



506 North Cascade Avenue - the home built by Judson Moss Bemis for his family in the early 1880's. s.

Photo courtesy of Special Collections - Penrose Public Library

AN UNSUNG LEGACY....

The Quiet Beneficence of the Bemis Family

by Marion Ritchey Vance

In sculpture, place names, and local lore, Colorado Springs celebrates its great benefactors — William Jackson Palmer... Winfield Scott Stratton... Spencer Penrose.

Virtually ignored is a fellow philanthropist who presented the city with two of its most venerable landmarks, the Day Nursery and the Fine Arts Center, and shaped its cultural landscape. A benefactor whose private collections anchor our world-class museum of Southwestern art; who funded the maternity ward at Glocker Hospital, donated the great organ at Grace Episcopal Church, endowed the Community Chest, established one of the first charitable foundations in town, and was a life-long patron of Colorado College.

She is Alice Bemis Taylor. Sixty years after her death, her legacy to the city remains largely unknown. Like Jimmie Burns before her, Alice Bemis Taylor spared no expense in creating the finest that money could buy. But while Burns'

Theatre Beautiful" lives only in memory, the institutions created by Mrs. Taylor are viable and vital to this day. They are a tribute not only to her vision and generosity, but to the foresight and business acumen that ensured their continuity.

Pioneer Values and Devotion to Duty

Alice Bemis was born in Newton, Massachusetts in 1877 to Mr. and Mrs. Judson Bemis who moved to Colorado Springs four years hence and quickly took their place among the city's founding families. Both parents were of English stock who settled on the east coast in the 1600s. Their pioneer values, their devotion to duty, and their remarkable sense of philanthropy were the foundation upon which daughter Alice continued to build.

Judson Moss Bemis was the quintessential self-made man. When he was only four or five, his family left Massachusetts and headed west by boat, foot, and covered wagon. Hardships of survival on the



The historic Bemis home was beautifully restored in the late 1970's and is today the Hearthstone Inn, a popular bed-and-breakfast.

Hearthstone Inn - Photo by Rob Middleton

frontier cost the life of his mother and convinced young Judson that farming was not for him. He found work as a clerk in Chicago and made up for his lack of formal schooling by absorbing everything he could about the world of business. At age 25, he determined to create an enterprise of his own.

As the story goes, Bemis ventured to St. Louis where he was fascinated by the bustle of the waterfront with its ceaseless loading and unloading of merchandise. In those days, most produce was shipped in barrels, which were heavy, cumbersome, and prone to breaking apart. The young man began thinking about a better way. When he spotted a bolt of burlap in a store front, he estimated how much of the material it might take to hold 100 pounds, and prevailed on his landlady to sew up a length on both sides. Sale of this primitive bag netted enough to buy two lengths of burlap for the next round. Thus was born a cottage industry that Judson Bemis built into the largest manufacturer of bags in the world. By its 125th anniversary, the company was producing paper and textile bags, thread, twine, plastic packaging, and specialized items in twenty-seven plants around the country. To this day, Bemis Co. is traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

Bemis' business philosophy was straightforward.

Identify a real need, fill that need, deliver a quality product, and give the customer his full money's worth. In an address to plant workers, he said "Our company thinks it better to extend its business and furnish good homes, a good place to work, good schools for workpeople, rather than spend its earnings in extravagant living and riding in ten thousand dollar automobiles. ... Success should be measured in the amount of money disbursed in the betterment of mankind..."

Judson Bemis was faithful to his creed, and Colorado Springs was the fortunate beneficiary. Bemis' contributions to Colorado College place him second only to General Palmer among the school's principal benefactors. Bemis Hall stands in his honor. Through his wife and daughter, the Bemis fortune touched countless other educational and service organizations dedicated to "the betterment of mankind".

His wife was born Alice Cogswell — the eighth generation of a distinguished Massachusetts family that counted among its forbears men such as Oliver Wendell Holmes and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Alice too lost her mother at an early age and took on responsibility for running the household. Family and friends wrote of "her sweet, cheery and gener-

ous spirit” and recalled “her always doing nice things for people.” Alice Cogswell graduated from the Ipswich Seminary, a school famous in the New England of its day and noted for producing “women of large influence in the world”.

