

## Bosnian visitors learn how U.S. strives for tolerance

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During a Friday visit to Howard High School of Technology in Wilmington, Arijana Mulabecirovic joked that sometimes even she has problems spelling her name.

But as much as her name looks different to Howard students, things have looked different to her, too, since she came to Delaware with a group of fellow Bosnian students and teachers.

"Everything is huge here. You have such good roads compared with our area," said Mulabecirovic, an English teacher in Tuzla. "It's very clean here. I think a lot of people are very polite."

"And," she added, "I like that you respect others who are different. I like here that you value every single person and give them human rights."

A lack of respect for others who are different threw Bosnia into war in the early 1990s, as Muslim Slavs, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats waged civil war and "ethnic cleansing" following the breakup of Yugoslavia.

For eight years, the U.S. State Department has brought groups, mostly high school students, from Bosnia for a monthlong visit to the United States. The 4-H program at the University of Delaware has bid successfully for the right to host the group the past two years.

The Bosnians stay with families who are 4-H members, and they travel to points of interest.

Friday's stop at Howard High, which is recognized as a leader in incorporating classroom activities with community service, provided an opportunity for the Bosnians to pick up some tips to take back home.

The 18 visitors are divided into three groups of five students and a teacher, with each group hailing from a different Bosnian town. Each of those towns is populated primarily by one of the three major ethnic communities -- Tuzla (Muslim Slavs), Livno (Catholic Croats) and Banja Luka (Orthodox Serbs).

"One of the goals of the project is to get these ethnic groups together, because they don't do it naturally in their own country for the most part," said Mark Manno, Delaware's 4-H educator, who spearheaded bringing the group to Delaware and received an \$85,000 grant to help fund it.

"It was an extremely selective process for these kids to be selected and come here," he said of the Bosnians. "They're here to learn, basically, democracy, leadership and citizenship, as well as learning to live together in a civil society."

"We are learning here small steps, like community cleaning up, like a tree planting, after-school programs,"

Mulabecirovic said. "This could be a great opportunity to learn and have some kind of support. It's good to have some kind of backup, some kind of organization like a 4-H. I cannot do it by myself."

Markeida Miles, 17, a junior at Howard High who helped show some of the Bosnian students around her school, said she was surprised by how much they are like American teenagers in things like dress and musical tastes.

"They had so much in common with us," she said. "This is the first time I've met someone from a different country. I thought they'd do something totally different from what American kids do."

Miles said she also sees some comparisons between the two countries in struggling with acceptance of people who are different.

"We still have racism today," she said of the United States. "It might be a little bit, but there is some today. I see [Bosnians] progressing just as much as we have. I think we're learning something from each other. There should be peace among the ethnic groups."

The Bosnians, who arrived here April 14, spent the first half of their visit with New Castle County 4-H members, and they're getting ready to head for Kent and Sussex counties to spend the second half with families there. They flew into Washington, D.C., from abroad, so they toured that city. They also have visited Philadelphia and Legislative Hall in Dover, and they will visit New York City before heading home May 12.

Manno, who has visited Bosnia three times recently, is gearing up to send five students from Delaware over there this fall. "It's never been done before," he said. "Before this, it was considered too dangerous to go over there. There're U.N. troops all over the country."

The visiting Bosnians all speak English. Student Milana Tarlac, 17, said they begin learning the language in primary school, and they have to take it in high school, along with another foreign language. But they have also picked up misconceptions, she said.

"There are stereotypes about Americans: They are bad neighbors, they're not polite," Tarlac said. "When I came over, everybody said, 'Hello, how are you?' I was surprised."

"I know most people think we don't get along," she said of her own country, "but that's not the case. Maybe older generations don't get along well and have a lot of prejudice. But the younger people don't care about that anymore. They maybe had some bad experience about war. There are 15 of us [students] and we're all getting along well."

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