



Benvenuto a Hampshire County

HHS Italian Exchange welcomes students

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Hampshire High School recently said "ciao" to incoming students from Liceo Linguistico Internazionale Grazia Deledda, a semi-private linguistic academy in Genoa, Italy, who came to visit Hampshire County for the Italian Exchange Program.

Among other things, students attended classes, cooked meals together, traveled to Washington D.C. and other areas, went bowling, visited an old time music cabin and lived with their Hampshire County cohorts for 10 days.

Most notable between the Americans and Italians was the variance in cultures both from rural Hampshire County to larger Genoa as well as other cultural differences.

"When you come to America, this isn't my first time in the United States, but it is a completely different place," said Deledda exchange student Iaria Giabbani. "When you come as a tourist, you act like a tourist. While, if you're here living [like on an exchange], you act like one of you and you see all of the small things that you do differently and it makes you think."

Hampshire High School student Bradley Bommarito also made note of the differences between the two nations. "Life in Genoa, Italy, is more fast-paced and complex than it is in Hampshire County and high school in Italy lasts for five years," he said. "Almost everyone in Genoa takes public transportation everywhere. When I stayed there, I had to take both the train and the bus to get to school every morning. It was a long but beautiful commute, with great views of the coast."

HHS German teacher and Italian Exchange Program coordinator Rita Landtrachtinger-Hott said, "The program began because of the need to show students, firsthand, the history and culture of Europe. You can't teach culture, only about it."

The HHS Italian Exchange Program was created in 1999, and it has allowed countless HHS students to travel abroad since then. Hott started searching for a school in Europe to form an exchange partnership with in 1998.

After her offers were rejected by several high schools in Germany, Hott decided to broaden the scope of her search. She contacted Istituto Superiore D'Adda (a high school in Varallo Sesia, Italy) and received very welcoming feedback.

The exact definition of the HHS Italian Exchange Program is as complex as its origin. The program is an academic class, a cultural experience, and an introduction to a foreign language; most of all, it is an opportunity to travel abroad, immerse oneself into a new culture, and to broaden one's horizons.

The exact itinerary and theme of the program changes each year. In 2014, locations in both Italy and Germany were visited, and an emphasis was placed on historical events from World War II and the Holocaust. Last year, many major Italian cities were visited, and the



▲ Deledda students from Genoa, Italy, and their hosts from Hampshire High. Below left: Italian students prepare a spinach casserole for Hampshire students during one of their days in the county. The students also shared pasta with HHS students as well. Below right: HHS and Deledda students gathered together to bowl in Romney the day before the Italian students departed home for Genoa.



focus was on Italian culture and the Renaissance. Since the initial trip, the Italian Exchange Program has been hosted by five schools in Italy and Liceo Linguistico Internazionale Grazia

Deledda is the current host.

Deledda student Matilde Borella agreed that the exchange program provides a deep cultural experience that helps the students grow over-

and Hampshire students are already preparing for their next trip to Italy. □

all. "You learn to be independent and how to live in a house with another culture eating different foods and doing different activities," she said. "It's such an experience that allows you to grow a lot. You get used to adapting to these changes easily."

"You really learn a lot about different cultures and their lifestyle is so different from ours," said HHS student Alissa Ward. "It's amazing to experience that 1st hand."

Ward shared that she appreciates Hampshire having an Italian Exchange program so that students can participate in a study abroad program. "Once you get on the plane, everything is new. [I'm thankful for being able to] Just be open to new things," concluded Ward.

Despite being in a completely new culture and not fully speaking the language, local students were able to navigate through Italy with the help of their fellow exchange cohorts who acted as guides. For example, Hampshire student Isaac Moreland recalls having his Italian friends help him order ice cream.

Ice cream wasn't the most memorable thing for Moreland, however. "It was such an amazing trip. I was able to see the Rome coliseum and the Milan cathedral. I was also in the Milan shopping center, which is the shopping capital of Italy. I even went to a movie theatre to see the Hunger Games," he said.

HHS Italian exchange has taken 18 different groups of students to Italy and other parts of Europe and next year's group will be the 19th group to participate in the exchange since its inception. Some of the places visited in Italy were: Turin, Cuneo, Alba, Genoa, Portofino, Santa Margherita, Florence, and Rome.

Summarizing her thoughts about the program, Hott said, "The most rewarding aspect of being involved with the HHS Italian Exchange Program is to be able to allow many students to

travel abroad and experience foreign countries firsthand. The program truly shines light on both life here and in Europe, and it has really opened up many students to travel, studying abroad, and new experiences."

Bommarito shares this sentiment and explained "The Italian Exchange Program forced me to become more independent and personally responsible. It has also allowed me to acquire a more global and informed perspective about the modern world. Ever since I traveled to Italy, I have become a more mature individual. I strive to think of life in terms of how vast and unique it really is."

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