved medical personnel, business and professional people, technical specialists, educators, university students, construction workers, pastors, media producers, athletes, musicians, linguists, craftsmen and performing artists.

Southern Baptists working with the Central Asian Foundation—a nonprofit human and economic development corporation—initiated the cultural exchange. Kazakhstan's Golden Apple Foundation assisted CAF, along with the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey.

"This was the first group of its kind ever to work in the Soviet Union," said CAF vice president Brian Grim, a Southern Baptist worker who lives in Kazakhstan. "It was a diverse group of people coming to use their professions to help people. That's CAF's goal: to get Christian people involved in Kazakhstan, using resources they have."

Baptists "dealt with the highest levels of government" in this effort, said Billy Peacock, a CSI associate for recruiting volunteers. "You could think of it in terms of Soviet-U.S. relations, and we don't work on that level very often. If we had known the full impact, it would have scared us to death."

At opening ceremonies, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev described his republic as a "crisis situation" and told the Americans: "[The festival] was conceived as an opportunity to get

closely acquainted with new friends. Your hand of help is a symbol of friendship which spreads to our people."

Significance of the foundation Baptists laid became apparent in September. President Nazarbayev assumed a key role in the new Soviet government formed in the wake of a failed coup. The Kazakh president presented a plan for a loose confederation of Soviet states. Soviet deputies eventually adopted a revised Nazarbayev plan with Mikhail Gorbachev's backing.

Baptists were the first ones in and on the ground floor through this festival. The Americans and Kazakhs forged friendships. They shared testimonies. They exchanged hopes and dreams. They bared their lives for each to see: neither would ever look at the other the same way again.

'Marketplace' Christians

Tethered by an interpreter and the will to save a man's life, American and Soviet surgeons worked quickly, their movements in sync like a Bolshoi ballet. The patient accidentally drank lye; surgeons replaced the man's severely burned esophagus with a portion of his colon—a tricky operation for this corner of the country.

Emerging from the operating room two hours later, broad smiles creased the faces of John Crook, a Concord, N.C., vascular specialist, and Djuraev Shukir, esophagus and stomach surgery director for Kazakhstan's only experimental surgery institute. The patient would live.

Like most team members, Crook never before had been part of an overseas volunteer team, since few hospitals where volunteer medical teams have worked are equipped for Crook's specialty.

The festival, giving "marketplace" Christians opportunities to work in the job they

Exhibits attracted large crowds of Kazakhs as these curious youngsters cluster around Sue Shingleton of Norfolk, Va., who made color-beaded bracelets representing the plan of salvation. She explained the Christian symbolism to all who took a bracelet.







Above: Kazakh young people divide their attention between pictures of the United States and an American who unexpectedly hopped into a saddle during the Steppes Treasures Festival in Chilik district. Among the day's activities, the Americans played traditional Kazakh games, watched competitions and races, listened to folk music and visited yurts, shepherds' tent-homes used during summer months when herds graze the grassy mesas. Right: Central to their nomadic "plains culture," Kazakhs use horses for transportation, work, games and even food. A traditional Kazakh meal includes generous helpings of horse meat served with kumis, a drink made from fermented mare's milk. When a Kazakh wants to praise another, he calls him a dzhigit—"horseman." Horseback is also the best way to roam the steppes, excellent pasture land the Kazakhs use for grazing sheep, goats, cattle and horses.

do every day, proved a place exists for this type of Christian effort. Participants were not asked to be "super" Christians, only to tell what they do in business as a Christian. This approach drew many volunteers and possibly started a trend.

"Our team expressed a brand of Christianity that was magnificent," said Peacock. "As a result, all kinds of testimonies and questions came. Now [Kazakhstan] is open."

The festival sent the largest group of medical volunteers ever to aid health-care institutions in Semipalatinsk and Pavlodar. Located on either side of the Soviet Union's main nuclear test site, both cities

record high rates of radiation-related diseases. Following the coup attempt in August, President Nazarbayev suspended all nuclear testing in the republic.

