



Third-graders tune in to visit with Ukrainian friends

Armstrong Elementary third-graders tuned in live to the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine, for a teleconferencing cultural exchange with students halfway around the world. The teleconference ran from 8-8:45 a.m. Thursday (5 p.m. Kyiv time).

The students shared moments of laughter, exchanged questions and answers about favorite sports, foods, hockey players, and even sang "Jingle Bells" together using teleconferencing technology. The Ukrainian students had not only learned "Jingle Bells" in English in preparation for the teleconference, but they also performed several short skits in their native language, including "Pinocchio."

The students in Stephanie Noack's class have been studying other cultures, and they will be able to learn what day-to-day life is like for their new Ukrainian friends. The digital exchange was made possible by Patricia Riatti, whose son, Peer, is in Noack's class.

The Ukrainian connection goes back to Peer's hockey coach, Oleg Tsirkounov, who returned to the Ukraine in 2006. Peer and his older brother Gray, an eighth-grader at HPMS, were such hockey fanatics and so loyal to their coach that they traveled with their family to the Ukraine for Tsirkounov's hockey camp. They became fast friends with others at the camp, and soon their mother was shipping donated hockey equipment to the Ukrainian youth hockey players.

Riatti's efforts grew into a foundation called the World Sports Consul, whose mission is to promote American spirit abroad and strengthen civil society through sports and education. Here is a link to the organization's website: <http://www.worldsportsconsul.org/>

The scope of the work expanded to help orphaned children. More than 85,000 children are socially and/or biologically orphaned in Ukraine, a phenomenon that has tragic social implications, Riatti said.

"World Sports Consul believes that we can give the children hope for a strong future through sports and education programs," she said. "In addition to hockey, we are also implementing soccer and tennis programs beginning this summer. I met with the Mayor of Warsaw, Poland and the President of Ukraine's wife regarding World Sports Consul. I received a letter from the First Lady of Ukraine, Kateryna Yushchenko, which said her foundation, Ukraine 3000, would be pleased to work with World Sports Consul. I am so excited about that possibility. I am busy writing grants and looking for funding to grow all of these programs."

One such program is called Vision on Ice, a learn-to-skate program for orphans made possible by the World Sports Consul and an embassy grant. A short video showing the Vision on Ice program in action is posted at:

http://www.worldsportsconsul.org/gallery_video_visions_on_ice.html.

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