

'Falcon Island'

Through simulation, students learn how 1903 immigrants felt

This story marks another installment of Today's Lesson, which occasionally chronicles classroom activities in Farmington Public Schools.

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At Farmington High School's very own "Falcon Island," students recently were able to sample a minuscule taste of the kinds of trials and tribulations that foreigners experienced when immigrating to the United States in 1903.

Unlike the real thing, students in five 20th Century history classes didn't have to cross the Atlantic Ocean and fidget about whether their entry would be allowed at the end of the journey, at Ellis Island in New York Harbor.

But the students, at Falcon Island, did wear period attire and went through a reenactment of immigration. It included several checkpoints for the "immigrants" to pass through, including queries about health, background and character, for example. Those who didn't pass muster were deported, unable to

enter the United Links of Farmington.

Jammed into one hallway, representing the "holding block," were 200 students, mostly sophomores, waiting to begin the process of being interrogated by Falcon Island customs officials. By the end of the 90-minute SMART period class, all either made it or were deported.

Within the walls of the customs area, officials sat across desks from the immigrants, asking and answering questions through body language, gestures and lively dialogue.

Student Jolie Skwiercz, for example, in the role of customs official, cradled her arms when asking an immigrant by the fictitious name of "Gunnart Eduart" whether he had any children.

Actually, the dialogue was nothing but loud gibberish, as instructed by history teachers Renee Lossia-Acho and Kevin Kansman. Any English spoken by immigrants resulted in a deduction of points, something that could hurt their chances of entering the ULF. The scene was one that wouldn't have been out of place in a high school drama production.

According to Lossia-Acho and Kansman, students who did the research were able to get into their roles better. And, they could have a better idea what



Waiting: This immigrant mother, portrayed by sophomore Natalie Kershaw, waits to find out whether she will be allowed into the United Links of Farmington.

immigrants, perhaps ancestors, had to go through when they came to America.

"We're hoping they have a small idea of the difficulty in coming to America," Lossia-Acho said. "To recognize the frustrations of not knowing the language and the communication barriers they would have faced as well as the frustrations in trying to get through each station, primarily the health station, and the fear involved."

Those passing through the health station had to show they were mentally competent as well as physically strong. Among the areas that needed to be checked: arthritis, mental illness, whooping cough, German measles and yellow fever.

Other stations included those to make appeals, sign loyalty oaths and gain clearance into the "country."

Kansman admitted that immigrating through Falcon Island could in no way fully duplicate Ellis Island.



Anyone have diphtheria? The health station was a key hurdle for immigrants trying to get into Falcon Island. Here, the health official, portrayed by student Jesse Norton (far right), queries sophomores Vanessa Wellner (left), Caron Burns and Amy Ludy.

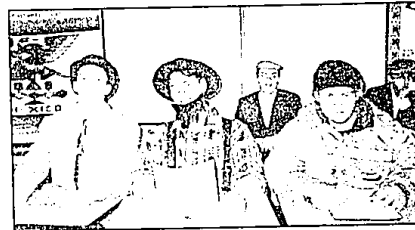
But it could at least help young people have a better understanding and appreciation of that time.

"If you did extensive research you'd get more of a feel for what people went through," Kansman said. "Here, they get a little bit of the feel, but it's in no way the (same) feel of leaving their home existence behind and wondering if you were going to be accepted into this country. That had to be an unbelievable sacrifice for people."

Lossia-Acho developed the immigration simulation lesson about three years ago.

"It's a hands-on experience that I feel is more beneficial than simply showing them a movie or reading something out of a book," she explained. "To have them experience a fraction of what was experienced in Ellis Island, we feel, is a better way" to teach the subject.

Concurring was senior Sarah



Going through customs: Dressed up in early 1900s attire, Farmington High School sophomores Mark Wilson (left), Paul Hofman and Joe Archambeau get into their roles as immigrants at fictitious Falcon Island.

Dickey, a student aide in Lossia-Acho's class who went through the immigration simulation in 1996-97.

"It just makes you realize," said Dickey, also performing the role of customs official. "It's bet-

ter than reading about it in a book."

Shane Csokas, a junior who portrayed a Polish immigrant, called the class "pretty interesting. I learned quite a bit."

Interview:
Falcon
Island
customs
official
Sara Van-
Buren
(left) asks
questions
to an
unidenti-
fied
"immigrant."



way fully duplicate Ellis Island.

