

Teaching a Man to Fish

Seacamp's Gift to Russia and Ukraine

Elena Istomina, Ph.D.

Seacamp Association, Inc. has applied the lesson of this Chinese proverb both literally and figuratively through their combined approach to marine science and the global camp community. Founded in 1966, Seacamp is the parent organization of two thriving businesses: Seacamp - a summer residential camp specializing in marine science and SCUBA programs; and a school program operating as the Newfound Harbor Marine Institute (NHMI). The NHMI delivers environmental and marine science education programs to middle and high school students, as well as to university students and teachers. Both of these programs operate on Big Pine Key in the Florida Keys, with 450 campers from the United States and around the world participating in three 18-day summer sessions. Campers study the ocean, learn about coral reefs, and share traditional camp activities. More than 10,000 local, state, national, and international students and teachers participate in the NHMI programs each year.

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”
— Chinese Proverb





Campers and Cosmonauts

Despite the cameras, computers, telephone hookups, and technicians which had commandeered the dining hall, all eyes were fixed intently on the large screen. This was the setting in 1998 when Seacampers and their eleven Russian friends made history by participating in a direct satellite communication link with the Russian Space Station "Mir." For twenty minutes, campers at the marine science camp posed questions through a staff translator to cosmonauts. Melissa Bradshaw from Miami commented, "I had goose bumps talking to Russian cosmonauts from my favorite camp in the Keys." Her feelings were echoed by Katya Frolova, a camper from Moscow, who said, "It was awesome to hear cosmonauts say that they did not see borders but one world which looked like a small ball."

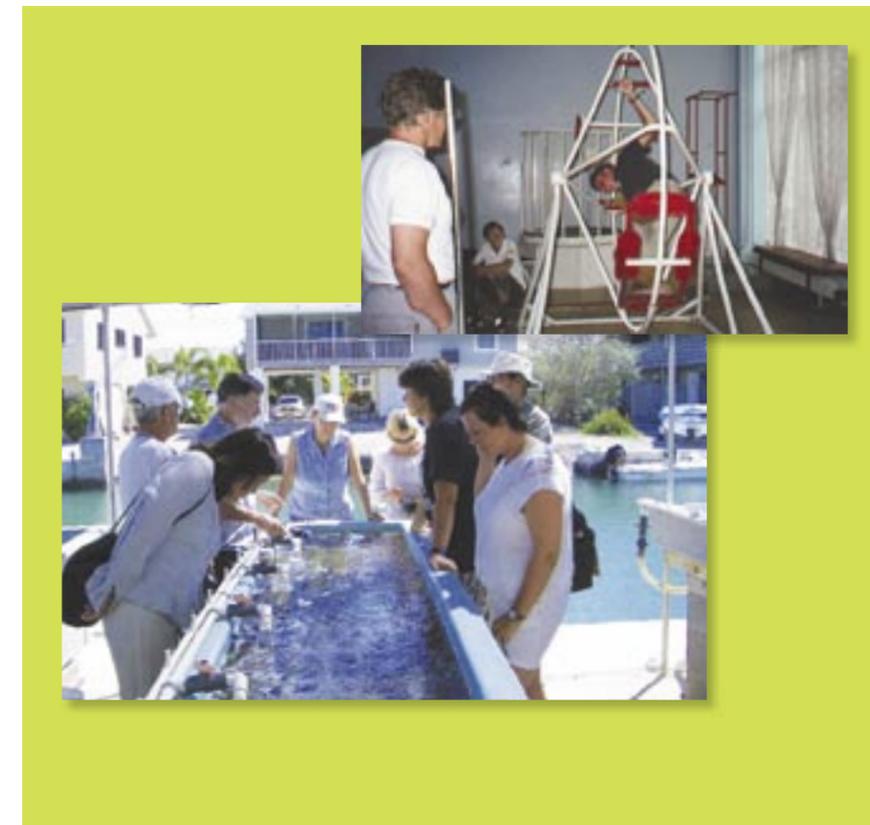
Recently, Seacampers exchanged both personal and marine-science-related information through Internet connections with campers at Black Sea Camp *Orlyonok* and environmental centers in St. Petersburg and Anapa. For twelve years, Florida Rotary international exchange students, representing twelve to twenty countries, have attended an annual conference on marine ecology. For the past three years, Seacamp/NHMI has taught young people from Russia, France, the Philippines, Nigeria, Venezuela, Italy, Spain, Canada, and ten other countries to care for the environment worldwide.

"Transmission was not only closing the gap between space and marine science, but closing the gap between countries and people." NBC Channel 6, Miami, Florida

In 1992, Seacamp Executive Director, Irene Hooper, and Summer Camp Director, Grace Upshaw, visited Russian camps on the Black Sea and near Moscow and were impressed by the natural beauty of the settings and the commitment of the administrators, but they also understood the tenuous status of camps in Russia in the post-Soviet era. (See the article, "Potatoes and Soap: A Russian Director's Dilemma on page 46.) As the director and founder of an environmental camp, Hooper saw a unique program opportunity for Russian camps.