A Semipalatinsk official, Keshrim Bos-taev, thanked the American medical team for coming to help his city. Noting he understood the members' Christian beliefs motivated them to offer aid, he said citizens were intrigued that the 13 Americans exposed themselves to radiation risks. Nancy Dickerson explained that her faith in God and the "calling of the medical profession" motivated her. "I don't think that's naive," said the Easley, S.C., nurse, "because with God I feel I'm protected."





The team spread out across the twin cities, working alongside Soviet counterparts in cardiology, orthopedics, pharmacy, oral hygiene, lab technology, orthodontics and nursing.

Before he went, Rich Latham thought Kazakhs wouldn't need his specialty. The cardiologist from San Antonio, Texas, soon found unusual instances of cardiovascular disease in Semipalatinsk. Within five minutes on his first day at the city's central hospital, Soviet doctors asked him to see a cardiac-arrest patient in the intensive care unit. That's how Latham's work began; it never let up.

Latham thought he would be attached to a Soviet physician and help on rounds. Instead, hospital officials brought patients from the wards to an examining room for him to treat with 15 doctors and nurses looking on.

Said the specialist, "I've not seen such severe disease; children with no breastbones, their hearts literally beating right under the skin. A panicky father wanted to know what I was going to do for his little girl. You just do what you can. You learn very quickly the language [of compassion] that transcends spoken language."

Team members reported many opportunities to share their faith. Kazakhs often asked Connie Wong, an ethnic Chinese from Daly City, Calif., if her parents were Buddhists. That opening gave her the opportunity to share why she is a Christian. "I was able to share that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life," she said. "God gave me an opportunity to open some people's minds just to the concept of Christianity. On the other side of the spectrum, there are [Soviets] who are well read" on Christianity.

In Pavlodar, Sharon Young of Fort Worth, Texas, learned her team of Americans was the first to go there. "We always had a police escort, and brass bands played wherever we went," she said. "We'd go to the hospital and everyone—staff and patients—would come out into the halls to stare at us."

Medical workers took supplies for Kazakh hospitals. Said Young: "Giving all those medical supplies was just like Christmas."

'Religious catalyst'

Dressed in his flowing black robes and turban, the Islam mufti of Kazakhstan passed a pen to the bearded, robe-clad archbishop of Alma-Ata's Russian Orthodox Church. Before them lay a "manifesto" calling for laws to guarantee religious freedom. Heads of the region's major faiths—Islam, Russian Orthodox, Seventh-Day Adventist, Baptist—signed the document, which also stated the government should not interfere in any religious confession—either by restriction or favoritism.

Earlier, on the steps of Chimkent city's government building, religious leaders of Islam and Christianity shook hands and posed for pictures. A Russian Baptist pastor called this show of openness "a real miracle." A year ago, Protestant leaders feared imprisonment for practicing their faith in Kazakhstan. Now their pictures appeared on front pages of newspapers in the area.

The religious conference, first of its kind in Kazakhstan, brought together religious leaders who normally would have no other channel to become acquainted. The Golden Apple Foundation asked the Americans to bring a team that would address issues of religion. During the conference, Kazakh and American keynote speakers delivered addresses, followed by discussion in a large Alma-Ata auditorium with television, radio and newspaper reporters looking on. Lectures open to the public, followed by discussions, were given in Alma-Ata, Djhanbul, Chimkent, Semipalatinsk and Taldy-Kurgan.

The theme of reconciliation permeated

Horse races are a Kazakh favorite, mixing speed and endurance. On holidays everyone gets into the saddle to participate in the customary races. Kazakhs take horse racing seriously: the winner of this two-hour race, who had to be helped out of the saddle, got an all-expenses-paid trip to America; a car went to the second-place finisher.







The Soviet central government pulled the "plug" on the Aral Sea, diverting its source waters to irrigate cotton plantations. The region's once-thriving fishing industry also has dried up as these seagoing ships give testimony, settling tons of rusting steel into the dry seabed, parched and cracked under 110-degree temperatures, even at 6 p.m.





