

InterVarsity group plans Soviet cultural exchange

By CHERYL ALLEN
Staff Writer

Breaking through the "Iron Curtain" is an impossible task for most Western religious groups. But for a group of 14 InterVarsity (IV) students and two IV staff members from UNC, the curtain may be pulled aside.

After nearly a year of planning, IV Area Director Rich Henderson and staff member Kathy Rowlett will lead the IV students to the Soviet Union for an exchange program with Kiev State University.

"The purpose of the trip is to give

students from both countries exposure to one another's cultures, values and understandings," said Scott Bessenecker, assistant to the director of IV missions at IV headquarters.

"They (UNC's IV group) were chosen basically because of Rich Henderson's experience in taking students overseas and the cohesiveness of the IV group (at UNC)," Bessenecker said.

According to Henderson, the group is interested in building relationships across cultural lines. "In a low key way we want to let them (the Soviets) see our faith. We want

to go as learners, servers and as Christians."

He said the group was especially excited because it thinks it is the first time the government has extended an invitation to an upfront Christian organization.

The group will spend a week of orientation in the United States, tentatively followed by a week in Budapest living with Christian families, and will then stay a month in Kiev. Students will return to Budapest with time for debriefing and preparation for re-entry back into Western culture, Henderson said.

The orientation will be held in Wheaton, Ill., and will cover topics such as Marxism, Soviet life and culture, and religion, he added.

"We hope to go for a week to Budapest, Hungary, where students will live with Christian families and work in a Christian church. Hopefully they'll be able to see their culture from inside," he said.

The IV members have been invited by Kiev State University to take part in an academic, cultural and language exchange, said Alice Benner, a sophomore from Raleigh. "We will be paired up one on one

with a Soviet counterpart," she added.

"Each day we will have a different topic to discuss," Henderson said. "They will range from value systems to economics to problems in society in both of our countries."

The exchange students will attend cultural and athletic events, said Deanne Deese, a sophomore IV member from Greensboro.

Students are looking forward to the trip for a variety of reasons.

"I've never been to another country," Deese said. "I'm excited to learn about communist culture and

how it differs from ours."

Tim Clayton, a December graduate from Huntersville, said he had always been interested in the Soviet Union. "One thing I am hoping for is to be able to visit with Christians who live there. Having people come from other countries helps them feel like they are not forgotten or alone."

Clayton said, "I am curious to learn about issues of faith and God — if he exists or what he is like from the perspective of those raised in an officially atheist nation."

Benner agreed, saying, "It is a lot harder to hold onto their faith in an Eastern bloc country."

The students also hope this trip will discredit some of the stereotypes they have grown up with in Western culture.

"I think a lot of our stereotypes will be erased," Deese said. "I hope a lot of their stereotypes of us will be erased as well."

Some have concerns about the trip.

"I'm worried about the things I take for granted here that I won't have there," Amy Wearmouth, a junior from Sterling, Va., said. Letters take a month to arrive, and the students are discouraged from calling the United States. "I don't want to write, because I'm afraid my letter will be read. The hard part will be not talking to my family."

Wearmouth said she hoped she would be able to adapt to the culture. "I don't want to be an American over there. I'd like to be a Ukrainian."

Kathy Rowlett, the other IV staff member accompanying the group, said she hoped the group could bring its experiences back to UNC.

"I hope they learn to love the Soviet people though they are different," she said. "I hope it helps them back here on campus to do the same — to love people different from themselves and to share their faith naturally."

