

Exchange students learn history from those who were there

By **KAITLYN NAPLES**
STAFF WRITER

Seventeen French students now can say they know a little bit more about American history, after hearing war stories from those who experienced that history first hand when they toured Memorial Boulevard last week.

Every year since 2004, Bristol Central High School has held a foreign exchange program with the Lycée Jean Monnet in La Queue-lez-Yvelines in France. On alternating years, a group of students from Bristol Central have visited France, and a group from the Lycee Jean Monnet have come to Bristol, spending a little over a week visiting the school, the city and surrounding cities, like New York and Boston.

This year, the French youths came to Bristol, and spent about 13 days here. They stayed with host families in the city, traveling to attractions in the state, and learning about the American way of life.

"It is important for the students to learn about the American culture, and they are interested in the culture; the movies, the music, they want to know more," Gael Manescau, one of the teachers on the trip, said. He

added that the students' English was "pretty good." However, they weren't fluent.

The students arrived in Bristol on March 30, and spent the weekend with their host families and visited Bristol Central on Monday. Last Tuesday, the group traveled to New York City, and Manescau said they were all amazed by what they saw. In New York City the students visited the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, the 9/11 Memorial, and more. Last Wednesday, they traveled to Boston, and were able to see attractions such as Quincy Market and Harvard University.

"I liked Boston better, the people in Boston aren't as rushed as they were in New York," Eline Gaude, 16, said, adding that it was her first time in the United States. She added that the people in Bristol "were very nice" and that she noticed a lot of differences in how the school day was run.

As part of their visit to Bristol, the students took a tour of Memorial Boulevard.

Eline said that by touring the monuments at Memorial Boulevard, she was able to learn more about American history since it isn't taught extensively in France.



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Foreign exchange students from the Lycée Jean Monnet in La Queue-lez-Yvelines, in France toured Memorial Boulevard last Thursday, stopping at each monument, like the Civil War monument, and hearing stories of its history from local veterans.

"I'm always interested in learning about history," Gaude said.

Another student, 15-year-old Mathis Berthelot, said he too noticed many differences in American culture.

"The cars are really big, and there's a lot of fast food," Berthelot said. He added, that at the high school, he noticed many of the students play sports. His attention also was captured by the display of American flags outside of the houses in town.

"People in France don't have the French flag outside

their homes," he said, adding that it showed Americans were patriotic and proud of their country.

Tim Gamache, a Vietnam veteran and Bristol resident, spoke to the students during their visit to the Boulevard. He shared stories from the days of the Vietnam War, and gave them some history on the Vietnam War monument and Memorial Boulevard. Other veterans were on hand at the other monuments on the boulevard as well, sharing personal stories and history of that specific time period.

John Lasnier, a World War II Army veteran, stood in front of the WWII monument, sharing a story about when he landed in France, and told the students he had a French background.

"I'm of French decent, and I've got a warm spot for all of you," he told the group of students last Thursday morning.

Gamache said he thought the exchange program was an opportunity for the students to see the American way of life.

"This is our opportunity to put our best foot forward for them, so they can go back and say that Americans are friendly people. We can build bridges with other countries," he said, adding that he has done this tour with the exchange students in the past, and it has always been well received.

"They seem to be happy to be here, they ask a lot of questions," Gamache said.

Amanda Robustelli-Price, French teacher and World Language Department coordinator at Bristol Central High School, said she looks forward to seeing her exchange partners each year.

"The exchange provides students with the abil-

ity to make connections; connections to other communities, within Bristol, between French and English, their own culture and that of their French exchange partner, comparisons of different viewpoints, and, most importantly, it allows students to practice their French in a meaningful way,"

Robustelli-Price said in an email. She added that the students making these connections are learning how to be citizens of the world, which she said is "a skill that is so important in our interconnected society."

"It is my hope that students will take these skills and use them for the rest of their lives," she said. "I also hope that they will establish life-long friendships, as I have."

Robustelli-Price said she is thankful to the host families who welcome the French students into their homes, as well as the community, including the veterans and police department, for their continued support of the program.

The students were in the United States until this past Wednesday.

Comments? Email knaples@BristolObserver.com.



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