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NEWSLETTER I

By John Ritter

“Wanted: Senior Lawyers with at least 25 years of significant practice experience to serve as visiting lecturers in American Law in former Soviet Republics.” How could I resist this ad aimed at age and experience? I had never seen one before. In fact, it originally asked for lawyers over 50 until some 40-year olds threatened to sue for age discrimination.

One year has passed since my reply to this ad from the Center for International Legal Studies to teach Law in Russia in 2007, and in July 2006, I was chosen to join 60 other American lawyers to go to Russia and teach the American Legal system to Russian law students. My assignment is to be visiting professor at Petrozavodsk State University, Petrozavodsk, Russia, north of St. Petersburg and near Finland in Fall 2007.

I am still euphoric over being named to go – a combination of excitement over an adventure to a foreign county, and an end of suppressing my desire to teach – I have always thought I had something of value to say to law students, and believe I can explain ways to make them better lawyers. This is partially because I was a full-time law professor from 1970-1980 when I knew very little about lawyering. Today, 25 years later, I have much more to teach.

The thought of teaching young Russian law students and lawyers about the good and bad of American law is almost too much to manage. When I was a young man, the Russians promised their socialist system would “bury us”. I watched movies about Russian armies invading New York City and the Rocky Mountains; however, I always knew that if the Russian army invaded the U.S., soldiers would be throwing away their rifles on the beaches to run and open McDonald franchises and buy Playboy magazines. The 1990 fall of Communism brought McDonalds and Playboy to Russia along with capitalism and democracy, without an invasion of the U.S. And now the Russian Federation is the number 1 oil producing nation in the world, surging ahead of Saudi Arabia last year. So Russia may yet bury us economically if we don’t get our oil consumption under control.

For now the Russians are working with a new constitution, new laws, and a red-white-and-blue flag. They plainly want to get ideas on how America has managed to control its executives and bureaucracy. This is my job as one of the professors teaching the American Legal System. Hopefully, we will be successful at instilling some of the good things about our system into the new Russia.