The attractive Miss Cogswell met Judson Bemis through a letter of introduction. They were married in 1866 and settled in Newton, Massachusetts where daughter Alice was born. When Alice was four, her mother developed a life-threatening throat ailment that prompted a family move to Colorado Springs in search of a more healthful environment.

“Benevolence Was Her Avocation”

By all accounts, Alice Cogswell Bemis was a remarkable woman. She pioneered the course that her daughter was to follow and then carry on to new dimensions. According to *A Sketch by a Friend* “Wealth to her was not a reason for luxury or pleasure-seeking but an opportunity for helping others — with a lack of ostentation characteristic of her whole nature”...“That the young should have their chance in life and that the paths of the needy should be made more easy became increasingly the object of her life.”...“Benevolence was her avocation.”

Daughter Alice and her siblings grew up in the warm atmosphere of the family home at 506 North Cascade, which was exquisitely restored in the late

1970s and now houses The Hearthstone Inn. A storybook childhood in the fashionable north end featured ice skating and bowling and tennis and a lifelong passion — horseback riding. Alice was a favored guest at Glen Eyrie and Briarhurst. In her teens, she spent a year traveling and studying in Europe with her mother and sister.



Photo courtesy of Special Collections - Tutt Library, Colorado College

Alice Bemis Taylor with adopted daughter, Alice Dorée. Dorée attended school in the east and shortly thereafter moved to New York City. She currently resides in Maine which has been her home for many years.

From her mother, Alice inherited a love of literature. Throughout her life, one of her great joys was reading aloud once a week with three devoted friends. Alice Bemis also enriched her mother’s collection of rare and first-edition books. A favorite was a first edition of John Keats’ poem “Endymion” whose familiar opening line “A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever” became a sort of beacon for her life.

Alice’s mother was a founder of the first women’s organization in town, the Women’s Art Club, and a generous patron of the YWCA. She helped establish the Women’s Educational Society, and was a charter member of a visionary group that founded the Colorado Springs Day Nursery in 1897.

At the time, families — particularly working

families — were being torn apart by tuberculosis. As one parent succumbed to the disease, the other was obliged to work full time. Children had no place to go. On March 16, 1897 fourteen women met in the Unitarian Church and created an institution “to assist working mothers in the care and education of their children and to procure employment for such

women". They produced by-laws on the spot. The organization was to be "wholly unsectarian, completely severed from questions of religious belief, politics, or nationality."

Fees were originally set at ten cents a day per child and five cents for each additional child in the family. During its early years, the Day Nursery shuttled from house to house on the southern edge of town. In 1921, Mrs. Bemis' daughter Alice announced her intention to build a permanent facility at the corner of Tejon and Rio Grande. The new Day Nursery was to be a memorial to her mother who had passed away in 1917.

The Mantle of Philanthropy

By 1921, Alice Bemis was coming into her own. She

had also become Alice Bemis Taylor by virtue of marriage in 1903 to Frederick Morgan Pike Taylor, a bond broker and outdoorsman from New Jersey. The Taylors built a house at 1238 Wood Avenue which remained Alice's principal residence for the rest of her life. Around 1910 the Taylors adopted an infant girl whom they named Alice Dorée.

Upon the retirement of Judson Bemis in 1909, his son Farwell had taken over the family business as President of Bemis Brothers Bag Company. Daughter Alice inherited the mantle of philanthropy. It may at times have lain heavy on her shoulders. A phrase used in describing her mother may

have applied to Alice as well "Nothing that she counted a duty sat lightly on her mind or conscience." According to a friend, Alice was moved by deep devotion to duty and an inner compulsion to share her material possessions and good fortune with others. She did so by granting large sums to civic institutions but also by way of personal, individual kindnesses to countless people: scholarships for students at CC; care at Cragmor for a little girl with TB; odd jobs for laborers out of work. She was a life-long patron of Colorado College and served as its first woman trustee.

At her own insistence, the vast majority of Mrs. Taylor's charitable giving was done quietly and without fanfare.

She was rarely photographed. Perhaps the need to shield herself from incessant pleas for help accounts in part for what some described as a cold or stern demeanor. Trusted friends and staff speak, rather, of a woman who was private and shy, but possessed of a sense of fun and a great love for the arts and nature.