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Left: Southern Baptist leaders on a tour of humanitarian-aid projects under way in Kazakhstan check the schedule during a fuel stop at Tselinograd enroute to Aral'sk. Shown (l to r): Paige Patterson, committee chairman for Cooperative Services International, a Southern Baptist aid organization; Wallace Williams, executive director, Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey, head of the visiting delegation; Stephen James, special projects coordinator for Central Asian Foundation, a nonprofit human and economic development corporation; Ed Mason, International Service Corps volunteer; Lewis Myers, CSI director; Brian Grim, CAF vice president; Billy Peacock, CSI associate for recruiting volunteers; Stan Smith, language missions and stewardship director, Pennsylvania-South Jersey Baptists; David Bishop, CSI project coordinator for Soviet Central Asia. CSI works in Kazakhstan through Central Asian Foundation. Above: Concord, N.C., surgeon John Crook (l) helps a team of Soviet surgeons in replacing a man's destroyed esophagus with a portion of his colon at Kazakhstan's Experimental Surgery Institute. The more difficult surgeries—such as reconstructive surgery and microsurgery—are done at this 320-bed facility in Alma-Ata, the most advanced surgical hospital in the republic. Using relatively new technology for the institute, this particular surgery has been performed here for the past two years.

the conference, despite tense moments at the opening session. Proponents of political issues, such as nuclear disarmament and the Iraq war, tried to introduce discussion on those topics.

"We let them know we're not representatives of our government," said Harry Rowland, of Nashville, Tenn. The American team told their hosts that "as Christians, we would have views on [political

issues], but our goal is to change the world by changing people."

Leaders credited the conference with creating a climate of cooperation and understanding. It's lasting contribution: offering a catalyst that highlighted religion, bringing the region's religious community together for discussion. After the conference, religious leaders asked festival organizers to open a Kazakh-American Col-

lege, not just to exchange information but also religious philosophy. Kazakhs also agreed to establish an International Mercy Fund to help humanitarian-aid projects.

"We had a true chance, as Christians, to be on the cutting edge in a way that is meaningful to people," said Wallace Williams, executive director of Pennsylvania-South Jersey Baptists and head of the American delegation.







"We found people right around the edges waiting for somebody to come out and say something credible about Christianity," added Williams, a member of CAF's board of directors. "No person or group of people could produce the results we've seen here. God controlled this, and the response was tremendous. The stories are just amazing."

'Warm souls'

Tears filled her eyes as the headmaster of a youth camp sponsored by the Kazakhstan Communist Party's publishing house told her guests: "My impression of Americans was that they were people with cold hearts. But now, through the work and concern of your [university] students, I've seen warm souls."

Teams of U.S. college students conducted recreation and education programs in Soviet "Pioneer" camps in several locations around Alma-Ata. Vladimir Lenin established "Pioneers," like 4-H or Conservation camps in America, soon after his Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

He said all Soviet youth must be organized. For decades, "Young Pioneers"—children age 8-14—became the first step along a path to the Communist Party, which preached the state's de facto religion of atheism.

As one sign of changing times, the head of a camp invited Jeff Lewis of Mount Juliet, Tenn., to bring Bibles and talk to the children about God. Lewis accepted the opportunity, at their request, to present a

Nina George of Collinsville, Ill., uses "Dr. George," a stuffed monkey-puppet, to entertain children in a Kazakhstan hospital. The registered nurse saved money for two years for a partnership trip to Japan, where her son lives, but the day before she needed to mail the money, her mother suffered a heart attack. When Mrs. George felt she could leave, it was too late to make the Japan trip. She felt "burdened" for the Soviet Union and believes the Lord wanted her to use the money to go to Kazakhstan instead.

Christian program. About 230 children packed the auditorium to hear, many for the first time, about Jesus Christ.

As he spoke, Lewis worried that translation and cultural differences might make it hard for the youngsters to understand. When he finished, Lewis asked if there were questions. An 8-year-old boy stood in the crowded hall, before his peers, to ask: "Why did God let His Son die for us?"

"That just cut my heart," Lewis recalled. "God gave them understanding. He brought clarity to their hearts."

