A close look at Russian Imperial Easter Eggs offers great perspective in recognizing the significance of Russian Orthodoxy as a strong tradition in the religious world and customs of Russians. Lavish and intricate designs depict colorful illustrations of religious figures as well as scenes that portray various events or tales that are central to Russian cultural heritage. Known otherwise as Pysanki or Faberge eggs, they are primarily associated with Christianity’s most important festival, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Russian Orthodox tradition, the Easter celebration is also known as the Feast of Feasts and the King of Days. The Easter tradition of exchanging painted eggs was brought from Byzantium to Russia with Christianity, though with time the types of decoration became infinitely varied. Easter eggs symbolize the concept of Christ’s Resurrection, hopefulness and new life. This tradition lives on today and continues to reinforce the true meaning underlying one of the most significant Christian feast days.

In March, Utah Valley State College was honored by a visit from His Excellency, Arman Kirakossian, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia. During his visit, he lectured at both UVSC and Brigham Young University. In addition, he had the opportunity to visit many of the tourist attractions in Utah.

Utah’s deep interest in Armenia grew stronger after the earthquake of 1988. Twenty-five thousand were killed, 15,000 were injured and 517,000 were left homeless by the earthquake.

Utah residents, including the notable Jon Huntsman, rushed to the aid of the earthquake-stricken country. Donations were collected and shipped, volunteers traveled overseas to assist in the rescue and cleanup of the devastated nation and the ties between this state and the Armenian nation grew stronger.
Blini, borsch, black bread, prianiki, vareniki, pelmeni..... It makes your mouth water just thinking about all that delicious Russian food. So, maybe it is time for you to try your hand at baking such delectables.

On Friday, May 11, at 6:30 pm at the Wahl’s home, we will have our very own Russian cooking class. The class will be taught by Nadia Alekseeva, a student at Utah Valley State College who currently works in UVSC’s Food Services Department.

In addition to a cooking experience, this upcoming Parents’ activity will provide an opportunity for us to discuss the possibility of opening a FRUA chapter here in Utah.

Many of you are familiar with the good work of Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption (FRUA) and the good resource this organization is to families who are in the process of adopting children from countries of the former Soviet Union. As a FRUA chapter, we will be able to open to our members even greater resources, as well as extend our scope to include charity work in the orphanages from which our members have adopted. Please look at the FRUA web site (www.frua.org) and be prepared to cast your vote on this proposal.

Experience Eastern European Culture

The beauty of Russian and Eastern European culture is truly stunning, but too many of us fail to have the exposure necessary to fall in love with it. To truly learn the culture, you must live it.

Inviting a student or other Russian or Eastern European guest to experience the culture of American family life can truly be your doorway into a whole new world.

Occasionally, we are approached by Russian students who are in need of some type of assistance. Sometimes they need jobs, rides, housing, or other assistance. These students are far from home and often feel the distance. Having a family here that accepts and loves them and can help out in a pinch, can often mean the difference between finishing school and returning home early.

In addition, the Utah-Russia Institute often hosts guests on exchange programs and as part of the Russia Days celebration in September. Each of these exchanges is an opportunity for us to open our hearts, homes and minds, to the beauty of another culture, gaining more than we could ever give.

If you are interested in participating in such an experience, please contact Jenny Davis at (801) 222-8897 or by email at davisje@uvsc.edu to be added to our hosting list.

Learn Russian!

Have you ever wanted to explore the diversity of Eastern European culture? Have you ever felt the urge to stun your friends with your bilingual talents? Have you ever wanted to travel to Russia and NOT pay the foreigners prices? Here’s your chance!

A second course of Beginning Russian I through Community Education at Utah Valley State College will begin Wednesday, April 4 at 7:00 pm in the Alpine Life and Learning Center (Health Room).

In addition, a more advanced Beginning Russian class will be offered starting Tuesday, April 3 at 7:00 pm in the same location.

If you are interested in participating in either of these courses, please contact Jenny Davis at (801) 222-8897, or just come to the class and we will get you registered.
Pascha (pronounced Paskha) or Easter is the highest celebration of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Russian Orthodox churches herald in the glorious event with a service, beginning at midnight on Pascha Sunday. After the service, proclaiming Christ’s Resurrection, Easter baskets are blessed and shared. This signifies the end of the Great Fast (Lent, in the West), a forty-day period of fasting.

Holiday fare includes a variety of traditional sweets and sweet breads that are often adorned with crosses fashioned from fruits or chocolate. A special Russian Easter sweet bread called kulich is a staple to the celebratory feast and is accompanied by vividly colored hard-boiled eggs. As red is symbolic of Easter and beauty, most of the colored eggs are red. The main course of the traditional Pascha dinner is lamb or ham.