Raczkowski from page A1

shop. All it took was a telephone call. Raczkowski emphasized that he wouldn't change that approach if he is re-elected to senior status and becomes House floor leader.

Committee service

The freshman representative also didn't shy away from committee work during his first two years. He contributed to four of them: public utilities, public health, labor and occupational safety, urban and economic development.

But, Raczkowski noted, if his goal of becoming floor leader is realized, he'd only seek out one committee for the next term: the oversight and ethics committee.

Raczkowski actually thinks the additional responsibility of being floor leader would be a boon for Farmington and Farmington Hills.

"The floor leader is the No. 2 man in the House," he said. "And that position brings a tremendous amount of leadership and potential for us to get our fair share back ... It's time for us to take back the reins of leadership. We're the No. 1 donor county and Farmington Hills is the seventh-largest city in Michigan and what are we getting back for it?"

His penchant for honorable, hard work is something he credits his Polish roots, parents Bogdan and Sonia Raczkowski for, not to mention his military background.

Meanwhile, as for calling himself a "bleeding heart conservative," rather than a social or

financial conservative, he described it as being "concerned about traditional values ... the environment, the economy," Raczkowski said. "But at the same time, he's compassionate to human needs, and listens, and finds a way of solving problems."

If Raczkowski is re-elected, there are enough problems in the district and entire state to keep busy trying to solve. Among them is the crumbling of roads. Raczkowski isn't so sure that dropping truck weight limits from 164,000 (the nation's highest) to the standard 80,000 pounds would be the answer.

"If you have one truck carrying 100,000 pounds, that would do the same amount of damage as two trucks carrying 50,000 pounds," he said. "We're an industrialized state and our traffic is so congested that it's hard to say if lowering the truck weights would do it. What would do it is building stronger roads."

Road repair ideas

That could be accomplished by following the lead of other states (New York, Ohio, Iowa) and use crushed fly ash, which forms a stronger bond when mixed with concrete. Despite more of a front-end investment, perhaps 20 to 40 percent more, Raczkowski emphasized that cost for maintenance and upkeep "drops tremendously below levels."

It also would be easier for a second-term representative to help change the road funding split, which is now 39.1 percent for state and counties, each, and 21.8 percent for municipalities.

Raczkowski also sees room for improvement in public schools, if the number of districts are reduced from 512 to 400, thus cutting into top-heavy bureaucracy and directing those dollars toward the classroom.

In Farmington and Farmington Hills alone, he listed three school districts, Farmington, Walled Lake and Clarenceville, which is only 2.2 square miles.

Maintaining an open form of government is strongly supported by the incumbent. Penalties for public officials who violate the Michigan Open Meetings Act should be taken "to the roof," as high as \$10,000, with governmental bodies forced to disclose who and how much is paid out in lawsuit settlements, except for cases involving individual medical files or juveniles.

"Outside of that, there should be no excuse for closed government. That's why we have a 100 percent voting record (in favor of every FOIA bill that's come in front of the House of Representatives.)"

Abortion is yet another topic on which Raczkowski takes an unyielding position.

He'd favor a proposal to prohibit abortions as a health benefit for public employees and oppose the proposed repealing of a state ban on Medicaid-paid abortions.

Mine's not a religious view, it's a constitutional view," Raczkowski said. "Until someone can prove scientifically where life begins, we must give it the benefit of the doubt, that life begins at conception."

"Call for Action" on WXYZ-TV Channel 7.

Gagnon gives advice on home appliances during his weekly call-in show on WJR-Radio. He is a consumer advocate who successfully lobbied the state to outlaw plastic and vinyl-covered clothes dryer vents. Over the years, Gagnon learned of the dishonest tricks of some in the service repair industry. He is still fighting for legislation to protect consumers.

Those interested in attending may call Andrew Raczkowski's office at 1-800-864-2108.

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Appliance Doctor makes call on Monday

Radio talk show personality Joseph Gagnon, the Appliance Doctor, will speak at the first-ever Avoiding Senior Scams Seminar 10 a.m. to noon Monday, Oct. 19, at the Costick Activities Center in Farmington Hills.

State Rep. Andrew Raczkowski is sponsoring the free seminar. Along with remarks by the 37th District lawmaker, a representative from the state Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division will discuss possible recourse against scam artists and protections under Michigan law. Also scheduled to speak will be Evelyn Stern, day captain for