The student team led in prayer so the children understood that through prayer they could receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. About 40 children raised their hands saying they had prayed to receive Christ.

Outside the auditorium, 12-year-old Asya Rsalieva proudly modeled her new bracelet of colored beads representing the tenets of Christianity. An American student gave it to her. Asya had met Americans before and enjoyed exchanging opinions with them. This was the first time anyone had told her about God.

'Pray doors stay open'

The "skills of Soviet people are equal to those of us in the United States," Greg Pope of Nashville, Tenn., told Kazakh bankers. "The secret of American business is our connection with God" through America's Judeo-Christian heritage.

Discussion in the festival's business consortium focused on creating an infrastructure for a market-based economy. Soviet leaders currently are busy writing laws opening up private enterprise—the backbone of a market economy. American business-team leader Paul Helton hopes Soviet politics stabilize so responsibility for major selling—traditionally held in Moscow—can move to the republics.

"[Soviets] have to put emphasis on the market and not on production, and on meeting needs, rather than employing people," said Helton, financial director of a Pittsburgh, Pa., steel company. "That's a main philosophy that has to change. But because of a 'hard' currency shortage [in the Soviet Union], as well as lack of

knowledge, it's very difficult."

During consultations, CAF and government officials agreed to enlist 10 American business specialists to help President Nazarbayev's economic committee train leaders in Alma-Ata, the Kazakh capital and sixth-largest Soviet city. Several festival participants volunteered to return to Kazakhstan to teach their counterparts.

U.S. business professionals participating in the consortium also took information home with them to match up Soviet and American companies. They want Kazakh businessmen to become more experienced in international business. As more responsibility moves from the central government in Moscow to Alma-Ata and then to private enterprise, business leaders such as Helton expect more opportunities to emerge.

Only a strong economy can fuel Soviet democracy, which in turn creates a climate for Christianity. Helton said American Christians "need to pray that doors will stay open so we can share our faith, and also from a humanitarian point of view, so we can make real inroads to help" the Soviet economy.

Aral sea, people dying

As a boy, Tieuzhanov Zhylykshibai remembers when the Aral Sea lapped at the edge of Dzhambul village and gave it life. He and his friends swam near the shore while their fathers fished the deep waters. That was 25 years ago.

Today the village's chief medical assistant treats health problems of severely malnourished children who have never

Children, ages 4-6, play a game with a team of American students at Otrap Kindergarten, described by the director as "a kind of children's city" in Alma-Ata. Soviet women recently gained the right to stay home and look after their children until they reach kindergarten age. The experimental school teaches in Kazakh, Russian and English; it offers such diverse courses as choreography, computers and swimming.









seen a sea—only rusting skeletons of ships on a dry, salty seabed. Four trucks must haul water 60 kilometers from Aral'sk every day to keep the parched village in drinking water.

Diverting water from source rivers for extensive irrigation projects has put the Aral Sea on the brink of extinction. Over the past three decades, water levels of the world's fourth largest sea dropped 45 feet. Authorities project the sea will completely dry up by the turn of the century.

—The area claims over 7 million malnourished people; the death rate has doubled in recent years.

—Anemia afflicts more than 80 percent of pregnant women.

—The Aral Sea's people contract typhoid 30 times more often, and viral hepatitis seven times more often, than those in other areas of Kazakhstan.

Southern Baptists earmarked \$1 million in an ongoing feeding program for the famine-stricken region. Once a month, Zhylyshibai welcomes International Service Corps workers Ed and Vi Mason, working against time to improve the health of Dzhambul's children. Sponsored by Cooperative Services International, the Tallahassee, Fla., volunteers carry out a three-year nutrition project. Festival workers helped the Masons in Dzhambul, the smallest of six feeding stations they manage.

Also during the festival, a team of U.S. ecologists joined Kazakh environmentalists in a consortium to examine plans to bring water back to the Aral Sea. One project calls for building an 11-acre botanical garden over the sea floor near Aral'sk to keep dust and salt from blowing back into the cities, causing major health problems, particularly lung disease and throat cancer.