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The Bemis Building Bug

By her own account, Alice inherited the "Bemis Building Bug". The first manifestation was the Day Nursery. In choosing the location at 104 East Rio Grande, Alice envisioned a "social settlement", encompassing the nearby Boys' and Girls' Clubs as



Photo courtesy of Starsmore Research Center - Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum

The Colorado Springs Day Nursery at 104 East Rio Grande. As is the case with virtually all the sites associated with Alice Bemis Taylor, this building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

well. She personally chose the architectural style for the building and supervised details of construction. The master builder commented, as did others after him, on “Mrs. Taylor’s great grasp of details. . . she could follow architectural plans and ideas as well as any professional builder.” An architect later remarked to her “Certainly if you were a man, you would have been in the building game.”

The Tudor/Gothic structure designed by Pueblo architect William Stickney is patterned after the great English manor houses that Alice recalled from her tours abroad. She brought from England a Mr. John Gray to oversee the fine touches of craftsmanship. And fine touches there are, from hand-carved fireplaces to whimsy in stained glass and mythical animals in the ceiling plaster, to the glorious nursery rhyme murals by Allen Tupper True. Everything converged to spark a child’s imagination and sense of wonder, and to keep the place from feeling like an institution. Furniture in the castle-like dining room is solid oak, scaled

just to child size. Generations of children have tacitly demonstrated respect for the beauty of their surroundings — no initials are carved, no artwork defaced. The Colorado Springs Day Nursery formally opened on Christmas Day of 1923, dedicated “to all mothers and all children”. At the time, it was a residential facility with a dormitory for forty youngsters, a 14-bed infirmary, and quarters for the live-in matron. Over the years, services of the Day Nursery evolved to suit the times, but the basic mission, conceived by the founding mothers 105 years

ago, remains exactly the same.

That luxury to remain true to mission, without bending principles to appease donors, is the great legacy of Alice Bemis Taylor. Through her will, Mrs. Taylor established an endowment which to this day provides core operating support. Additional bequests came through the Bemis-Taylor Foundation created by Mrs. Taylor in 1927. Such seed capital has helped attract partnership funding to expand coverage. Now known as “Child Nursery Centers”, the day nursery network encompasses six

locations across town serving some 400 children a day and providing a model for quality pre-school education and health care.

The Art of Giving

A modest bronze plaque on the towering organ at Grace Episcopal Church reads: “In memory of Frederick Morgan P. Taylor and as an enduring tribute to his love of good music, this organ is given by his wife, Alice Bemis Taylor.”

In 1928, following the death of her husband, Mrs. Taylor presented a fine pipe organ to Grace Church and St. Stephens. The Parish accepted the organ “as a public trust for the benefit of the whole town” and pledged to honor Mrs. Taylor’s wishes that the organ be used “for the benefit and enjoyment of the citizens of Colorado Springs.” It was to be played on given afternoons, free and open to the public, “that all who care for music may come. It is hoped that many people returning home from work at the close of day will feel at liberty to drop in.” The genius of



Image courtesy of the Colorado Springs Day Nursery

Detail of the Mother Goose murals at the Colorado Springs Day Nursery. The murals were painted by Allen Tupper True and photographed by Laura Gilpin in 1922.

Mrs. Taylor's gift lay in the trust fund that accompanied it, endowing the Taylor Memorial Concert Series that continues to this day. According to the current Taylor Memorial Organist, Frank Shelton "The trust was brilliantly written. It ensured that this is the gift that truly keeps on giving." Not only have the concerts been held for three-quarters of a century, but they have attracted world class musicians and enriched the musical culture of the city. The Colorado Vocal Arts Ensemble, among others, owes its origin to the Taylor Series. Special Diamond Jubilee concerts will be performed through spring of 2003 in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the dedication of the organ and the concerts.

From Collection to Creation

Alice Bemis Taylor met architect John Gaw Meem in Santa Fe in 1928 and forged a partnership that culminated in "the finest piece of public architecture in Colorado Springs." Sculptress Eugenie Shonnard introduced the two. Mrs. Taylor was a fan of the Spanish mission revival style for which John Gaw Meem was the leading proponent. She commissioned him to design a chapel for her country estate "La Forêt" as a memorial to her late husband Frederick Taylor. At Alice's request, Meem also created a job in his Santa Fe studio for her niece, Faith Gregg Bemis. Two years later,

Meem and Faith Bemis were married. Meem encouraged Mrs. Taylor's interest in southwestern art and reportedly introduced her to the *santos* which became the signature piece of her prized Spanish colonial collection.