Easter is a holiday for visiting friends and relatives. The traditional greeting is, Christ is Risen, to which one would respond, Truly He has risen.

The old Russian tradition of Maslenitsa precedes the Great Fast. It is eight days of eating, drinking, being merry and a carnival-like atmosphere similar to Mardi Gras. Known also as Butter Week, this period is characterized by mass consumption of blini, or Russian pancake-like pastries.

After Maslenitsa, the Great Fast commences. This is a mandatory fast of 40 days during which no animal products may be eaten. This includes red meat, fish, poultry, milk, cheese, eggs, butter, etc. In other words, this is a strict diet of fruit, vegetables, beans and grains. Entertainment is also forbidden with the exception of cultural and religious concerts and singing.

As Palm Sunday approaches, a sense of anticipation and joy breaks through the long days of fasting. This event typically corresponds with the first signs of spring and the marketplace is filled with flowers, toys and confections in commemoration.

Easter eggs are a major part of the Russian Easter celebration. As in pagan times, the egg symbolizes life and, to Christians, Salvation and Christ’s Resurrection. Red dyed eggs are given to everyone as a gesture of love and wish for a good life. The hard-boiled eggs are eaten with traditional Easter bread.

During the days of Imperial sovereignty, the royal family gave colored and lavishly decorated eggs to the boyars and the nobility.

In addition to chicken eggs, wooden eggs are decorated and exchanged as gifts during this important season.

Russian Orthodox Easter Sunday falls a week after Jewish Passover. This is a time of literal and spiritual cleansing. Spring cleaning and household repairs are accomplished and everyone looks forward to the traditional Easter feast.

Holy Week, the week between the Palm Sunday celebration and the Saturday just prior to Easter, is a time of fasting, reflection and repentance.

Good Friday, like elsewhere in the world, is the most somber day of this week. Easter vigil, Saturday night, features a liturgy that climaxes at midnight. At this time, the darkened church is brought to life by the lighting of countless candles, church bells toll and the faithful pour out of the church, singing and praising Christ.

Now, the feast begins! All kinds of meat - primarily ham and lamb, kulich, cakes, sweets and everything else which was forbidden during the Great Fast is present on virtually every household table.

Христос Воскрес!

Upcoming Events

April 1   April Fool’s Day
April 3   Beginning Russian Part II begins
April 4   Beginning Russian Part I begins
April 11  Ambassador of Ukraine visits Brigham Young University (Lecture at 12 noon in the Auditorium of the Harold B. Lee Library)
April 15  Easter
April 18  Ambassador of Kazakhstan visits Utah Valley State College (Lecture at 9:00 AM)
April 27  Utah Valley State College graduation
Easter Bread

History
This Easter bread was acquired by the Russian Mennonites from the Russian Orthodox women who would ice and decorate the loaves very elaborately. The round dome of each loaf was a symbol of the domed Orthodox churches, and on Easter Sunday each woman would give this offering to the priest. When served at home, with company present, the guest of honor would be offered the iced top, otherwise the oldest member would be honored.

1. 1 1/2 cakes or 2 packages dry yeast, soften in 1/2 cup warm water.
2. Mix and scald 1 cup milk and 1 cup cream.
3. Beat 10 eggs well and add them to the cooled mixture of milk & cream
4. Combine: 2 1/4 cups sugar, 1/8 teaspoon salt, 1 cup butter (2 sticks)
5. Add this combination to the egg and milk mixture
6. When the mix is lukewarm, add the softened yeast, 1 Tablespoon lemon extract and 1 Tablespoon lemon rind, continue to mix
7. When consistent, add enough sifted flour to make soft dough
8. Beat well and add more flour to make stiff dough
9. Knead till satiny, cover with a towel or cloth and let the dough rise to 2x its volume
10. When risen, punch the dough down and knead slightly
11. Divide the dough into 3 parts - roll each into a smooth ball and place each one into a greased (or Pam covered) gallon can such as a large coffee can (or use tall juice can)
12. Fill each can approximately one half full and let rise till doubled.
13. Bake at 325 degrees for about one hour. Cover domed top with foil after first 15 minutes to keep from getting too brown.
14. Let cool completely before adding orange cream icing.

Recipe for Orange Cream Icing
One pint soft cream cheese brought to room temperature. Turn out into a mixing bowl and add: 1/4 cup frozen orange juice concentrate plus 1 Tablespoon sugar - DISSOLVED BEFORE adding to cheese. To the juice and cheese mix add the zest of one lemon. Beat with electric mixer till very smooth - add more orange juice and sugar if desired, making sure to have no granules of sugar noticeable in the mixture. Add several drops of food coloring if desired.