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### **Russian delegation offers help in Pearson situation, envisions new display on Chkalov**



Photo by [Zachary Kaufman](#)

Valery Chkalov, left, grandson and namesake of famed Soviet aviator Valery Chkalov, speaks to Vladimir Vinokurov, Russia's consul general in San Francisco, while Doug Lasher looks at trans-polar flight panels with Andrey Yushmanov, Russian consul general in Seattle and his head of protocol, Evgeny Uspenskiy, during Wednesday's visit to Pearson Air Museum.

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Following a dispute over management of Pearson Air Museum, Russian officials made sure Wednesday that their artifacts linked to the history-making Chkalov flight were still in good hands.

But the delegation had an even more significant Chkalov-related issue to discuss. Top cultural and diplomatic officials described their vision of a much bigger exhibition to commemorate the 1937 flight of Valery Chkalov, whose crew flew nonstop over the North Pole from Moscow to Vancouver.

But in the wake of that Pearson dispute, they need to know who their partner will be.

"We're very worried," explained Vladimir Vinokurov, Russia's consul general in San Francisco. "When we heard about the difficult situation, we decided to see if we could help."

So, the delegation held separate meetings with representatives of three agencies that had — until a few weeks ago — collaborated on running the air museum.

First came a meeting at the museum with Tracy Fortmann, superintendent of the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site and curator Theresa Langford.

Later, the delegation headed for the Marshall House, where the Chkalov aviators were greeted more than 75 years ago by Gen. George Marshall. After talking with Vancouver City Councilor Larry Smith, they met with Elson Strahan, CEO and president of the Fort Vancouver National Trust.

The delegation included the Russian aviator's grandson, also named Valery Chkalov, and Doug Lasher, president of the local Chkalov Cultural Exchange Committee.

In both historic places, Alexey Korjouev, an official with Russia's ministry of foreign affairs, got assurances that Soviet-era artifacts of the flight were safe while the museum's Chkalov display is in storage.

But however the dispute plays out, Korjouev indicated he's not really interested in returning to — as American curators might describe it — the same old same old.

"Not just put this modest exhibit back," said Korjouev, nodding toward flight goggles and other memorabilia currently on display at the Marshall House.

Russian officials would like to see it "renewed on a new level," said Korjouev, deputy director in the ministry's Department of North America. "We're thinking of expanding."

Maybe as a bigger presence in Pearson, maybe as a smaller stand-alone museum.

As far as additional resources go, Russian archivists have been told to look for documents that can tell more about the flight, including material that had been classified for decades, he said.

There would be other types of resources. After establishing a stable partnership, "we can mobilize some donors, for money," Korjouev said.

The bigger Chkalov display would, in turn, be a significant piece of a new Russian-American cultural relationship. On the Pacific Coast, that cultural partnership would highlight historic landmarks from California's Fort Ross, settled by Russian fur traders in 1812, up to Alaska.

"Vancouver should serve as one pillar," Korjouev said.

It sounded like a good idea to the local Park Service officials at Fort Vancouver.

"An opportunity to build on to an existing framework is exciting," Fortmann said.

And in the other meeting, Strahan told the Russian delegation that the trust would welcome an expanded Chkalov heritage presence.

"That's wonderful, as far as I'm concerned," Strahan said.

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