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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Computers4Kids Hosting Russian Exchange Students

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA (November 23, 2004)—Since its inception in 1999, Computers4Kids (C4K) has enlisted the support of hundreds of volunteers in the Charlottesville/Albemarle area who mentor city and county students to enable them to earn a computer of their own. Now C4K is getting a little help from beyond its traditional borders with the addition of two exchange students from Russia.

Kirill Gusev, a 20-year-old volunteer from Kaluga, and Alexander Venediktov, a 21-year-old volunteer from Ekaterinburg, are part of an exchange managed by IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board). Sponsored by the U.S. government, IREX brings young, Russian volunteers to the United States to perform community service in various fields, including information and community technology (ICT).

“We had never heard of the DC-based IREX, but we were happy when they contacted us,” said Kala Somerville, Director of Computers4Kids. “The group was trying to find nonprofit organizations that help improve communities through technology and thought C4K was a good fit. We decided to participate in the exchange program because we felt it was a great opportunity to share what we do with other cultures, expose our students to other cultures, and get some extra help on various projects at the same time.”

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Both Russian volunteers have extensive backgrounds in Information Technology. While still in high school, Kirill Gusev participated in a project organized by the Kaluga Agency for Social Information where his responsibilities included analyzing news information, editing, and organizing public events. Gusev then went on to run a student newspaper at his own school. His achievements were noticed by school administrators and he became chief editor of his newspaper until graduation. In 2001 and 2002, he volunteered for the virtual information resource center (www.trainet.org) where his duties included selecting news about the noncommercial sector in Russia, editing news stories, and posting information on the web site. Through this experience, Gusev gained a full understanding of information technology, which prepared him for participation in future volunteer projects at his university and with other organizations. He is currently studying at the Moscow National Technical University (Kaluga campus) where he majors in information technology.

“I’m really enjoying staying in Charlottesville,” Gusev stated. “I’ll try to do the most urgent tasks because we don’t have too much time here.” Gusev also remarked on the value of his time here in gaining experience. He said, “I’m about to implement some concepts of C4K in Russia, especially in the field of working with kids.”

Alexander Venediktov is a volunteer with the international student organization BEST (Board of European Students of Technology), a noncommercial, nongovernmental organization composed of students from technical universities in Europe. BEST connects 64 universities from 25 countries. LBG-Ekaterinburg is one of the local branches of this organization of which Venediktov is an active member. His volunteer activities with this organization include developing the organization’s web site, teaching web skills through a summer course, and developing PR materials.

He currently studies technology and information security at the Ural National University of Communication. He has extensive experience in ICT and promises to be an asset to the USRVI program. Of his time here, Venediktov says, “The work experience at C4K will give me the chance to improve myself, to see how a nonprofit organization in another country works. I don’t know of any other organization like C4K in Ekaterinburg and my region. That’s why it would be great to organize a program like C4K in Russia.” Venediktov is also very enthusiastic about his experience here so far saying it has been “cool” and “unforgettable!”

Gusev and Venediktov will spend four weeks in Charlottesville (November 12th—December 10th) performing various tasks at C4K, including refurbishing computers, working on developing activities for students and mentors, and conducting workshops with the students in the computer lab. Two families were generous enough to offer to house the students during their stay. And though they’ll be working hard during the week, Gusev and Venediktov will be spending their weekends visiting area sights, including Washington DC, and New York City.

“This is not only a great experience for Kirill and Alexander, but it’s a wonderful opportunity for C4K as well,” Somerville said. “Already, they have been extremely productive in the Refurbishing Lab and the kids are taking advantage of their vast knowledge of technology. If another opportunity like this comes up in the future, if the volunteers are anything like Kirill and Alexander, we would definitely be interested in participating again.”

Computers4Kids was established in 1999 to foster computer skills and give a computer with appropriate software to city and county students. Applicants to the C4K program are students in grades 7-12 whose families cannot afford to purchase a computer. C4K students earn their computers through a nine-month training process that not only provides valuable technological skills, but also teaches responsibility and accountability as well. Computers4Kids matches every youth with a volunteer mentor. Together the mentor and student creatively explore various aspects of the computer and technology.

For additional information on Computers4Kids, please call 434-817-1121 or on the Web, www.computers4kids.net.

