

Education

Students are provided with rural lessons

A farmer, miner, fisherman and firefighter talk to students about their Montana lifestyles.

By Angela Hokanson

Students at Roosevelt Middle School on Wednesday heard about a far-off land where the sky isn't crowded with tall buildings, next-door neighbors can live miles apart and cows outnumber people.

Jill Lorang, a farmer, told middle school students at Roosevelt about her life in Montana, where she and her husband grow wheat and barley and raise cows on their farm in Great Falls.

Lorang and four other "Provider Pals" — a miner, a fisherman, a wildland firefighter and a rancher — came to Glendale as part of a program that teaches urban youth about the link between the goods they consume and the people that use natural resources to produce them.

It's the second year a group of Provider Pals has discussed their rural lifestyle with Roosevelt students, said science teacher Mary Cook, who helped introduce the Provider Pals program at the school.

The cross-cultural learning does not flow just one-way during the visits, said Chas Vincent, program coordinator with Provider Pals, a nonprofit organization based in Libby, Mont.

On this trip to the Los Angeles area, Vincent is taking the rural visitors to Disneyland to give them a taste of urban entertainment.

"It's a real shock for me to come to California," Lorang told a group of seventh-graders at Roosevelt.

The morning traffic was stunning, Lorang said, and quite a change from the four miles of open road that would take her to her nearest neighbor's house back in Great Falls.

Lorang showed John Carroll's seventh-grade science class photos of her farm and the equipment her family uses to maintain it.

Students asked Lorang if she had ever shot a snake with a gun — she had — and if branding cows hurt them.

"Do you have electricity there?" asked Gevorg Aroyan, 12, after seeing a photo of Lorang's house and her adjacent barn.

Lorang also explained how wheat kernels were separated from the chaff of the wheat plant using a giant combine. Students then saw how flour made from wheat was combined with water to create pasta.

“The food that you eat in the grocery store comes from our place and other places,” Lorang said.

Down the hall, eighth-graders in Cook’s science class heard from Jason Venn, a Montana-based wildland firefighter with the Bureau of Land Management. Wildland firefighters play a key role in protecting natural resources, so they sometimes visit schools in areas that have been affected by wildfires, Vincent said.

Venn jumped into a silver, cocoon-shaped fire shelter to show students “the last line of defense” a wildland firefighter has to protect himself from the hot air of an approaching fire. Venn also passed around a military-issued “meals-ready-to-eat” to show the kids some of the cuisine that kept the firefighters going.

“I would eat it,” said Kevin Rappard, 13, as the packaged meal was passed around the room. “It smells pretty good.”

About eight Roosevelt students will continue their immersion in rural life this summer, when they take part in a weeklong summer program in Montana offered by Provider Pals, Cook said.