The Soviet government tries desperate-

Scott Hoffman (seated, center), of Greenville, Miss., waits with other Americans on the student team for their ride to an Alma-Ata Pioneer Camp, where they organized a recreation program for Soviet children. Hoffman majors in Christian ministry at Mississippi Delta Community College. He wants eventually to serve a church as youth pastor.

ly to find solutions to the problems, but help doesn't come quickly enough to cure the dying Aral. Environmentalist David Oliphant of Greenville, S.C., suggests "fervent prayer for rain for the area." He says that was "the answer in Utah" where the Great Salt Lake receded in the 1980s.

'Most humanitarian project'

People cultivated gardens, tended orchards and herded sheep in nearby pastures one calm evening last year sensing no hint of impending disaster. Suddenly, in a few swift, frightening moments, 14,000 people in Zaisan lost their homes as an earthquake ripped apart foundations of fragile buildings.

Since people were outside their homes—a Muslim custom in the evening—only one person, a 2-year-old girl, was killed. If the earthquake had occurred a few hours later, an estimated 7,000 people would have died. Still, the disaster shattered the lives of 80 percent of the city's population.

To the dismay of local officials such as Zaidilbek Kuniyarov, no help came from the outside, either from international aid organizations or the Soviet central government. News of the earthquake's devastation never leaked outside Soviet Central Asia.

Southern Baptist workers heard about the disaster on a fact-finding tour late last year. They learned that the earthquake rendered the city's schools unsafe and about half the children attend classes in apartments.

CSI appropriated \$120,000 to aid the devastated city. The festival sent a 15-man construction team to help with three projects: repair a boarding school dormitory; build a Kazakh-American Friendship Center; break ground for a new U.S.-Kazakh school.

Festival program director Dusenbek Nakipov called the Zaisan project "the most humanitarian" work of the festival. The Zaisan construction effort became a focal point of Southern Baptist humanitarian aid in Kazakhstan.

During the building projects, Don Langston of Strawberry Plains, Tenn., said a city official asked the American group to





Left: Under a marble portrait of Vladimir Lenin, founding father of the Soviet Union, American and Soviet business people investigated possibilities for joint partnerships during the festival's business consortium. Discussion focused on steps to create a market-based economy, opening up private enterprise in Kazakhstan. Participants hope soon to develop tangible entrepreneurial activity in the Kazakh business community. Above: Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev met with an American delegation during the festival to discuss ways U.S. business people could help facilitate plans for economic reforms in the Soviet republic. The Central Asian Foundation and Kazakh government agreed to enlist 10 American specialists to help the president's economic committee train business leaders. Several festival participants volunteered to return to teach Soviet counterparts. Nazarbayev noted that changes in the Soviet Union, caused through perestroika, created favorable conditions for this kind of exchange.

pray for rain, since the area had received no rain in several months. In the evening worship service at the dormitory where they stayed, the team prayed for the people of Zaisan and specifically for rain.

Dark, ominous clouds already had formed by the next morning. By midday, sheets of rain began to fall and continued steadily for three days. The group's amazed interpreter, who witnessed the special prayer, stopped everyone he saw and relayed the story: Americans had prayed to their God for rain, and He answered their prayers.

At groundbreaking ceremonies for the

new U.S.-Kazakh school, CSI director Lewis Myers told the townspeople, "When you invest in a school, you invest in the future. For Zaisan children, we hope this school will not only teach things, but also values for their lives, so they will not only know things but believe things. We want this school to teach children to know and believe."

CAF officials are currently hoping to form a relationship with a "sister" Christian school in the United States to provide ongoing exchanges of teachers and students, as well as textbooks and equipment for the Zaisan school. Also, CSI is trying to





place up to 10 teachers in the U.S.-Kazakh school.

"Our people are patient," Kuniyarov said. "The time we waited for you cost us much. The people wait and hope everything will be better soon. The Americans have done a lot in a short time."

'Broken down walls'

America is beautiful," said Zeinesh Mukulbaeva amid hundreds of people milling around tables displaying American crafts Margaret Rodgers of Pipersville, Pa., helped the Soviet girl choose several photographs of American scenes to glue on a bright piece of orange paper. Zeinesh came to the cultural exhibit "to meet the Americans." She came nearly every day.

