

Tuesday, December 24, 2002, #3(3)

DISABILITY IS NO LONGER AN OBSTACLE

Internet progress gives a new chance to people with disabilities

Olga Zenkovich

MOSCOW

There are six million deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the world. There are quite a few of them in Russia. Many of them would like to get higher education and improve their professional growth opportunities. Some will have such a chance very soon: a multimedia/distance learning laboratory has been opened at Bauman MSTU.

The State Technical University started training hard-of-hearing students in 1934, more than a thousand disabled people have received diplomas of the famous Bauman since then. It was quite logical that it was here that the Research and Methodological Center for Complex Rehabilitation of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing was set up and successfully carries out its tasks. At present the Center has 170 students, and 50 more students are taking a pre-college training course. And now we see a new step forward. A unique complex supported by a grant from The Nippon Foundation of Japan has been established in cooperation with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) at Rochester Institute of Technology (USA). It has become another link in the international postsecondary education network for people who are deaf and hard of hearing within the framework of PEN-International project. Besides Russia and the USA, participating in the project are Tsukuba College of Technology (Japan) and Tianjin College for the Deaf of Tianjin University of Technology (China).

There are a lot of developments in the technologies' market today which can be used in training people with special needs. The problem is their efficient application. The initiators of PEN-International project and its current Director Dr. James DeCaro set an object of joining intellectual and material resources of the great powers with the purpose of making the world educational space accessible for hard-of-hearing people.

Here, in the new laboratory of BMSTU, with the help of web cameras we can see a sign language interpreter on the monitor, at the same time the image can be transmitted to any point in the world. Without leaving the room, it is possible to carry out video conferences...

"I saw something like this at Rochester Institute," said Vladimir Bazoev, the Chairman of Moscow Society of the Deaf. "And I am happy that now we have such a wonderful laboratory in Moscow."

The laboratory of such level is indeed the first one in Russia. And its appearance can to a considerable extent be attributed to the efforts of Maria Shustorovich, a Professor of Mathematics of NTID, who has served as the Coordinator of PEN-International project in Russia from the very beginning. Alexander Stanevsky, Director of the laboratory, emphasizes this fact.

"People with disabilities look forward to entering BMSTU, but unfortunately not all of them have this opportunity," says Igor Saprykin, Director of the Department of Social Support for

Muscovites. “Seeing this laboratory one cannot help thinking of establishing such a laboratory in the Rehabilitation Center that trains deaf people with support-motor apparatus disorders. According to our plans, this year 750 handicapped children will be able to get education at home. We now have initial funds for this program.”

According to Tatiana Volosovets, Director of the Department for Territorial Education of Russian Ministry of Education, “Work is underway to open such laboratories in Yekaterinburg, Krasnoyarsk, Vladimir and Kazan.”