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## ***NEWS FROM ASCA***

*An ongoing series of reports, articles, and news items about the Arlington Sister City Association's programs and activities, plus news from its Sister Cities*

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### **Arlington Students Touched by *Joie de Vivre* during Visit to France**

**by Katy Wheelock**

Twenty-two high-school students from Arlington participated in a two-week exchange program with Lycée Marc Chagall, in Reims, France from June 23 to July 7, 2017. Led by chaperones Katy Wheelock, Lori Brown, and Inger Moran, students from H.B. Woodlawn, Wakefield, Washington-Lee, and Yorktown High Schools rekindled friendships and formed new ones during their time in Reims.



Twenty-two Arlington students at Dulles International Airport ready to board their Air France flight to Paris

Because many of the French students were preparing for and taking their end-of-the-year Baccalauréat exams we were not able to attend their regular classes, but we did receive a tour of the school and ate lunch in the cafeteria twice. Some of the Arlington students stayed with the French students they had hosted in fall 2016, while others had the opportunity to stay with new French families. The Arlington students were encouraged to practice their language skills as much as possible while on the exchange. "I used my French all the time with my family, which helped me a lot with the language," said one student, Sachi Cooper. Maggie Baldwin embraced life with her French family and told us, "I got to use my French so much with my family that by the end of my stay with them I was able to converse almost normally."

The French host families spent the weekends doing a variety of activities with their visitors, including picking fruits and vegetables at local farms; organizing extended family dinners; exploring local village fairs, festivals, and waterparks; and even visiting Parc Astérix and EuroDisney. Others went to the evening Sound & Light shows at the Reims Cathedral or made excursions to Versailles and the Normandy coast. Yet despite all the sightseeing we did, student Ethan Hall still ranks his time with his French host family as one of the top two activities of his trip.

Much of our time in Reims was spent learning about its rich heritage, history, architecture, and culture. We took a guided tour of the Fossier Biscuits factory, where visitors not only saw how the famous Biscuits Roses de Reims are made but also got to sample the unique French cookies. Visits to the Cathédrale Notre Dame de Reims, Palais du Tau, and the famous champagne cellars of Taittinger introduced students to centuries of history and architecture. Students also learned that Victor Hugo's inspiration for the character Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was the hump-backed bell-ringer of the Basilique de Saint-Rémi, which we also visited. The chaperones also had a tour of downtown Reims and the local countryside in a zippy yellow 2CV (Deux-Chevaux).



Chaperones Inger Moran, Lori Brown, and Katy Wheelock after an excursion in Reims and the surrounding Champagne countryside

While in Reims, we made several excursions and short day-trips in the surrounding area. Students enjoyed the medieval fortress and falconry show in Bouillon, Belgium. One student said that her time in Bouillon was one of her favorite events during the exchange because "we had a lot of free time to explore the town, and the tours were good." Pierrefonds, a castle largely rebuilt by Eugène Viollet-le-duc, was especially enticing for those who had enjoyed the television series Merlin several years ago, which was filmed at Pierrefonds over a span of five years. To end the day, students rented paddleboats on a little pond and skirted around waterlilies.





Enjoying paddleboats on the pond

On a day with a focus on cheese and chocolate, students learned all about Brie from a family that has been making the famous French cheese for five generations. Though the tour itself was very informative, the highlight of the day was tasting three different types of Brie plus fresh milk from a local farm.



Melina, Isabella G., and Nina enjoy fresh milk from a local farm.

Afterward, during a guided tour of the town of Noisiel where the famous French chocolate *Menier* is made, we learned about workers' rights and the fascinating history of efficiency in factories. "Learning about the history of the chocolate factory and its impact on the town" was Ethan Hall's second favorite part of the trip. Another day spent in the town of Troyes began with a photo scavenger hunt to find various cultural items and historical locations around town. Having to ask local residents for advice, directions, and suggestions made this activity a favorite with many of the students! We rounded out the day with tours of a stained-glass museum and a modern art museum featuring a special exhibit on Renoir.

The students' trip concluded in Paris with a homecoming of sorts for trip leader Katy Wheelock, who had begun her own semester abroad in the 1990s with a three-week stay at the Grand Hôtel des Balcons in the 5th arrondissement. Naturally, we selected this same hotel for the students' three nights in Paris. Students traveled to the heights of the City of Lights from the hill of Montmartre to the top of the Eiffel Tower, and also to its depths from the deepest Metro stops in Paris: Abbesses (36 meters) and the Catacombs (20 meters). Free guided tours of the Impressionist museum, Musée d'Orsay, and the Cathédrale de Notre-Dame de Paris were as fascinating as they were informative.



Arlington students getting an informative overview and history of Shakespeare and Company, the famous Paris bookstore

While it is not surprising that some students loved the visit to the Eiffel Tower the most, one student insightfully remarked, "I also enjoyed our last night in Paris because it was really nice walking along the Seine and just being able to explore



local life." Later that night, when we saw a local band rehearsing along the quais of the Seine, a small group of our students spontaneously began dancing and singing along. This unplanned moment was a demonstration of the *joie de vivre* that touched many of our students during our time together in France.



Ethan, Grace, Andrew, and Meleny at the Pyramide du Louvre at sunset

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The Arlington Sister City Association (ASCA) is a nonprofit organization established in 1993. ASCA works to enhance and promote Arlington's international profile and foster productive exchanges in education, commerce, culture, and the arts.

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