Edna Frances Dawkins noted that since the American exhibits were open to the public, the cultural exposition gave her team opportunity to touch various segments of society.

"We built friendships with just the average people," said Dawkins, of Richmond, Va. "Not only were great friendships made, but we have broken down walls of separation that will enable those who come after us to make strides in reaching people." She related a conversation with a communist philosopher. As he left, the man told Dawkins they "might not see each other again here, but we will later, and pointed upward. That melted me."

Physics teacher Abuov Mukanovich, browsing a display booth, said, "Before [the festival], we thought Americans were

our enemies. Now I like Americans because they are very friendly." Steve Singleton, of Norfolk, Va., patiently explained his wares, including American products like Crest toothpaste, Flex shampoo, and Band-Aids.

His wife, Sue, worked the next table making bead bracelets as fast as tired fingers would let her. The colored beads represented the plan of salvation.

"I'm selling them faster than I can make them," Sue said with a sigh. "I set the price too low and was mobbed. I explain to everyone who takes [a bracelet] that it is a symbol of the Christian faith and each bead means something." So no one misunderstood, she also handed them a card written in both English and Russian that explained the symbolism.

Although the exhibits attracted large crowds of curious Kazakhs, Dawkins admitted most Soviets could not afford to buy, though prices were just one-tenth the cost. Still, sales from the crafts earned nearly \$1,500, earmarked for humanitarian-aid projects in Kazakhstan.

Crowds of children always swarmed Lois Wakley of Redding, Calif. She brought candy to give away but soon found she couldn't give Kazakh people anything without them giving her something in return. So she ended up selling the candy for one ruble (3 cents) each.

"It's beyond anything I anticipated: the friendliness, openness, going out of their way to make it good for us," she said of the festival. "I've planted many seeds."

Music for Kazakh youth

Fourteen performing groups toured the republic with Kazakh bands and singing groups during the festival. Playing to crowds of thousands in auditoriums packed with screaming Soviet teens reminded Dennis Mink of an earlier time, before he became a Christian.

Now lead guitarist for Sound Theology, a Christian band, Mink and the group performed 12 concerts in two Kazakhstan cities. The fans surprised Mink and the five other members of the Dallas-based band, but he was not unfamiliar with the phenomenon of adulation.

In the early 1980s, Mink was lead gui-

International Service Corps volunteer Vi Mason (l), of Tallahassee, Fla., shares a candid moment with Azima Baltaeva, head pediatric doctor at a clinic in Dzhambul, where Vi and her husband, Ed, work through the Central Asian Foundation to help distribute nutritious food to the famine-stricken area. The Masons are serving their third overseas stint: two tours doing famine relief in Ethiopia and now running six feeding stations around the Aral Sea in Kazakhstan.



The American team in Zaisan took time out from three construction projects to visit a Kazakhstan cultural museum. One project—a new “national” Kazakh-language school—impressed Kazakh foreman Razmetula (Rocky) Batuzbekov: “We are forgetting our [Kazakh] language. We should reclaim our language, culture and history.”



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tarist for a popular band and counted musicians like Jackson Browne and the ZZ Top band among his friends. After a stint with Mirage, he played with a band invited to tour with Styx and offered a recording contract even before it had a name.

Just days before he was supposed to sign, he became a Christian through the witness of a brother in prison. So after 11 years in the music business, Mink decided he couldn't be part of that world any longer. He put away his guitar and left the

"rock scene," which often included alcohol and drugs.

But Mink doesn't like to talk about the past. He's just thankful to be part of Sound Theology and for the chance to take the gospel to Soviet young people, who will attend a rock concert but may never go to church.

Dallas' Casa View Baptist Church gave \$20,450 in less than eight weeks to subsidize the band's trip to Kazakhstan and to purchase 1,100 Russian Bibles. Most of the



band are members of that church.