Camp: A New Market Economy

After visiting camp *Orlyonok* on the Black Sea and several other camps, the concept of applying the new market economy to the venue of camps began to develop. Because industries could no longer support them, camps needed to learn marketing techniques to attract customers and to learn how to raise money. It was important for camps to develop new programs to attract campers as they located their niche in a new market. Hooper realized that some highly qualified scientists whose research institutes and universities could not pay their salaries for months could be attracted by camp admin-



istrations to design new projects for camps. The key to the success of many camps in a new Russian economy could lie in developing environmental programs.

The opportunity to help camps in the former Soviet Union presented itself when the U.S. Department of Commerce established the Special American Business Internship Training Program (SABIT). The grant called for American organizations to host former Soviet Union scientists and managers from different industries and educate them how to conduct business in a free market economy. In 1993, Seacamp Association, Inc., applied for and received a SABIT grant.

Under the auspices of this program, scientists and managers from camps and environmental centers travel to Seacamp for periods of three to four months to learn how to operate successful camp programs with a marine science focus in a market economy. With each group, a team is developed with expertise in scientific and management skills to develop a winning course of action for selected Russian camps. By recognizing the dual needs of scientists to find new projects and camp directors to develop new programs, Seacamp has made

a practical contribution to the Russian camp industry. While at Seacamp, camp administrators learn by working side by side with the administrative staff in various Seacamp departments in order to learn the skills and decision processes needed to run a thriving camp program. Meanwhile, scientists observe Seacamp's field-oriented teaching approach and learn ways of applying academic science to hands-on education. When they return to Russia and Ukraine, these interns work together to apply their newly acquired knowledge to practical work.

The Far-reaching Influence of SABIT Interns

Seacamp received its first SABIT grant in December 1993. By the end of May 2004, ten years later, Seacamp has hosted forty-eight interns from as far as the Russian Far East to the largest Russian and Ukrainian camps, *Orlyonok* and *Artek*, on the shores of the Black Sea. Seacamp SABIT interns have organized two environmental centers, opened two camps, founded four associations and foundations, set up one commercial company, and have developed and implemented seven successful camp

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programs in different areas of Russia and Ukraine, including national republics of Mari-El, Buryatiya, and Yakutiya. Seacamp SABIT interns have also developed more than forty educational resources in laboratory activities, science manuals, and camp games. Two English-Russian and Russian-English dictionaries were created, *Dictionary of Camping Words and Phrases and Environmental Science Dictionary*. Two unique exhibits of coral and algae were left to Seacamp as a legacy of the SABIT interns.

One of the SABIT interns, Dr. A. Kamnev, set up the most successful marine science and environmental program in camp *Kavkaz* on the Black Sea. Another intern, Taras Kononets, developed and now manages the first national Internet camp site, www.camps.ru. Seven Russian groups, organized and accompanied by SABIT interns, have participated in the summer and schools' programs of Seacamp. In the summer of 2003, the Foundation for the Advancement of Camping Industry, Youth Health Development, Recreation, and Out-of-School Activities "Roads to Discovery" was set up in Moscow by seven Seacamp SABIT interns. In the summer of 2004, the Foundation successfully operated three sessions of marine science and SCUBA programs on the Black Sea for three hundred campers.

Contributing to the Future

During the past ten years, Seacamp/NHMI has made a great contribution to developing marine science, and environmental camp programs in Russia and Ukraine. Although the SABIT program does not generate income for Seacamp, it generates something more important: A like-minded community of people who work for future generations. Most of the Seacamp interns work with students either as camp admin-

istrators with school-age children at camp or as scientists at the university level. A dramatic "trickle-down" effect is apparent as each camp administrator, educator, or scientist carries the Seacamp message back to Russia and Ukraine. By teaching students about the environment and developing the camp structure that supports such programs, Seacamp has contributed the foundation for creating the infrastructure of a sustainable future. Each year the Seacamp staff is rewarded by seeing newly created camp programs come to life in Russia and Ukraine by the network of interns as the

camp's philosophy and mission are spread internationally. ■

Photos: Courtesy of Seacamp Association, Inc.

Dr. Elena Istomina holds a Ph.D. in linguistics from the Moscow Teachers' Training University. She first came to Seacamp in 1991 and, since 1994, has enabled Seacamp to conduct cooperative programs with Russia and other countries through her role as director of international programs for the Seacamp Association, Inc. She has authored several English language textbooks which are used throughout the Russian university system. Special recognition to Linda Pulliam, who contributed as editor for this article.

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