

**‘CITY MEETS COUNTRY AT RESOURCE LEARNING CAMP’**

*New York City urban ambassadors visit friends at Montana’s Historic Raven Resource Learning Center*

Libby, MT. No cell phones, TV, or radios for a week. Classroom learning every morning. Stick picking, chores, bus rides (with no a/c), visiting logging jobs, mines, farms, ranches, and museums. Late nights, early mornings. Not what most middle school students would dream of during their summer break. Unless they are at Provider Pals Summer Camp that is. In this case, the students actually apply and go through an intense selection process to receive the ‘Montana Provider Pals Scholarship.’ On Tuesday, July 8, 2008, the eight selected urban ambassadors of the Provider Pals program flew from New York City to Glacier Park International Airport. Eight rural ambassadors from Libby, Eureka, and Plains, Montana drove 30 miles outside of Libby, MT to meet the NYC students at Historic Raven Ranger Station, Provider Pals Natural Resource Learning Center summer camp site.

The week of cultural exchange, part of what the Wall Street Journal has called ‘one of the most exciting education initiatives in years,’ is the culmination of months of communication between the New York students, natural resource providers adopted through the Provider Pals program last fall, and rural students from Northwest Montana.

The students spent the week exploring the professions and culture of this small logging and mining community. Each day at the camp starts with classroom instruction centered upon natural resource education followed by a half-day field trip where the students get to see resource management up close and personal. Activities that the student will engage include trips to local forestry operations (TBC Logging), sawmills, the Libby Dam, Revett’s Troy Mine, and conservation award winning Beebe polled Hereford ranch. The students also enjoy gold panning (NW MT Gold Prospectors), wilderness hiking, swimming, archery (Libby Archery Club), leather making and horseback riding.

While engaging in these activities, the students bond to the point where they did not want to leave each other at the end of the week. Laughter, tears, and promises to stay in touch filled the air at Camp Raven yesterday afternoon when it was time to leave. It was truly a magical week for everyone – the bonding was immediate and continuous. Even the tired counselors were sad to see the campers head home! Local parents waited patiently, but the bus driver was getting anxious. He understood that the NYC students did not want to leave their new friends, but also knew that the plane wouldn’t wait! He and the staff had to coax the students away from each other and load the NYC bound campers on the bus to Kalispell.

Libby, Montana, based Provider Pals’ is an urban/rural cultural exchange program with a mission of building a bridge of understanding and respect between rural resource based cultures and our nation’s youth. The 501c(3) non-profit group is privately funded.

“There is no way we could teach in a classroom setting what these students learned in their week at this camp,” said Bronwyn Ryan, teacher for the Center School and one of two teachers who traveled with the New York students. “Both the students and teachers walk away armed with information and a new respect and perception of both the environment and the people who manage it,” she said. Rebecca Montville, the second New York teacher added, “We are so grateful to the Pacific Forest Foundation for sponsoring our year of involvement in Provider Pals. It is like nothing we have ever seen or experienced – without this avenue we would be incredibly misinformed about our natural resources.”

“The Pacific Forest Foundation represents a 100 year commitment to assisting in telling the story of sustainable forestry and sharing with the public the human face of our culture,” said John Smith, Pacific Forest Foundation Chairman of Victoria British Columbia. “We have gotten to know the teachers and students of the Center School and are pleased to support their involvement through our partnership with Provider Pals,” he said.

Bruce Vincent, executive director of Provider Pals, said “This marks the sixth year of the summer exchange with the Center School and what takes place is truly remarkable considering the fact that most urban students never get to meet the person that provides the raw products necessary for life.” “None of this would be possible if it weren’t for the support of groups like the Pacific Logging Foundation, Revett Minerals, and Caterpillar” said Kim Lakko, Provider Pals summer camp coordinator. Revett Minerals sponsored the local students’ participation at Camp Raven. The program recently announced a \$250,000 donation from the CAT Foundation for building the second phase of their on-line interactive educational gaming site ‘Provider World.’ Check it out at [www.providerpals.com/pworld](http://www.providerpals.com/pworld).

**For more information on Provider Pals, call 406-293-8822 or visit them online at [www.providerpals.com](http://www.providerpals.com).**