In Kazakhstan, Sound Theology toured with the popular Soviet rock group, A Studio. While the Soviet "rockers" performed, the Christian band worked the crowds, making friends, sharing testimonies and passing out Bibles.

By the time the tour made it to Chimgent, members of the two bands had already formed lasting relationships. Sound Theology hopes to sponsor an A Studio tour to the United States next year.





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'No reason to fear'

The festival would have been a scoutmaster's nightmare as Americans and Soviets, arm in arm, ventured off the beaten paths of Kazakhstan. Yet the people-to-people contact was the secret of the success. Both Kazakhs and Americans wanted it to happen: to replace stereotyp-

Above: Igor Nicholaevich Tutevol (r), first secretary of the eastern Kazakhstan region, and Lewis Myers (l), director of Cooperative Services International, Southern Baptists' aid organization, wield shovels to set the cornerstone during ground-breaking for a new U.S.-Kazakh school in Zaisan. The school is a joint venture; Southern Baptists gave \$120,000 through CSI to build and equip it; local townspeople will erect the facility. Central Asian Foundation officials want to form a "sister" relationship with a U.S. Christian school to provide exchanges of teachers and students, as well as textbooks and equipment. Left: Part of a 15-man construction team, workers shore up a dormitory wall of a Zaisan boarding school damaged during a 1990 earthquake that rendered the town's three schools unusable. Students who live apart from parents tending sheep in nearby hills use the boarding school.

ical views with new, more productive relationships. The exchange opened not only once-closed Soviet doors but also the hearts and minds of both peoples.

Everyone pointed to the festival's "family exchanges" as the ice-breaker. Though she signed up to host an American, Leila Z. Ashimova wasn't so sure she really wanted one to stay in her home. This manager of a state bank in Alma-Ata feared Americans. But curiosity got the better of her, and she reluctantly agreed to let Beth Dawson of Nashville, Tenn., stay in her home. After the exchange, Leila said she wouldn't trade the experience.

By day Joyce Daffern sold crocheted crosses for bookmarks made by women in Abilene, Texas, churches. At night she stayed with a Kazakh family. As she was leaving, the hosts asked Joyce "if they could be my father and mother. I said, 'I'd have to be your sister, because I'm too old to be your daughter,'" she laughed. "Never in my life have I seen such evidence of God at work."

"We wanted so much to bring hope: spiritual, physical and emotional. That's why all of us came" said Paula Hemphill, of Norfolk, Va. "By living with these people, we had a chance to love them and be loved back. We had a chance to open our hearts and share our faith. The 'heart' communication profoundly affected them and me."

Policemen in Zaisan took fellow officer Steve Evans of Lakewood, Colo., into their homes, showing the fraternity of police all over the world. Evans said, "Just the fact we were here and with the people gave many opportunities to go into their homes, to share our faith and give Bibles. They hadn't seen many Americans, but they saw that we're no different. The main

The lead singer of A Studio, a Soviet rock band that toured with Christian band Sound Theology during the festival, sings one of the group's hit songs. Sound Theology, from Dallas, Texas, was just one of the varied ways festival organizers tried to reach all segments of Kazakh society. While A Studio performed, the six-member Christian band worked the crowd, sharing testimonies and passing out the 1,100 Russian-language Bibles they had brought.







Above: A Kazakh falcon handler shows his skill to interested Kazakh and American onlookers as he offers a well-padded arm as a perch for his giant bird returning from a scouting expedition. The demonstration was but one of the examples of native life Kazakhs and Americans showed each other during the cultural exchange. Right: Kazakhs joke that "everyone is born with a domra in his hands and music in his heart." Nearly everyone in Kazakhstan plays the two-stringed domra, the national instrument of the republic, such as the one held by the man kneeling at left. This Kazakh folk orchestra treats their American guests to traditional culture during the annual Steppes Treasures Festival. The percussionist of this group clapped decorated horse's hoofs together in rhythm to the domra.

thing is to show we're all the same on God's planet, so there's no reason to fear each other."

