

Ortner makes trip to D.C.

Written by Chris Lee

A Holyoke seventh grader recently traveled to Washington D.C. for a five-day trip. Nick Ortner, 12, was nominated by his teacher Kevin Asbury to attend the Junior National Young Leaders Conference.

Asbury recognized Ortner as a student with the scholastic merit, maturity and strength of character to represent Holyoke on the trip. Ortner said he was glad to go. "It was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me," he said.

Ortner spent June 29-July 4 in D.C. There were 13 different weeks he was able to choose from. He said there were about 250 other kids there when he was and he didn't know a single person. The conference was for fifth and sixth grade students from all over the world. There were kids from China, Ortner said.

When one thinks of D.C. they think about visiting all of the different memorials and monuments. Ortner said that was one of his favorite parts. He got to see and learn about many of the historical places around the area.

Ortner's mom, Mariane, said Nick told her the thing he disliked the most was the schedule. Everything was timed out down to the minute.

Nick stayed at the National 4-H Center where he roomed with three other people. One was from Texas, another from St. Louis, Mo. and the last was from the D.C. area.

Ortner said the first question he received when he said he was from Colorado was, "do you ski?"

Leadership workshops took up the other part of the schedule. Ortner said there were groups made up of 15 kids. They met up together with the same leader each time to learn different skills. Respect, problem solving, communication, teamwork, goal setting and character were the different areas they studied.

They also toured Harpers Ferry, the Newseum, the Washington Monument, Korean Memorial,

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Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Memorial.

Another highlight was when he saw a protest against the death penalty. It was a new and different experience for Ortner.

The final night in town, the group spent the night in the National Air and Space Museum where they watched a 4D movie.

Even though he will be too old to attend the D.C. conference again, Ortner will be able to attend a conference in Boston next year if he wants to. Since he attended the D.C. one, he will not have to go through the nomination process. When he is a senior in high school, Ortner will have the opportunity to travel to China, Japan or Europe.

“We just thought this was a wonderful opportunity for Nick to go on something like this,” Mariane said. “We knew it would lead into other things.”

Ortner was responsible for the cost of the trip. He said he had some help from his grandparents.

Ortner has flown before but never by himself. His mom said it wasn't easy to let him fly solo but everything worked out fine. She said the conference sent e-mails every day to update the family about what their child had done that day and to ensure everything was OK and safe.

When Nick arrived he said they took \$40 from him to keep until he left. He said they did this with all the students. In case they spent all of their money, they had \$40 to fly home with in the end.

Mariane said Nick had a lot of money with him and all he purchased was a book. He also picked up some postcards. “He had a lot of money from grandma and he spent \$10,” she said.

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Ortner and his mom encourage others, if given the chance, to try and attend. Nick said even if it's not with a conference, a family trip to D.C. would be a wise decision.