

## Soviet citizens visiting here this weekend

By ELIZABETH BARBERA  
Sunday Post staff writer

WESTPORT — The spirit of 'glasnost' pervaded the Saugatuck Congregational Church on Saturday, as about 50 Soviet citizens — including attorneys, physicians, educators and theater professionals — met their Fairfield County host families during a Gold Coast weekend kick-off.

The gathering provided a respite to about half the Russian contingent of the Soviet-American Citizens' Summit, an unprecedented and historical conference organized to have citizens discuss peace and other social issues facing the two superpowers in the 21st century.

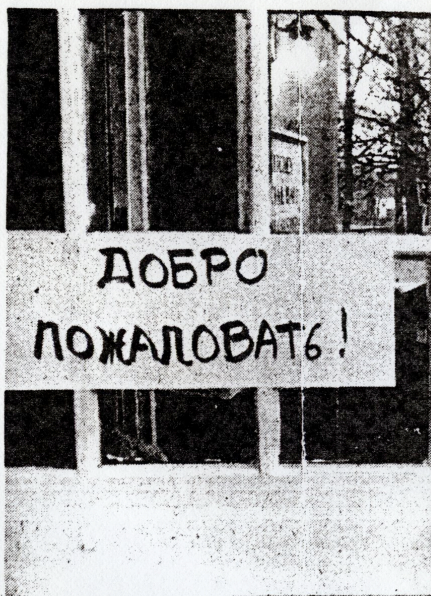
"What is most unusual about the visit is that I have found the warmest atmosphere here," said Gregory Lokshin, secretary of the Soviet Peace Committee. "For the first time in three travels to the United States, I feel myself at home. I have never experienced such extreme goodwill."

Lokshin, who is staying with Westport's Frank and Priscilla Wood, said he would like to watch the American family in its ordinary environment, apart from the political rhetoric.

Sponsored by the Seattle-based Center for Soviet-American Dialogue, the two-week conference focuses on changes facing the United States and the Soviet Union in areas such as politics, education, business and trade and medicine.

This week, the group will travel to New York City for further discussions at the United Nations and an inter-religious service at St. John the Divine.

Ruth Steinkraus Cohen, chair-



Sunday Post/Mark Hoffman

Soviet citizens arriving Saturday at the Saugatuck Congregational Church in Westport were greeted by a sign on the door saying 'welcome' in Russian. The group is staying with families here this week.

man of the International Hospitality Committee of Fairfield County, said the Soviet visitors had been paired according to similar occupations or interest with 48 families in 11 Fairfield County towns.

"The Soviets can be witness to American families," she said. "They've tested our government, now they're going to test ordinary people to see what they are like."

Speaking through Margarita Maksimova, head of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the U.S.S.R. Academy

of Science, Oleg Soroka, deputy attorney general for the U.S.S.R. in Moscow who is staying at the home of Westport attorney Ed See, said Gorbachev's openness policy had produced "so many different, great changes including economic and democratic reform, and others in politics and social life."

Stamford residents Robert and Tanya Van Pelt stood in the back of the church with a green card embossed with Alexander Orlov's name, likening themselves to limousine drivers at the airport.

"A smile and a thank-you goes a long way," said Van Pelt, a stockbroker who speaks a little Russian. "People are basically the same. You have to talk with them and not at them."

Although they admittedly planned very little for Orlov's arrival, preferring rather to have their guest tell them what he would like to see, Van Pelt said he "had a bottle of Stolichnaya vodka in the refrigerator."

"That means table water," he added.