

FRIDAY

'Benvenuto'

County High students interact with Italian teachers online



By LEE DAVIDSON

BAY MINETTE — Some Baldwin County High School teens have become exchange students to Italy without ever leaving Barbara Marshall's classroom.

Eleven students enrolled in Mrs. Marshall's international studies class use the Internet to hold teleconferences with faculty from the Professional Institute of State known as Iris Versari, an independent school in Cesena, Italy, in the northern part of the country, near its eastern shoreline.

This is the first online cross-continental exchange for both sides. The exchange is made possible through video and audio connections run through a server in Finland that broadcasts slightly delayed correspondence from each school's computer terminal.

The institute is a high-tech vocation-

al school that specializes in teaching social services, apparel and fashion, and advertising. The average age of its students is 16 and there are about 25 students enrolled, instructor Loretta Valgiusti said during an online interview Monday morning.

Students in Mrs. Marshall's class were more concerned with what Italian students did after school than what they learned in school.

Two weeks ago, students had their first chance to chat with the Italian faculty online.

"We talked about cultural differences, mostly," said Hannah Dean, 15, a sophomore in Mrs. Marshall's class. "And we're trying to learn the language. Hopefully we'll have some Italian food one day. That'd help me learn about their culture."

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Students Virginia Stephens and Ryan Dunnam, seated from left, talk to Linda Jones, standing at left, and Bethany Sherman. Barbara Marshall's room is unique compared to other classrooms, her students said. She has sofas and tables, instead of desks and chairs.

Public access

Daphne removes barricade

City no longer considering leasing public lane to Daphne developer

By LESLEY FARREY PACEY

Staff Reporter

DAPHNE — A barricade at the entrance to a public access road to Mobile Bay was removed Thursday afternoon after residents living nearby complained, Daphne officials said.

The city, which recently considered closing McMillan Avenue in the event that it were to lease the one-lane dirt drive to Daphne developer Buddy Barland, on Tuesday received a "Dead End, Do Not Enter" sign and yellow tape out of concern that someone would drive off the end of the bluff and into the Bay, Daphne Mayor Harry Brown said.

But because residents are outraged over the possibility of losing the public access, the barricade and



LEE DAVIDSON/Pagella

Tara Kirchharr, a freshman at Baldwin County High, talks to instructor Loretta Valgiusti, an Italian educator, using a video and audio exchange accessed online.

Students talk online with others half a world away

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The exchange is part of a year-long project for Mrs. Marshall's class. They are studying social systems and the cultural patterns of Alabama. By contrasting it with Italy, Mrs. Marshall hopes her students will get a better perspective on how America and Alabama fit into a global social structure.

The two schools also are exchanging three "care packages" filled with items indicative of their culture and heritage. Mrs. Marshall's box contains a ball of cotton, books and other items representative of Alabama's history. The second parcel will contain food products unique to the South, and the final mailing will have compact discs and musical selections students enjoy.

"They have McDonald's and a lot of the same things we have here. You never know what people have on the other side of the world, so it's neat to learn about it by hearing it straight from them," Miss Dean said.

Sophomore Autherine Brown, 15, said American's financial status and home life revealed the biggest difference in cultures.

"They think we're spoiled and materialistic," she said. "We all have computers at home and access to the Internet whenever we want, and they only have the school computer, so they think we've got more than they do."

Students said they are learning a lot by interacting with Italian students online. Mrs. Marshall is using the opportunity to teach her kids some Italian, too.

"I'm learning the most, I think," Mrs. Marshall said. "Technology is truly the most impor-

a success. Language skills can't hurt, though. I'm learning more about both just by supervising this project."

Mrs. Marshall said the pictures e-mailed to her students from Italy were breath-taking: "It's just like getting a postcard. It's a picture-perfect place."

In response, she plans to e-mail pictures of the beaches of Gulf Shores.

Both parties hope for more student interaction in the future. As principal Francesco Cascone of Italy said, "It is so good to be talking to you."

Cascone does not speak much English, but he did set the scene for his listeners half a world away.

"It's getting dark here, and it is raining," he said to Mrs. Marshall's 11 a.m. class. There is a seven-hour time difference between the two countries, and the Italian teachers stayed late to accommodate Mrs. Marshall's class schedule.

"We've been invited to Italy, but that would be a little hard to do," Mrs. Marshall said, optimistic about continued interaction with the institute in future years.

Mrs. Marshall has taught at Baldwin County High School for five years. She is also co-sponsor for the Chess Club, and adviser for Model United Nations and the literary magazine.

"Mrs. Marshall has done a great job with this project," said freshman Tara Kirchharr. "Everyone tries to get into Mrs. Marshall's classes because we know she's going to keep us thinking and have something different