New Orleans

2016

Thirty LS Drama and Music Booster students with eight chaperones headed to New Orleans for spring break March 22 through the 26th. The motor coach bus arrived at Sully at 2 pm and students were loaded and hit the road by 2:30 for the 17-hour bus ride.

The following morning (Wednesday), the group arrived at the famous Jackson Square in New Orleans and were given a couple of hours on their own to stretch their legs and to take in the many shops and restaurants.

At the Jackson Square, the group met their Brightspark tour guide, Kyle. “He was really good and led us to the right places in New Orleans,” said Shaleah Van Wyk. The Jackson Square is a historic park located in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana and was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1960. In 2012 the American Planning Association designated Jackson Square as a one of America’s Great Public Spaces.

In the afternoon of day one, the group headed to the Old US Mint. Built in 1835, the Old U.S. Mint is the only building in America to have served as a United States and Confederate Mint. President Andrew Jackson advocated the Mint’s establishment in order to help finance development of the nation’s western frontier. There were mixed reactions from the students about the historical U.S. Mint. For example,  Shaleah Van Wyk said she didn’t enjoy this particular site because, “There was not a structured tour so I didn't really know what anything was or why it was in a place where money should have and once was,” said Van Wyk. After the self-guided tour, the group checked into Drury Inn & Suites to freshen up before heading to Mulate's Cajun Restaurant.

Mulate’s is known as the original Cajun restaurant, famous for preserving and celebrating the food, music and culture found in the small towns and along the bayous of south Louisiana. That evening after dinner, Mulate's featured live Cajun music and dancing. Students were not afraid to step out on the dance floor and swing their partner.

After dinner, the group took a walk after dark on a French Quarter Ghost Tour through the eerie streets of historic New Orleans. We heard stories of the ghosts who “haunt” the Quarter today. The French Quarter, also known as Vieux Carré, is the oldest and most famous neighborhood in the city of New Orleans. When New Orleans (La Nouvelle Orléans in French) was founded in 1718 by Jean-Baptiste LeMoyne de Bienville, the city was originally centered on the French Quarter, or the Vieux Carré ("Old Square" in French) as it was known then. While the area is still referred to as the Vieux Carré by some, it is commonly known as the French Quarter today, or simply "The Quarter." The district as a whole is a National Historic Landmark, and contains numerous individual historic buildings. “What we saw was really interesting and it helped me get a good feeling about the New Orleans Culture,” said Carson Dunsbergen.

What many people wanted to know on the visit was how 2005’s Hurricane Katrina affected the area, which they found out - relatively lightly, as compared to other areas of the city and the region as a whole.

On Thursday, the group departed the hotel in the rain and headed back to the French Quarter for additional sightseeing. Several jazz band students were interested in performing on the streets, so they prepared two jazz numbers to play around Jackson Square. Those performers included band director Ryan McNulty and Dillon Van Manen on trumpet, Garret Cross and Zach Van Wardhuizen on saxophone, and Caleb Jansen on drums.

At noon, the group enjoyed a meal at Golden Feather Mardi Gras Indian Restaurant and Museum. After lunch, they had the opportunity to meet and hear a chief on the rich history of a New Orleans mysterious gem. Not only did they hear about the traditions, students had the opportunity to learn some of the music of the Mardi Gras Indians.Drummer Caleb Jansen assisted the chief on a traditional song at the restaurant/gallery. The Chief also explained the history of the mask with the tribes, how it takes a year to hand-sew the beads and feathers, the mask is worn only once and then either burned or sold for up to $50,000.

In the afternoon, a Cajun style swamp tour was enjoyed by all on a flat boat through the heart of the swamplands. Viewed were the moss-draped cypress trees, plant life and the creatures that make the swamps their home. Students enjoyed seeing several alligators and their fondness for marshmallows, which were tossed out by the tour guide throughout.

Dinner that evening was enjoyed at Hard Rock Café near Bourbon Street. After dinner, the group strolled down Bourbon Street to Preservation Hall for a concert. Preservation Hall was established in 1961 to preserve and protect one of America’s truest art forms – traditional New Orleans Jazz. The nightly concerts feature some of New Orleans finest performers, showcasing a musical legacy dating back to the origins of jazz itself Unfortunately, the performance is first come first serve and the group did not make the 8 pm showing because of the line. After waiting another hour, the majority of the group headed back to the hotel while a few remained behind to wait out the line. Marissa Vos, one of the several students who went back to the hotel early commented she heard the concert was good but it was disappointing to wait for so long in line for Preservation Hall. Lucas Jones, who decided to stay said he had fun enjoying the music as he is in the beginning the stages of becoming a jazz drummer for next year.

On Friday morning, the group headed to the National World War II Museum and Theater, which is a living history tribute to the veterans of World War II in a military archive. Exhibits and interactive experiences painted the picture of a nation mobilized for war; those who answered the call of service and those who supported our fighting forces by producing planes, ships, tanks and other vital machinery in unprecedented numbers. The stories are from an America at war: on land, in the air and at sea, told in a way that engaged the senses, the mind and the heart. Students enjoyed the 4D Film “Beyond All Boundaries” narrated by actor and producer Tom Hanks. Jackson Hardin claimed, “This is what I was looking forward to the most. This is what I came for.” Carson Dunsbergen would have liked to have more time in the World War II museum “because it was really cool.”

After the WW II Museum experience, the group headed to Blaine Kern's Mardi Gras World for a tour in their large facility.  The tour guide told the group how the Mardi Gras floats were created.  Each float could cost tens of thousands of dollars to create and that doesn’t include the money spent on items such as beads that the participants throw from the floats during the parade.  They work all year to create these floats and once Mardi Gras is over they begin to think about ideas for the next year.  Some of the designs included football players, characters like Spongebob, and more.

There were a couple of hours before dinner and the group headed to either Decatur Street or back to the Jackson Square. Several of the LS participants went to the French Market, which is one of the nation's oldest continually run public markets. Jackson Hardin and Isaac Collins were able to try alligator on a stick – which was actually a gator sausage. “It was more like a spicy sausage,” said Hardin. Other students and adults went to visit Congo Square in Louis Armstrong Park (where many of the musical aspects of New Orleans Jazz originated), which is the historic center of the African culture in New Orleans.

For dinner, students and chaperones enjoyed dinner and entertainment by the DUKES of Dixieland jazz band on the Steamboat Natchez. The Natchez is the last authentic steamboat on the Mississippi River and dinner consisted of a diverse Southern buffet. After the steamboat river cruise, the LS group boarded the motorcoach and arrived back in Sully on Saturday afternoon. Ricky Farris said that overall she thought the trip was fun because she got to see a different city. “The amount of time we got to look around the city on our own, it gave me the "tourist" feeling and I didn't feel rushed at all.” Jones finished by saying that he is thankful for the experience of New Orleans.

