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*Priyatelstvo—"friendship"
—and partnership is
what we found when
Blue Ridge Assembly
visited Bulgaria.*

Roger Hibbard and Ian Luck visited Bulgaria between April 24 and May 3, 2001, to present seminars at the Discoveries 2001 Conference, a meeting of nonprofit organizations, and to establish a partnership between YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, the Non Government Organization (NGO) Center of Razgrad and Razgrad YMCA. Razgrad is a city of 75,000 people 300 miles northwest of Sofia.

p r i y a t e l s t v o

The four-day conference, held in a small ex-Communist owned conference center in the village of Pchelina April 27-30, was highly productive. The series of meetings and seminars was well-received by approximately 70 participants who attended free of charge, thanks to financial grants. Roger presented a session on fund raising and capital development; Ian presented information on supervising and motivating staff and volunteers, and a seminar on team-building. The attendees were mostly CEOs and board members of non-government organizations in Razgrad, including the YMCA. Also represented at the conference were 20 members of the NGO Youth Forum 2001 and the Gabrovo YMCA which sent six staff members along with their CEO, Tony Yankabakova.



FRIENDS GATHER FOR A MUSIC
SESSION IN RAZGRAD PARK

ALEKSANDR NEVSKY CHURCH,



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Helping to make a b
world, one kid at a
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Our second annual
trip is a rousing suc
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Bill Phillips is a mo
successful leadersh
and generosity.

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On April 26, a formal meeting was held for the signing of the exchange agreement between YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, the NGO Center of Razgrad and Razgrad YMCA. Roger Hibbard represented Blue Ridge; Georgi Milkov, an alumnus of Blue Ridge, represented the NGO center and Dancho Kyosev, board chairman, signed for the YMCA of Razgrad. In attendance were delegates from NGO Center member organizations and the Deputy Minister for Justice. The outline of the agreement

is as follows: 1. When necessary, each organization will host staff from the partner organization to provide opportunities for observation and networking; 2. The Razgrad NGO center and YMCA will conduct the selection, document preparation and orientation of up to seven staff members for work at YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly each summer; 3. YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly will send a representative to the Razgrad YMCA for five weeks each summer.

The partnership agreement became effective this summer with Blue Ridge receiving two Bulgarian students selected by the NGO Center and Georgi Milkov joining us in September. In 2002, Bulgaria will become an official partner and a part of YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly's overseas ambassador program.

The trip also included a birthday party for the Youth Forum, one of the NGO Center member organizations. The underlying impression of both Roger and Ian was that the future of Bulgaria and YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly's partnership looks good. The Youth Forum members, all 14 to 17 years of age, were proactive in problem solving, worked well as a team and demonstrated outstanding leadership skills. They showed some of their projects such as published newsletters, articles and ongoing community projects. As part of the exchange agreement, some will work at Blue Ridge in subsequent years.

Roger and Ian also attended meetings with other NGO representatives to discuss funding for the NGO Center and to support the partnership with Blue Ridge. Additionally, they met with representatives of the U.S. Embassy to discuss the visa application and interview process. They left with the assurance of government cooperation to help YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly develop a strong, diverse staff, including Bulgarian representation.

Two further developments arose from this initial visit: first, YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly hosted Marina Hristova, a youth leader from the Gabrovo YMCA, for a week following the YMCA General Assembly; and second, Ian was invited to attend the September meeting of the Bulgaria Partnership, a group of countries having partnerships with Bulgarian YMCAs which meets annually to assist the Bulgarian YMCA movement with its program and infrastructure development. Ian will be the only U.S. representative on this invitation-only panel, joining delegates from Germany, Norway, Greece, England and Turkey.



SCENERY ALONG THE BLACK SEA COAST OF BULGARIA.



IAN (center) AND ROGER (right) WITH NEW BULGARIAN FRIENDS AT THE FORUM BIRTHDAY PARTY.