

Israeli visitors experience Bethany life

Barbara Anderson
Staff Writer

In spite of problems caused by Hurricane Sandy, nine Bethany High School students, 10 Israeli student visitors plus a teacher/escort for each group, left Oklahoma Nov. 1 and made stops in Washington, D.C., and New York City on their way to Israel.

The visitors arrived in Oklahoma City on Oct. 25. They and their Bethany hosts are on their way for the adventure of a lifetime — three days in D.C., four days in New York and, for the Bethany students, two weeks in Israel. Teacher Michelle Ayers spearheaded the trip from the Bethany end.

BHS Principal Dr. Don Wentroth said the Israeli students, at first, were disappointed that they were to come to Oklahoma instead of going to some of the popular American tourist places they had heard of. However, when they were ready to leave Oklahoma, they told him they would rather stay in Bethany than go to New York.

The visitors followed

their host students' schedule but, in addition, were able to see the area's attractions, including the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building Bombing Memorial and Museum.

They were immersed in

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Oklahoma/American culture, including Halloween — a new experience for them. They did a little trick-or-treating, Wentroth said, and enjoyed other holiday fun. Imbar said the highlight of the day was carving pumpkins.

Sophie Khatskevich said there are similarities between the two cultures. "We also hang out with friends, go to shopping centers and movies, too." There are differences, however, in schools. Schedules are different. Among those differences is the requirement of science. The visitors say they are "all about math and science" in their school. The math Oklahoma students study is two years

behind theirs, they said. There are no sports teams except those formed for after-school participation. Some of the visitors speak several languages, including Russian. Their high school is a magnet school with students from all over the country; it is part boarding school and part day school. Ilya Melik-Adamov said their school is more like college with more course choices.

The Israeli teens said they are more independent at home than their Bethany friends are. "Here, people are more protective. At home, they don't 'bug' us," Ilya said. Students do not have cars but, instead, rely on public transportation. Israeli teacher Nati Fass expressed surprise that many of the people he has met have not traveled to New York or Boston or to foreign countries. The Israeli students explained that it part of their culture to want to go and see others, to travel to many places. Wentroth explained that travel for Israeli people it is a short distance to other countries but in the U.S. that is not so.

Wentroth said there was lots of emotion and lots of tears on both sides as visiting students prepared to leave Bethany and host families. Both groups of students said the experience has been a very good and exciting one. They said they have made good friends, friends for life, and they

expect to stay in touch.

The Israeli student visitors are Noa Chen, Michal Yakar, Tal Schwartz, Ilya Melik-Adamov, Imbar Sheris, Nizan Harel, Yahli Ranen, Linoy Ston, Omer Kalitzky and Sophie Khatskevich. Their BHS hosts and, now, traveling companions, are Leah

Fields, Katie Hall, Mikala Garlett, Hayley Graft, Kayden McKenzie, Brennan Ivy, Kaylee Powell, Jackson Sharp and Rachel Petillo.

The America-Israel Friendship League sponsored the traveling groups in their exchange of Youth Ambassadors program.



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Ten Israeli students visited Bethany High School for a week, and will now accompany Bethany students on a tour of their country. Shown are Noa Chen, Michal Yakar, Tal Schwartz, Ilya Melik-Adamov, Imbar Sheris, Nizan Harel, Yahli Ranen, Linoy Ston, Omer Kalitzky, Sophie Khatskevich, their teacher Nati Fass and Bethany High School Principal Dr. Don Wentroth.