Alice Bemis Taylor had been quietly collecting for some time. She followed her mother's footsteps in acquiring rare and first edition books and seminal works on the American Southwest. She broke entirely new ground by investing in southwest Indian pottery and Navajo weavings . . . this long before such objects were considered to be serious art. Gradually the residence at 1238 Wood Avenue overflowed with art and artifacts. Mrs. Taylor began to look for a way to house her collections and — more importantly — to make them accessible to the public.

As early as 1930, she made inquiries of the Broadmoor Art Academy concerning the land on Cascade Avenue and Dale Street originally donated by Julie and Spencer Penrose. She also set aside

\$400,000 for an addition to Coburn Library at Colorado College, to which she proposed to bequeath her superb collection of books. A prime motivation for the building project was to create employment for out-of-work stonemasons.



Photo courtesy of Grace Episcopal Church

The Taylor Memorial Organ at Grace Episcopal Church, dedicated in 1928. Since that date, three distinguished musicians - Frederick Boothroyd, J. Julius Baird, and Frank W. Shelton - have held the post of Taylor Memorial Organist. A special Memorial Concert will be held on March 2, 2003 in celebration of the 75th Anniversary Diamond Jubilee.

An Idea Takes Off

As the Colorado Springs cultural community caught wind that a building might be in the works, the idea took off. Music groups needed space. Drama clubs needed space. Mrs. Taylor's modest museum for her southwest artifacts began to spiral

into a full-blown center for the Arts. Monies originally destined for the CC library could be the down payment. A key player in this unfolding drama was Elizabeth Sage Hare — an easterner who had moved with her ailing husband to the healing climes of Broadmoor. Marshall Sprague described her thus: "She was rich, she was witty, she was smart, she was imperious, she was dominating, she was tremendously energetic, and she numbered among her close friends absolutely everybody worth knowing in New York and Europe. She knew also, as members of the Springs' ultra-conservative, Republican society soon were telling one another in shocked tones, just about all the crackpot liberals, socialists, communists and avant-garde intellectuals in the land from John Dewey ...to Eleanor Roosevelt...to [New York Socialist] Boardman Robinson." She had a summer place in Santa Fe, where one of her good friends was John Gaw Meem.

Sprague goes on to say that Betty Hare founded Fountain Valley School for Boys and hired Meem to design several buildings. As art teacher, Mrs. Hare choose Boardman Robinson, internationally-known muralist, illustrator, and educator. With her

backing "socialist Robinson was taken to the local Republican bosom like a prodigal son and even made an instructor at the Broadmoor Art Academy". By 1931, nurtured by Hare, Robinson, and Meem, the concept of an "arts center" was fully fledged. All that was left was to secure the desired

land on Dale Street, along with permission to raze the Broadmoor Art Academy which occupied it. Julie Penrose saw to both.

Construction began in 1934. As Mrs. Taylor had envisioned, the center's first contribution to the community was the creation of desperately-needed jobs during the depths of the Depression.

Correspondence shows that she paid personal attention to myriad details of construction and furnishings, particularly the lighting fixtures.

Opening ceremonies for the Fine Arts Center in April, 1936 were as much an anomaly in conservative Colorado Springs as was the naming of Boardman

Robinson to be its first Art Director. The week-long program of *divertissements* was produced by Elizabeth Hare and featured such avant-garde performers as dancer Martha Graham and eccentric French composer Erik Satie. The invitation-only audience was stunned and, it is said, the genteel patroness Mrs. Taylor "took to her bed" for a time.

"Modern, Monumental, and Unlabored"

Particularly for Colorado Springs natives who have grown up with the Fine Arts Center, it is easy to take it for granted. But the basic concept, of housing all the arts under one roof, was positively



Image courtesy of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center

cutting-edge in its day. The final design encompassed museum space for the Taylor Collection; art galleries and studios; an art school that taught drawing, painting, sculpture, lithography and murals; a library of early Americana; a music room; and a mahogany-paneled theater to seat 400. Creative interaction was promoted by locating a workshop between the theater and the art school so that art students could build and paint sets, and by housing Colorado College's Art Department within the Center. Local drama and music groups enjoyed use of the performing arts venues. Admission to all exhibitions was free.

