

Sharon Tennison

Founder and President, Center for Citizen Initiatives

Sharon spearheaded the start and development of CCI in the early 80s. It has grown from a coffee-table discussion to a 501(c)(3) organization with a multi-million dollar annual budget. Sharon has designed all CCI's programs and raised over \$60 million to implement them. Prior to CCI, she was an ICU Registered Nurse and founded Dove Professional Apparel, a manufacturing company that produces medical wear. Sharon was highlighted as one of nine persons in *Citizen Diplomats: Pathfinders in Soviet American Relations* in 1985. She produced *When the People Lead* video in 1984. In 1993 Tennison received a White House appointment to sit on the 13-member Board for the Russian American Enterprise Fund. Sharon is known for creating and executing streamlined, low-budget, cost-shared technical assistance programs for the U.S. government. She is often consulted by the foreign policy advisors of U.S. presidents and presidential candidates. Recently, Sharon was asked to assist with the formation of a congressional caucus on Russian-U.S. relations.

Center for Citizen Initiatives

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Mission Statement

The Center for Citizen Initiatives implements programs that assist Russian citizens in securing economic and political reforms and fosters cooperative partnerships and relations between the U.S. and Russia.

History

The Center for Citizen Initiatives is the brainchild of an ordinary American citizen, Sharon Tennison, who in the early 1980s determined in a period of desperation to try to reduce tensions between the two Superpowers. Tennison and a growing group of business and professional Americans made the decision to try their hands at diplomacy and began putting together their first trip to the "land of the enemy."

The Cold War was at a peak - the KAL 007 airliner had just been downed by Soviet Interceptor Jets killing all passengers aboard, and the two Superpowers had 50,000 nuclear weapons on launch pads aimed at each other. Scientists predicted if 10% of the weapons were detonated, nuclear fallout would shortly leave planet Earth lifeless.

On September 16, 1983, twenty would-be "citizen diplomats" and a film crew of four left the United States and headed for Moscow. Note: Originally the organization was named the Center for U.S.-USSR Initiatives (CUUI). With the dissolution of the USSR in 1990, the organization took its present name. See CCI's history

Citizen Diplomacy

Unbeknownst to CCI's small collection of concerned citizens, a new movement was about to be born. Clumps of highly concerned Americans in Washington State, upstate New York, Tucson, Arizona, Chicago, Florida and other places around the United States, were meeting in homes, universities and churches to determine how they could take the nuclear nightmare into their own hands.

At that time few Americans had ever seen a Soviet citizen, nor had Soviets met any real Americans - time few Americans had ever seen a Soviet citizen, nor had Soviets met any real Americans - and there was no precedent or pattern how it might happen. Upon arriving in Moscow, Leningrad and Tbilisi, CCI travelers began diplomacy to Soviet sidewalks, market places, schools and to rare apartments at the invitation of the Soviets who risked chancing encounters with the KGB. CUUI's first trip changed the lives of the travelers - each came back to America committed to be public educators. Following the first trip, CUUI immediately spawned a travel program, which took over a thousand Americans to the USSR as citizen diplomats. Each traveler agreed to do six months of public education upon return back to their cities. This work began to spread the citizen diplomacy concept and the education of ordinary American citizens regarding the risks at stake. See citizen diplomacy

Starting AA in Russia

From 1983 forward, Russian citizens questioned CCI travelers if Americans had a solution for alcoholism. AA Big Books began being smuggled in suitcases by citizen diplomats. In 1985, Tennison knocked on the doors of the Soviet Ministry of Health to try to get permission to bring the AA philosophy to the Soviet Union. Eventually, the request was taken to the USSR's new Party General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev. He reportedly said, "Our problem is so great that we must try anything the west has to offer." On April 10, 1986, the first ever AA meeting was held in Kiev, Ukraine by 20 southern California recovering alcoholics, and within three days the second AA meeting was held in Moscow. The starting of AA was a bit rocky in the beginning, but they celebrated AA's 20th Anniversary in Russia in 2006. See AA on CCI website . Also, see an article on 20th Anniversary of AA in Russia.

Soviets Meet Middle America

In 1988, CCI started a first-ever, non-governmental citizen exchange program, Soviets Meet Middle America (SMMA). In the early stages CCI had to partner with the Soviet Peace Committee. After they failed to allow CCI to choose the citizens to travel, they were terminated. Fortunately, Gorbachev had just appointed a young change maker, Gennady Alferenko, to give exit visas to any Soviet citizen who had an invitation to travel abroad. CUUI immediately partnered with Alferenko and soon ordinary Soviet citizens, who CUUI travelers had met on their streets, were flying across the US to four different cities. Over a two-year period, 400 Soviet citizens in small groups of four persons traveled to 265 American cities where they stayed in some 800 private homes, and were interviewed by thousands of American newspapers, radio and TV programs. They returned home to the USSR and spread the news that America was a great and luxurious country and full of friendly host families. They became America's finest ambassadors.

Environmental Initiative

In 1987 CCI's Environmental Initiative began by partnering with young Soviet-era environmentalists to defeat a Communist party-promoted Dam in Leningrad's famous Neva River. The program sprouted tentacles and moved into water quality cleanup, nuclear clean up campaigns around weapons installations, and eventually was awarded the opportunity to map and create a sustainability plan and cleanup program for Russia's acclaimed Baikal Lake, the world's largest and deepest lake. George Davis, an expert in restoring large damaged American sites, was hired to oversee the

restoration of the Lake Baikal basin. Fran Macy was CCI's first Environmental Director and went on to found the Center for Safe Energy after CCI lost USAID funding in 1999. The Environmental Program spanned ten years.

