

A SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL EXCHANGE KENTUCKY AND BURGUNDY

When my friend, Jacque VanHouten, told me about a school in Burgundy seeking a partnership with a school in Kentucky some 10 years ago, I wondered if I were ready. As a teacher who wanted to further challenge my students, I had always wanted to involve them in an exchange with a homestay, but didn't know how to begin or if I could trust a student travel company to set one in motion. How did they select the other school and the families? Could I count on the other team to hold up their end of the program? But five exchanges later, I can say we have found a great match with the *Lycée Charles DeGaulle* in Dijon.

The high school in France is located on the north side of Dijon, a city considerably larger than our little town of Alexandria, Kentucky. Happily we are, however, situated in the Greater Cincinnati area and can benefit from the many professional sport venues and wonderful area museums. Of my school's 400 students, 84 study French. The *lycée* in France is a European high school of 800 which focuses on language learning and offers classes in the language of choice. For example, students in *première* attend *Science* and *Histoire/Géo* classes in English. Therefore, by then, in their sixth year of English, they are very capable in their second language and are becoming quite adept in their third language of Spanish, German, Russian, or Arabic as well. My students were only in their second or third year of French and had been unfamiliar with exchanges in the beginning. You can imagine the contrast between us. But still, we have made it work.

The teachers from Charles DeGaulle are always led by an energetic, technically savvy head teacher, Gérard Déclas. He has a group of 40 to 45 students accompanied by five teachers whose curriculum calls for such an exchange. The idea of hosting a group that size required my seeking other partners. We have twice shared the exchange with high schools in Louisville, Kentucky, a city which provides the richness of options that Cincinnati does for us in Northern Kentucky. This year, our partners in Louisville were Atherton High School and Dupont Manual High School. In Northern Kentucky, my school, Bishop Brossart High School, was joined by Villa Madonna Academy. It took a little bit of organizational effort, but partners were matched up by me and Cathy Green in Louisville. Everyone met during a videoconference arranged in January that connected Louisville, Dijon, and us together for the introductions and presentations that allowed all 80 partners



and their teachers to meet "face to face." They loved it and the tension and excitement were electric.

I spent every spare moment during the winter months and a few "snow days" scheduling the many visits the group would make when they would arrive to spend two weeks with us in April. Through e-mails, Cathy and I were able to coordinate the program and assure a good balance of activities between Louisville and Northern Kentucky. We even planned a joint visit of the Governor's Mansion, our state Capitol building in Frankfort, and the Woodford Reserve Kentucky Bourbon Distillery in Lexington to give all 80 students a chance to meet together at least once during their stay in Kentucky. All those bus trips were expensive, and we needed to ask for a few donations. So, the Brossart students bagged groceries for tips, and I contacted the Alexandria Business Community, the Northern Kentucky Rotary, and the French-American Chamber of Commerce in Cincinnati for donations. They all obliged. Finally, came the Kentucky AATF Chapter and the National AATF that matched the Kentucky gift with a Small Grant Award. Without all of these sources of funding, the bus trips, the exchange T-shirts and yes, even the Kentucky Fried Chicken we served at the farewell dinner would not have been possible.

The big day finally arrived. On April 2, half the group from Dijon with two teachers flew to Louisville and the other half with three teachers to Northern Kentucky. After a few flight delays, the groups each landed, and the students finally met in person. Students attended class in Northern Kentucky the following day, while the Louisville group was still enjoying its spring break. This allowed the Louisville group to come north to visit the Newport Aquarium, the World Peace Bell, and the National Underground Museum and Freedom Center that week in a program that closely resembled that of the Northern Kentucky schools. Other activi-

ties in Northern Kentucky included attending a performance of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Shakespeare Festival in Cincinnati, a visit to the Contemporary Arts Center, the Taft Museum, the Cincinnati Museum Center and Omnimax theater, a Cincinnati Reds baseball game, and an evening of cosmic bowling! On one of the weekends, Brossart's senior class play, *The Pajama Game*, was an option as was the opening weekend of Paramount King's Island amusement park north of Cincinnati. The weather cooperated by giving us daytime temperatures in the 80's.

By April 16 and, after sandwiching in a great many shopping trips along the way in order to take advantage of the favorable exchange rate of the euro to the dollar, our partners headed to the airport with their host families with much more packed in those suitcases than before. Tears were shed and reminders made that in six weeks we would be repeating the experience in France. That morning an article and a photo of a young French girl from Dijon swinging a baseball bat for the first time in her life in a Physical Education class appeared in the *Kentucky Enquirer*. Yes, we made an impression. Thanks to the AATF for helping to make dreams like this a reality for all of us.

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