

State's Attorney probes Estonia partnership By Greg Guenther, Times Staff Writer Tuesday, August 10, 2004

The state's attorney's office is investigating Westminster's involvement in a partner city program.

In 2000, city leaders began visiting Estonia to look for a city in the 1,800-square-mile Baltic country with which Westminster could forge a cultural exchange.

Westminster officials chose Paide as its partner city in 2002.

The state's attorney's office would not comment on the investigation.

Westminster Mayor Kevin E. Dayhoff confirmed last week that the state's attorney's office also was investigating the city's role in several industrial and residential developments. They include the Meadow Branch Industrial Park, Westminster Technology Park and the Bolton Hill developments, among others, Dayhoff said.

Dayhoff said he does not see a connection between the investigations.

A Paide partner city fund was established in October 2002. The Community Foundation of Carroll County Inc., a Maryland not-for-profit and 501-(c)(3) organization, manages the partner city fund.

Audrey Cimino, executive director of the Community Foundation, said the partner city fund makes up a very small percentage of the Community Foundation's assets. According to a community fund balance sheet dated Dec. 31, 2002, the Paide Partnership City Fund made up \$13,007 of the foundation's total assets of \$3.8 million. Cimino said she could not provide financial information for the 2003 fiscal year.

Westminster's interest in creating a relationship with Paide grew from a program called Partners for Peace, a military program that began in 1991 to help the newly independent country become stable, train management and improve communication between civilians and military personnel.

The program, headed by the Army National Guard, developed into a partner-city program in 1993 and now includes several Maryland municipalities, as well as 14 other states.

Since the partnership was formed, city officials from Westminster have visited Paide and the newly elected mayor of Paide visited Westminster in June.

Contributions to the community fund have also supported cultural exchanges, including a visit from the Estonian Television Girls Choir in 2003.

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