Agricultural Initiative

CCI's Agricultural Initiative, started in 1990, as Soviet agriculture was falling apart due to the breakup up of the whole Soviet food system. The Agricultural Initiative was primarily a response to get food on Russian tables for their survival. Urban gardens, rooftop gardens, support for new private farmers, massive seed lifts, ocean shipments of emergency food supplies were all in motion simultaneously by CCI during that time. CCI brought the concept of the American Extension Service to the Russia, to help private farmers get the latest agricultural data to operate their new hectares. Cornell University provided Extension teaching materials, as did other American Universities, which were translated and distributed to 345 Russian Agricultural Colleges. Dr Martin Price, world rooftop garden specialist, spread rooftop gardening techniques first in St Petersburg in 1993. After being picked up by TV, the concept jumped borders to other Russian regions. (See Rooftop gardening in St.Petersburg, Russia). The agricultural initiative was a ten-year program.

Economic Development Program

The Economic Development Program (EDP), the first-ever business training program for young Soviet entrepreneurs, was started by CCI in 1989 with private funds and financial contributions from the Soviet entrepreneurs. Four years later, when the U.S. began funding Russia projects, USAID provided EDP with a \$7.3 million grant - and required that CCI work only in Russia. CCI developed Russian offices in St. Petersburg, Volgograd, Voronezh, Rostov on Don, Ekaterinburg, the Moscow Oblast (Dubna), and Vladivostok. EDP was for English-speaking participants only, which was a limitation for Russia's regions. However, it was a vital first step and the only one of its kind of training at the time. Business libraries were started, American business consultants were assigned to each Russian office, while many Russian entrepreneurs in EDP were absorbing U.S. "know how" in companies across America. EDP ran for 8 years and was gradually reduced as CCI's largest-ever Productivity Enhancement Program (PEP) for non-English speaking Russians, was erected. Other sources: USAID EDP report and USAID Sustainable agribusiness support project

Productivity Enhancement Program

In 1994 Sharon Tennison found research done by the Marshall Plan's original Productivity Tours designer, Jim Silberman. It promoted that the Marshall concept should work for post-Socialist countries. Tennison began immediately to adapt the Productivity Tours information into a program for Russia in the 1990s. CCI began implementing the experiment first in 1994 and entitled it the Productivity Enhancement Program (PEP). Over the years, PEP became CCI's largest and most dramatically effective program. For more than 15 years PEP was in constant experimentation. As Russian entrepreneurs evolved rapidly, the program had to be updated and refined every year. From the beginning, CCI partnered with Rotary Clubs across America, in addition to Kiwanis, Optimist, Soroptimist and Lion's Clubs. Over 500 Rotary clubs participated, some taking up to 11 delegations every year. The extraordinary amount of volunteerism brought to PEP kept program costs low and the benefits, in terms of numbers of Russian entrepreneurs served, high. CCI never paid hosting civic clubs or American business trainers - they all gave their time and expertise pro bono to PEP.

In 2004 CCI's State Department contract was terminated prematurely. CCI developed means to keep the program running and eventually Russian entrepreneurs were paying full costs of training and CCI's operation costs. By 2008, to keep PEP afloat, CCI had cut staff, moved operations, reduced salaries and the number of PEP participants. In late 2008 as Russia was pulled into the global financial crisis, Russian entrepreneurs were no longer able to pay for the business training in the U.S. Participants canceled 2009 training trips, and CCI was forced to close the doors of the PEP program in February. See President's Report April 2007.

CCI's smaller programs

Between 1993 and 2003 CCI ran many other smaller programs, which contributed to Russia's developing private sector:

- Schultz Awards Program - loans in return for equivalent charitable service;
- Russian Initiative for Self-Employment - a Microenterprise Incubator (see RISE);
- Non-Profit Management Initiative - work with new non-profit initiators(see NPMI);
- Presidential Management Training Program (see PMT);
- Consulting Services for Russian Enterprises (see CSRE);
- Managed renovating of the School of Management of St.Petersburg State University (see GSOM);
- Next Steps Anti-Corruption Program (see Next Steps);
- the Russian Leaders Institute - promoting leadership training for the best of CCI-trained entrepreneurs and taking 100 of them to Washington for Congressional meeting;
- Angels for Angels - computer laboratories for Russian orphanages (see Angels for Angels).

Blog Russia: Other Points of View

Announced in Sharon Tennison's June 9, 2008 *President's Report*, CCI opened a blog Russia: Other Points of View with intention to promote better coverage of Russia in US press. The blog hosts a companion project called Russia Media Watch, which analyzes select pieces of western mainstream media for accuracy or inaccuracy of content based on 17 objective criteria and journalistic standards. Beginning in mid-2009, analyses will be sent to the journalist, the publication and to a wide list of American Congress members, think tanks, business and civic leaders throughout the country.

Note: RMW project is not to be confused with an organization "Russia Media Watch," under www.russiamediamonitor.com, with which CCI does not have an affiliation.

Funding

Membership drives, small philanthropists, large philanthropists, American foundations (The C.S Mott Foundation, [[Atlantic Philanthropies]], the Rockefeller Brothers, the MacArthur Foundation, and numerous family and smaller foundations), and USAID and the U.S. Department of State have all contributed strongly to CCI's financial base over the years.

Sources: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Center_for_Citizen_Initiatives
and Center for Citizen Initiatives at www.ccisf.org