'Thanks for celebration'

Exploding fireworks reflected off the facade of the Russian Orthodox cathedral in Alma-Ata. The state uses the cathedral, confiscated after the Bolshevik Revolution, as a gallery for insane artists. Highlighting the spiritual nature of the festival, local organizers chose the old cathedral as site for a U.S. Independence Day celebration—another first for Kazakhstan—to honor their American guests.

A Kazakh opera star's English renditions

of American patriotic songs resounded around the cathedral as Soviet children scampered away from fireworks' sparks that reached the ground. Kazakh and American students linked hands in a human chain that slithered its way through the massive crowd. American team members taught Kazakh friends the words of gospel songs like *I'll Fly Away* as the five-member Arkansas Ozark Band—made up of Southern Baptist pastors—bellowed out the lyrics atop the cathedral steps.

The "star-spangled" celebration was an electrifying close to the first Kazakh-American Cultural Festival. With fireworks bursting overhead, American team members, and their new friends hugged and exchanged addresses.

"After what [the Kazakhs] did, I'm







In her living room, Soviet host Leila Z. Ashimova's shows a book to her sister-in-law Rosa Berik (c) and Beth Dawson, (r) of Nashville, Tenn., while a television program diverts the attention of Leila's children. As part of the "family exchange" pro-

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gram, in which 100 Americans resided in Kazakh homes during the festival, Beth stayed in Leila's home after the latter overcame her initial fear of having an American live with her family.

really worried," said Stan Smith of the Pennsylvania-South Jersey convention, charged with organizing another festival in the U.S. next year. "They had the Grammys and Carnegie Hall all wrapped up in one. We're going to have to work hard to come anywhere near what they've done here. It's been an incredible thing to watch."

A second Kazakh-American Cultural Festival will be held May 10-15, 1992, in Pennsylvania and other states. Organizers expect about 300 people—representing all facets of Kazakh society—to make the trip. Besides the need for workers for next year's festival, CAF's Brian Grim said opportunities for continued Christian lay involvement—both long-term and short-term—are available in business, ecology, medicine, education, performance, language study, tourism, student programs and sports. U.S. families who can host Kazakh high-school and college students will begin receiving Kazakh guests early in 1992. Also, Christian businessmen will soon be receiving Kazakh professionals—coming to the United States for two- to eight-week programs—as interns in their businesses.

After his two weeks in Kazakhstan, John Crook returned home committed to a continuing tie to his Kazakh colleagues.

He hopes to provide equipment, exchange ideas and improve technology for Soviet doctors. He wants to bring young

surgeons to the United States for more training. Back in North Carolina, Crook takes his plea to hospitals and foundations.

Most participants agreed with Crook's summary: The festival's ultimate success depends "on what we do when we go home; whether we can come up with expertise and money to follow up. If we can convince people back home, then it was probably the best thing Southern Baptists have done in a long time." □

The writer, stationed in Hong Kong, is assigned as overseas correspondent and communications consultant. Writer Lounette Templeton, based in Hong Kong, and Connie Davis, assistant editor of Baptist and Reflector, Brentwood, Tenn., were members of the festival's media team and contributed to this article.

Ways you can be involved

- Host a Kazakh business intern or student.
- Go to Kazakhstan as a teacher in business or English.
- Organize a Kazakhstan tour group to meet Kazakhs and offer seminars in your specialty.
- Donate textbooks and technical equipment.
- Participate in the second Kazakh-American Cultural Festival, May 10-15, 1992, in the United States.

For these and many other opportunities contact either:

Cooperative Services International
Box 6841
Richmond, VA 23230

or

Stan Smith
Baptist Convention of
Pennsylvania-South Jersey
4620 Fritchery Street
Harrisburg, PA 17109

The Arkansas Ozark Band—made up of five Baptist ministers—sings I'll Fly Away from the steps of Alma-Ata's Russian Orthodox cathedral, as Kazakhs and Americans celebrate newly forged friendships. The bluegrass band included Wes Kent of Birmingham, Ala., with the others from Arkansas: Lynn Robertson of Stamps; Tom McCone, Monticello; Bill Waller, Paragould; and Brandon Willey, Fort Smith.



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