If the notion of a center that combined museum space with visual arts, music, and drama was innovative, John Gaw

Meem's design for it was a brilliant match. In a striking departure from his trademark adobe-and-wood-beam style, Meem gave the arts center a timelessly modern look by stylizing the pueblo form and incorporating art deco highlights. His choice of monolithic concrete—a building medium more associated with factories than fine art—was revolutionary. It all worked. The concrete takes on subtle hues from the Colorado light and the stepped-back profile of the building balances gracefully on its inclined site. Distinctive murals, bas reliefs and frescos added accents of color to the spare horizontal lines of the building. The result, wrote *Architectural Forum*, "is a building which is modern, monumental and unlabored. Its simplicity reveals assurance, not sterility.... there is a freshness here.... which is the building's greatest charm."

Today, some 70 years later, the Fine Arts Center still has a distinctly modern feel. It is to Alice Taylor's enormous credit that she embraced a style so novel for its time and so removed from her personal taste. That taste is probably more truly expressed in her summer home at La Foret, or in the Day Nursery.

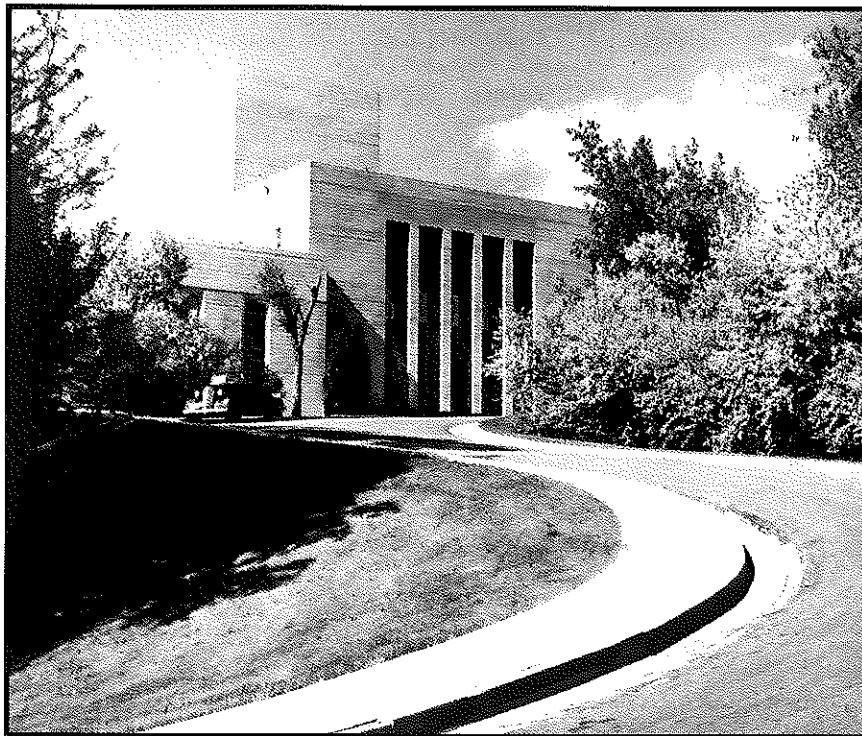


Photo courtesy of Special Collections - Tutt Library, Colorado College

The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, shortly after it was built. The artistic curve of Dale Street, setting off the site, was an integral part of the original design.

In addition to the building itself, Mrs. Taylor donated to the Center her rich collections of Southwest Indian and Spanish Colonial Art which form the core of the much-acclaimed Taylor Museum. Some 6,000 volumes from her personal trove, particularly books and maps of western Americana, stocked the library. They include such treasures as a first edition of Rose

Kingsley's "South by West" printed in London in 1874.

Mrs. Taylor also saw to the future of the Fine Arts Center through a large bequest which was "to be invested and reinvested, and the income only therefrom used by the Trustees.... as hereinafter requested" for operating expenses.

The Next Half Century

While Meem's layout proved adaptable to changing needs, more space was eventually required. A grant from the Bemis-Taylor Foundation in 1968 created the free-standing Bemis Art School for Children, and 1971 saw the first major addition to the main building. Funded by El Pomar Foundation, new gallery space was built on the eastern perimeter of the original courtyard,



“Ponderosa”, the great house at La Forêt, was built of pine logs from the western slope of Pikes Peak. Once the summer home of Alice Bemis Taylor in Black Forest, La Forêt is now a conference and retreat center.

