LOCAL RESIDENTS BRING GAINESVILLE TOURISM TO RUSSIA AND VICE VERSA

Gainesville, FL -- Dr. Svetlana Stepchenkova, Associate Director of the Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute (EFTI) at the University of Florida (UF), and Ilya Kuftyrev of the State University of Nizhny Novgorod (UNN) in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, recently headed up a U.S. and Russian delegation to strengthen tourism education, training, research and industry outreach between the two universities. The objective of this project, which is in its third year, is to create a partnership between the tourism schools of UF and UNN. The project will develop, share and partner teaching methodologies, instructional materials, research initiatives and industry outreach activities both in Florida and the Federation of Russia.

Dr. Stepchenkova’s capacity-building delegation from the U.S. included Dr. Lori Pennington-Gray of EFTI, Roland Loog, Executive Director, of Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau (DBA: Visit Gainesville), and Ron Gromoll, General Manager of the Best Western Plus Gateway Grand Hotel and Conference Center. The delegation's visit to Nizhny Novgorod was from March 14th through March 22nd.

In February 2013, a group of students from UNN studied at UF and in-between many tourism classes, they were able to visit tourism sites around Florida to get a firsthand view of the inner workings of the tourism industry. They participated in a behind-the-scenes tour at Universal Studios led by Universal artist, Kim Gromoll; visited the springs at Rum Island Park; did archery in Newberry; met with CVB representatives in St. Augustine; did garden work for the city of High Springs as a service project; met with festival coordinators of the Hoggetowne Medieval Faire in Gainesville; received a back-of-the-house tour of the Best Western Plus Gateway Grand; and even had a chance to work in the Banquets Department led by General Manager Ron Gromoll. The students also had the opportunity to meet with the staff of Visit Gainesville, Gainesville’s Division of Cultural Affairs, and the Gainesville Sports Commission.

The UF delegation made presentations at UNN to tourism officials, students, faculty, and tourism operators. Roland Loog lectured on destination management, Dr. Lori Pennington-Gray presented tourism crisis management, and Ron Gromoll covered revenue
management and employee motivation. Later during their visit, a roundtable was held with tourism officials where tourism objectives were discussed in regards to Nizhny Novgorod's hosting of the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

It was not all work and no play as the U.S. team toured the Kremlin, numerous museums, Nativity Street, and participated in the Maslenitsa Festival (Russian Mardi Gras Day). “This visit and the work we did with the State University of Nizhny Novgorod exceeded our expectations,” said Dr. Svetlana Stepchenkova. Roland Loog remarked, “It is always enlightening to see how international students perceive tourism in the United States and rewarding to be able to show them how we promote tourism to Gainesville and Alachua County.”

The Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute is committed to building a bridge between the tourism industry, organizations, destinations, and higher education through excellence in interdisciplinary research that provides strategic information focused on a wide array of travel, tourism and hospitality opportunities.

Visit Gainesville is the official tourism sales and marketing organization for Gainesville and Alachua County. Visit Gainesville is ready to assist you in planning your vacation or your meeting. From your initial inquiry to dining and entertainment recommendations to the ride home, our experienced and professional staff is your guide to the community.

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