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Clarenceville students get 'hands on' history lessons

By Joni Hubred
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After Sept. 11, many schools canceled field trips, and Clarenceville Middle School 8th grade teacher David Lengel thought this year's trip to Washington, D.C. might be... well, a wash.

But the 10th annual trip went off without a hitch, with students leaving on buses at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 30 and returning, a little more tired and a great deal more educated, early the next Saturday, May 4.

"The tie-in is U.S. history," Lengel said of the trip, which included building tours and an appointment with Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI), "but it's something done totally extra-curricular."

About 60 percent of the 8th grade class went along for the ride. That's the low end of the average over 10 years.

"After Sept. 11, my peg number was if we took 80, I was going to be happy. The numbers are really satisfying," Lengel said. "The majority of students were fun and light-hearted and easy to work with. That made it a fun trip."

The country's heightened state of alert following last year's terrorist attacks didn't seem to affect the trip much. Kids did have to wait in a long line at the White House, but only because they were switching to a new security system.

"That's where we really got sunburned," said Maggie Siecinski. Still, she thought Washington was a really beautiful city.

Her favorite stops on the tour? "The Iwo Jima memorial was really huge. I thought Arlington (National Cemetery) was really cool because it's peaceful there."

She and Jennifer Oldani were among four students who helped lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Brent Robbins was also very affected by the visit to Arlington, where row after row of white crosses mark the graves of American soldiers. "It showed how many people died in the wars," he said.

Marcin Sulek was perhaps *most directly affected by the* events of Sept. 11. His parents were concerned about his safety and requested that he not tour the White House. Lengel wasn't aware of that until Sulek told him he couldn't go inside the day of the tour.

"I don't think I've ever seen such a responsible young man as far as what his parents wished," Lengel said. "He could have just not told me and went in."

Sulek said he understood his parents' concerns. His favorite part of the tour was the Lincoln Memorial. "From there you could see a nice view."

The kids also toured Baltimore, Maryland's Inner Harbor and the National Aquarium. "I liked Baltimore because you got to be with your friends and have fun, and we got to see the dolphin show," said Jon Ciaramitaro.

Evan Meili pronounced the memorial to former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt "cool" because of its many waterfalls. Oldani also enjoyed climbing over the Einstein Memorial, which was more interactive. Lengel said next year, he'd like to add a visit to a park where a statue called "Awakenings" gives kids a similar opportunity.

The students say they learned a lot from their visit. "I got a lot more history and learning than I thought I would," Meili said. "It wasn't forced on you."

"We got to actually see what everything was," Robbins added.

Their visit with Sen. Levin was also a learning experience.

"He talked about how he became a senator," Robbins said.

"His wife talked him into it," Meili interjected.

They learned how he helps the President, that he has no time to be bored in his job, and that he served on a city council before becoming a senator.

"They were pretty attentive," Lengel said.

Capitol Ideas: *Sen. Carl Levin addresses members of David Lengel's eighth grade class at Clarenceville Middle School in Washington, D.C.*

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