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Playing Santa Claus for Moscow Charity

By Katherine Jacobsen

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British expatriate Jon Roche **Katherine Jacobsen**

British expat John Roche is not your regular philanthropist. From March to January, Roche, marketing director at Officescape International, grows out his white beard in preparation for his holiday-time role as Father Christmas at various charity events. He is also a regular master of ceremonies at expat charity events.

Q: How did you end up in Moscow?

A: I was asked to come over for a month to solve a problem that a company had back here in 1993, and so I came for a month, and I've stayed here since. I'm in my 18th year of my one-month contract.

Q: How did you get involved in philanthropy work in Moscow?

A: It was initially happenchance, but it was a delightful one. In 1998, I was invited to join the St. Andrew's Society of Russia committee because they were putting on a ball, and they

asked me if I would be the master of ceremonies for the event. I suppose I was filling a gap at the very beginning with St. Andrew's because at that time a lot of people were leaving because of the financial crisis. And then once I started, the Irish business club asked me if I would do their MC activities. I became, I suppose, something of a fixture, you know it was: 'Oh John'll do it and John always does' so it sort of rolls along.

Q: While you continually work as a master of ceremonies for various events, you're also involved in Taganka Children's Fund, why?

A: I've focused on Taganka because over the years I've gotten to know how it works. I've gotten to know the individuals; I know a lot of the families, knowing the people and seeing how any resources are utilized. I think that's the thing.

Q: Why do you continue your involvement in philanthropic activity?

A: I think if you're living somewhere, and you've decided you're going to stay, then you need to get involved in your community, and if you can do something it can become a collective joy. You see results and you see the pleasure and the interest, and what a huge return you get for really quite low-level investment in just time. It's really just remarkable.

Q: When do you cut off your beard?

A: Well, historically, after January 1st people pay me to cut off my beard. This year, I'll be doing it on my own, but in March I'll start again. Every year, I think, well, maybe I'll retire as Santa. But I'll probably be doing it again.

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