

City school ready for French visitors

BRISTOL -- An entire classroom of students from France will be arriving in Bristol in a week.

French exchange students from the town of La-Queue-les-Yvelines will be provided host homes by Bristol Central High School students and their families. The 29 students and three teachers will be offered a glimpse of what it's like to be an American for 10 days, visiting such cities as Boston and New York during their international journey.

World language department Coordinator Dorothy Raviele said the initial connection between the two schools was more by coincidence than anything else.

"It was kind of through a friend of a friend of a friend, asking if I could get hooked up with an English teacher in France," she said.

As luck would have it, the person she was connected with was Gael Manescau, an English teacher who was writing an English language textbook to be published in France. The author used BCHS as a "typical American high school," so now students of BCHS are somewhat known around France. The two instructors sparked the meeting of the two cultures. "Everyone is just so excited about this," said French teacher Amanda Robustelli. "There's definitely a buzz around the school."

Matt Janczyk, 16, a sophomore and second-year French student, said he's looking forward to meeting his pen pal Marine, who will be staying at his house with his family. "Just meeting her is exciting. I think she's interested most in viewing how our schools are and how we spend our time at home," he said.

The two students have been e-mailing each other since last year. They write each other in both languages. Home host Therese Janczyk, mother of Matt, said it's interesting to read the e-mails from Marine, and that on occasion, Matt and she try to comprehend the letter together. "I have a little bit of French language knowledge. I can speak it conversationally, so I try to help him when he's stumped," she said.

The visiting students have an event-filled itinerary in front of them, including two different day trips to New York City, where they will visit such sites as the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, Rockefeller Center, St. Patrick's Cathedral and the United Nations. They'll also tour Boston, where they'll spend time at the Boston Science Museum, Kennedy Library and the aquarium.

Don't forget about Bristol in their plans. The mayor will be a guest, along with the students and families, at a luncheon and reception at the Carousel Museum, hosted by the Chamber of Commerce.

Robustelli said that she believes this is an experience of a lifetime for many of the French students because it's the real world application of knowledge that makes it so exciting. "I think this is awesome. This is bigger than the usual exchange," she said.

With six-month approval required from the Bristol school board required before taking an international trip, the Bristol students hope to be the traveling group next year. The pen pals would then stay with the same family they hosted themselves.

Therese Janczyk said that Matt would be allowed to take the trip to France next year. "This whole experience is just a great opportunity for not only the kids, but also the families and teachers. We can't wait to meet her, and all of the other students, and share our cultures and our languages," she said.

The French exchange students and their teachers will stay in Bristol from Feb. 24 to March 4.