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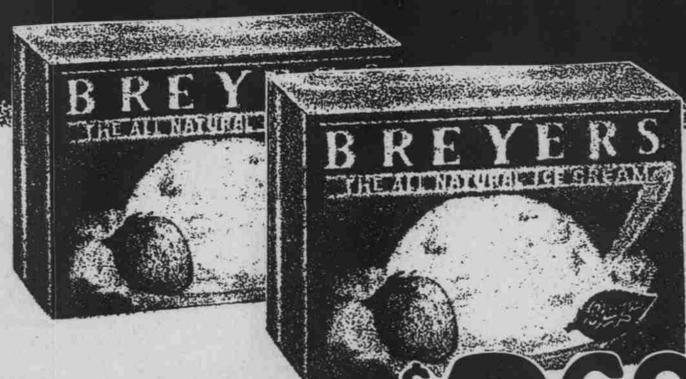
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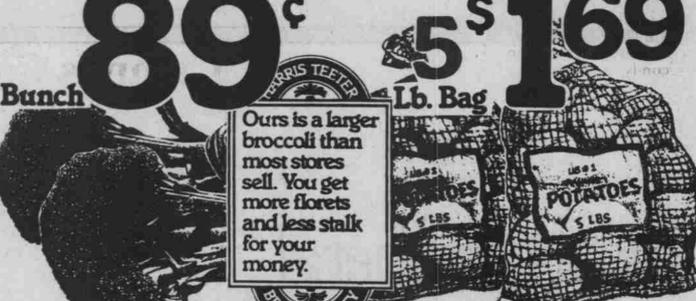
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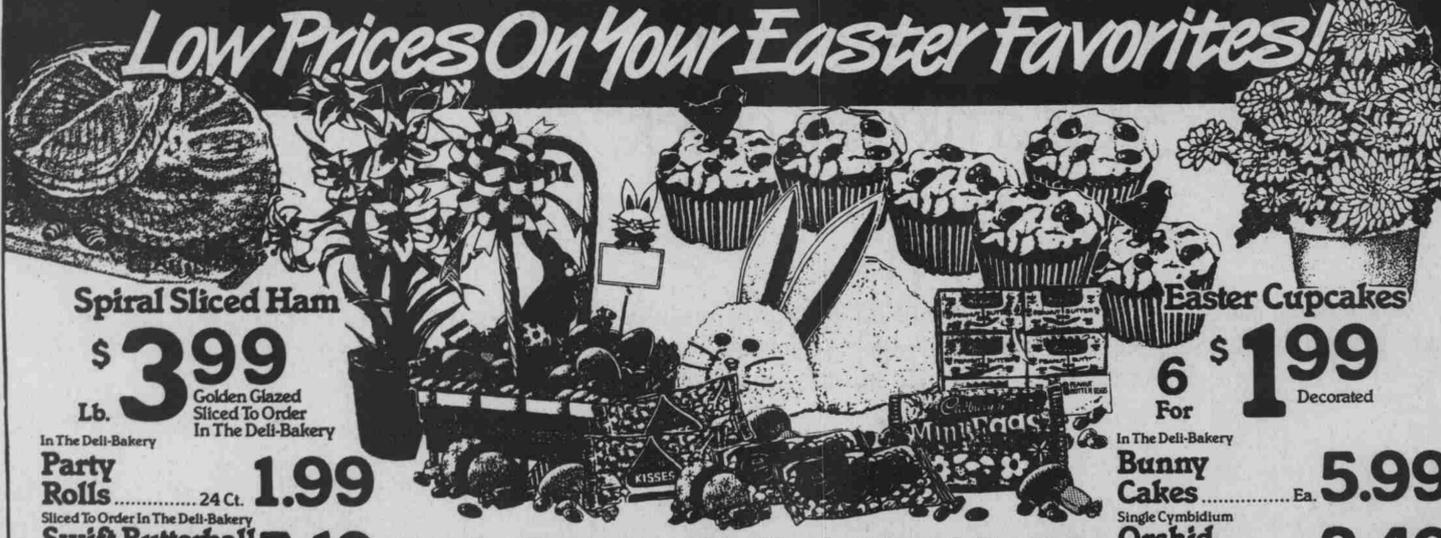
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Gifts from page 1

Cozart, assistant director of the alumni association. "The money will probably be used for a graduate fellowship or a need-based scholarship."

"The program is only about five years old. We based it on the programs at Carolina and Duke," he said.

Georgia Tech is the only ACC school without a class gift program.

"The seniors are not planning to give a gift," said Michael Cowan, a student representative. "Most of our class gifts come from the alumni."

Allen said senior class gifts are not common.

"There are not too many schools with high levels of funding. Class gifts are the exception in this country, not the rule," he said.

The senior class at UNC has collected \$343,000 and has received pledges for much more money over the next five years, said Steve Tepper, UNC senior class president. Seniors who pledged money paid \$10 now and will pay \$190 over the next five years.

More money will come from the state government, which agreed to help by matching funds. The state will pay \$167,000, and the class is also receiving a \$50,000 grant from the Educational Foundation. The amount the senior class has raised totals about \$560,000, Tepper said.

A great deal of time was spent over the summer and fall in meetings and forums in order to come up with the professorship idea, he said.

"We wanted to do something special for the bicentennial," Tepper said. "This professorship is the ideal gift for the students to give — the gift of a great teacher."

"This effort shows the way the seniors feel about their school. It indicates how enthusiastic, proud and thankful they are to be here."

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