Photo courtesy of the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum - Starsmore Center for Local History

The great house at La Forêt sits among tall pines and commands a sweeping view of Pikes Peak. Known as “Ponderosa”, the elaborate log structure was the heart of Alice Bemis Taylor’s summer retreat in Black Forest. Mrs. Taylor began construction on the 500-acre estate shortly after her husband’s death in 1927. It is there that she dedicated to his memory the Taylor Memorial Chapel — a gem in Spanish mission style designed by John Gaw Meem with interior art work by Eugenie Shonnard.

La Forêt was a place for Alice Taylor to enjoy nature, stable and ride her horses, and entertain special friends. It also served as a summer camp for young artists-in-residence. As in all her building projects, attention to artistic detail is evident throughout. Mrs. Taylor took special pride in the main fireplace, with its illuminated forest scene. While the estate was set up for a complete live-in retinue of gatekeeper, chef, butler, maid, and chauffeur, it also had a small rustic cabin that Alice named “Kings X” — a term from childhood games meaning “time out” — one place where she could truly get away.

Some of best insights into life at La Forêt come from the memoirs of Vera Rusk Ellett whose family lived across the road. “I learned early on that Mrs. Taylor was a very special lady....In the summer, her place looked like a park because the brush, dead trees and everything else was cleaned up....Mrs. Taylor was many things to the Black Forest.... Before Christmas, Pat McCarty was

told to give her a list of needy people in the Forest, and they each received a large box of food. One family had eighteen children and the father wasn’t always at home. Many times, Mrs. Taylor helped them out... One man was losing his property because he could not pay the taxes. She paid his taxes and took a small amount from his check each month as payment. Not long before her death, she marked his note “paid in full”. Each person working for her at the time of her death received \$200 for each year they had worked for her. My Dad went into the dairy business, getting his start from her”.

After Mrs. Taylor’s death in 1942, La Forêt went to the Bemis-Taylor Foundation which in turn donated it in 1944 to Colorado Congregational Conference, a forerunner of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Conference added a number of small cabins and a large dining hall and did the requisite modernization to turn La Forêt into a retreat center. Hundreds of groups have held camp at the Center over the years, attracted by the seclusion, the serenity and the inspirational quality of the place. It is currently owned and managed by La Forêt Conference and Retreat Center, Inc. and is open year round.

The picturesque chapel has remained intact over some 85 years. It was re-dedicated in 1999 as the Bemis-Taylor Chapel, and placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

BRIEFLY

Gasoline, oil prices tumble nationwide

NEW YORK • Oil prices tumbled to a five-week low Monday on growing evidence of an extended recession that could sap energy demand for some time. Benchmark crude for August delivery fell \$2.68 to settle at \$64.05 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

Gasoline prices fell overnight to a national average of \$2.611 a gallon, according to the Oil Price Information Service and AAA. In Colorado Springs, the average price of a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline was \$2.46, according to AAA.



Bemis Co. to purchase Rio Tinto PLC

NEW YORK • Bemis Co., whose clear plastic packages hold everything from batteries to burgers, said late Sunday it is paying \$1.2 billion for the global packaging business of Rio Tinto PLC. Buying the assets, known collectively as Alcan Packaging Food Americas, gives Bemis 23 facilities in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and New Zealand. These companies make flexible plastic containers for cheeses and steaks, as well as clear, hard-to-penetrate packages for batteries and toys.

Ex-Sachs employee charged with theft

NEWARK, N.J. • Federal authorities have charged a computer programmer in New Jersey with stealing trade secrets from his former employer, Goldman Sachs. The FBI says the Russian-born Sergey Aleynikov, of North Caldwell, downloaded software and sent computer codes to an Internet account in Germany. Aleynikov resigned June 5 from his \$400,000-a-year job at Goldman Sachs.

Pepsi to boost its Russian investment

MILWAUKEE • Soft drink and snack maker PepsiCo Inc. announced plans Monday to boost its investment in Russia, continuing a trend of consumer companies seeking growth in emerging markets as their U.S. sales soften. With its largest bottler, Pepsi Bottling Group Inc., PepsiCo plans to invest another \$1 billion in Russia over three years, taking the partnership's Russia stake above \$4 billion. Pepsi in 1974 became the first Western consumer product to be made and sold in the U.S.S.R.