

Brief Narrative Report of Accomplishments

ACROSS CULTURES FORUM WAS OCTOBER 11 – 27, 2004 IN SEATTLE WASHINGTON

This business and cultural exchange among business leaders from the Baltic States and Seattle, Washington was born out of a desire to build partnerships for learning among the participants and enhance relationships with alumni of the "WOMEN Decision Makers and Influence Makers" conference in Estonia which was attended by the UW Center for Women & Democracy Sweden and the Baltic 2003 Delegation and Young Business & Professional Women (YBPW) Estonia members.

PROGRAM FOCUS

The focus of Across Cultures is to introduce participants to various training, philosophies, trends, and practices that enhance the leadership potential of women. The four focus areas are:

[Human Rights](#)—Seminar focusing on trafficking of women, HIV, and reproductive health.

[Access to Information](#)—The importance of increasing access to media, communications, technology and the Internet.

[Economic Equity](#)—Leadership training, business mentoring, sharing knowledge in case study seminars, site visits to organizations with environmental and sustainable practices.

[Cultural Experience](#)—Experiencing "each others world" will increase mutual understanding and result in beneficial working relationships.

PROGRAM GOALS

Across Cultures supports U.S. foreign policy goals to work with partners in the Baltic States to build healthy economies. More specifically, the goals are:

To raise awareness of human rights.

To support the development of women-owned small businesses, promoting efficiency, productivity and sustainability in a growing economy.

To develop skills and knowledge base of businesswomen, enabling better management of their businesses.

To disseminate acquired knowledge to the business community.

To promote partnerships between women professionals.

A second project is proposed to bring a delegation of US women to Estonia in 2005 as a continuation of this business leader exchange.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Across Cultures 2004 was a success! The experience had a profound impact on the delegates as well as the participants in the Puget Sound Community. A number of articles were published including: Methow Valley News, Seattle Woman Magazine, the national Lithuanian newsletter, The Seattle Lithuanian and Estonian newsletters, local Lithuanian newspaper, Business & Professional Women Association-Estonia Newsletter, and the Omnitel newsletter. The delegates have shared their experience with associates and organizations in their community including at a BPW Estonia Tallinn Club meeting and with the US Embassy in December 2004.

For two weeks in October, a group of Baltic business leaders saw the best Seattle has to offer... from its corporate headquarters to academic halls to local living rooms, as well as the beautiful environs.

Seattle, which has nearly a thousand residents who claim Baltic heritage and boasts the only Baltic Studies program in the U.S. (supporting all 3 countries) located at the University of Washington, was the perfect locale for this exchange. Guntis Smidchens gave the women a tour of the campus and the library, which houses several thousand volumes of Baltic language books.

The delegation was hosted throughout Seattle at events such as the UW Business School Deans Breakfast where they listened to Bruce Nordstrom, had a briefing with the Small Business Administration, and participated in the SBA WNET program. Site visits to Costco, Starbucks, Nordstrom, Cedar Grove along with tours of Boeing and the Microsoft museum were a highlight.

Each delegate was partnered with a mentor. The business mentorship program was supported by The University of Washington Business School, Bank of America, Eddie Bauer, Edelman, ExtraPR.com, F. Schumacher and Co., Garrigan Lyman, GM Nameplate, Langan-Bigelow, McKinnons Furniture, Netspeed Leadership, Nordstrom, Seattle Girls School, Playtime Inc., The Seattle Design Center, T-Mobile, UPS, United Way of King County, and XO Communications.

The Human Rights event included a panel discussion about world-wide trafficking in persons, followed by a documentary, "The Day My God Died," on the child sex trade from Nepal to India. Topics of Reproductive Rights and HIV also provided insight to global issues.

The delegation met with Issaquah Kiwa nis Club members and local residents where the preservation of the environment, volunteerism, and access to information were the message. At the Salmon Hatchery in Issaquah, they were impressed not only with the story of the fish, but with notion that much of the work was undertaken by volunteers. "It was amazing for me to see how well people take care of their community," said Pille Ruul, who works for a training and consulting firm in Saku, Estonia. "I had so many questions about volunteering. Why do people do it, what motivates them. I think we would be much happier and more successful if we could implement it in our country too." After an inspirational presentation of "Laughing Your Way to the Top!" the internationally acclaimed Dr. Patt Schwab with FUNDamentally Speaking proclaimed, "They are a truly exceptional group of women! It does my heart good just to know they are there making the world a better place through their insight and industry."

The delegation visited the Dale Chilhuly Glass Studio, toured Benaroya Hall, Sound Bridge and the Experience Music Project having the opportunity to express their love of music and song.

"The Seattle Estonian Society commends the work of the Across Cultures program in bringing Estonian and Lithuanian business women to Seattle, stated Paul Raidna, President of the Seattle Estonian Society.

The local Lithuanian and Estonian community hosted several events. While the two European countries share a similar history having been occupied by the Communists during World War II and regaining their independence in 1991, their language, customs and culture are different. The women said one of the benefits of "Across Cultures" was that they actually learned more about each other's country.

"We became good friends with the Lithuanian women and hope the best for further cooperation," said Ruul. "Think of it... we needed to go to Seattle to know more about our Baltic neighbors!"

"We have learned a lot during our Across Cultures Program in the U.S. But I am sure that a visit to the Baltics would be very useful for the business and professional women in Washington State and other states," added Ruul.

"The distance between countries, nations and individuals disappeared at least for a moment. It brought a great inspiration: I can do more, we can do more. It put me already into action – I am making difference!" added Aida Zigmantaviciene, CEO of a garment manufacturing firm-one of the largest Lithuanian employers led by a woman. Aida was a delegate of the 2002 Helsinki Women Business Leaders Summit and the 2004 Riga Women Business Leaders Summit.