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Young Glade resident attends Governor's School

By Carol Campbell / Sun contributor

When CCHS student, T.D. Schlafer, submitted his application for five weeks of Governor's School for International Studies at the University of Memphis this summer, he had no idea what was in store for him.

Eighty students from across the state of Tennessee (40 guys and 40 gals) gathered at the University of Memphis on June 3 for an intensive five-week curriculum that included courses in political science, language, geography and international affairs. When asked about the selection process, T.D. said, "It consisted of grades, location in the state, and the submission of two essays — one on why you wanted to attend, and the other on what you feel is a pressing global issue." T.D. selected global warming for his topic.

T.D. first heard of the Governor's School from a guidance counselor who presented the program to his trigonometry class, and at first was not interested. After the counselor tracked him down and encouraged him to submit the application, T.D. gave it some more thought and agreed to try. The selection process began on Dec. 6 last year, and candidates were announced in March.

Why is the program called Governor's School? Because Lamar Alexander, in 1978, when he was governor of Tennessee, decided one of his goals in office was to improve the state of education. Not sure how to go about it, Alexander visited a governor's school in North Carolina. He liked what he found. In 1986 Governor Lamar Alexander opened his first Governor's School for International Studies. This summer there were 12 governor's schools at strategic campus sites around the state, each featuring a different area of study.

After arriving on campus, T.D. said, "The first highlight was discovering that I was to stay in South Hall, the dorm for athletes, which meant the beds were extra long."

T.D. offered to take me through a typical day. He explained that after breakfast students took two courses, each for three hours of college credit, (1) a political science class, taught by professors from the University of Memphis and (2) a language class. Four languages were offered — Hausa, Chinese, Portuguese, and Russian — not your usual high school offerings. T.D. selected Hausa, a language of northern Nigeria, taught by Dr. Ibro Chekarao, a Hausa language professor from Michigan State University and was then assigned to the African study group for the remainder of the school. After lunch, students were enrolled in an elective; T.D.'s choice was geography. Then for three hours before dinner there was time for computer use, study, and recreation. T.D. said, "It's a great campus. I was really impressed with the three-story, library, and I enjoyed playing soccer during the recreation time."

After dinner some evenings were spent with guest presenters. The topics varied and included U.S. foreign policy, British diplomacy, genocide, climate change game, policing in Iraq, global trade, aspects of culture, and counterfeit pharmaceuticals. T.D. said the topic on "British diplomacy" was presented by Martin Rickerd, Her Majesty's Consul General, who happened to be in the U.S. for an appearance in Atlanta the following day. The most interesting presenter, according to T.D., was a police officer from Memphis who had just come back from a year of helping train police officers in Iraq.

Then when asked if Senator Lamar Alexander put in an appearance? T.D. said, “Yes, he did. He was with us for dinner one night.”

T.D. pointed out “There was a lot of reading expected of us and daily tests. The big assignments were research papers, and I thought I was a fairly good writer, until I got my first paper back. It was really marked up, but the professor gave me good feed-back and suggestions. My writing definitely improved during the course of the school. Another thing, I began to understand what college professors wanted, and that I was writing at a different level.”

On the third day at the school all of the students participated in a “Global Scavenger Hunt.” The teams, representing different parts of the world, were divided into battalions — each with a specific task. (T.D.’s team was Africa.) That evening skits were presented, food tasted, knowledge gained, and the winner was announced. It was team Africa.

Another highlight was a United Nations project that wove its way through the five-week curriculum. Each student selected a country at random (T.D.’s was Ethiopia) to research and prepare for resolutions which would come before the General Assembly. The resolutions included “World Health” and “Child Soldiers.” T.D. said, “We may not like the idea of child soldiers, but very small countries with not enough manpower might view the situation differently. The important thing here was the research. You needed to know and understand how the country you were representing might feel about the resolution.”

Now that T.D. has had time to reflect on his five-week immersion into the world around us, including global cultures, language and perspectives — what were the highs and lows? He eagerly replied, “There were no low points. It was a wonderful, eye-opening experience. I pay more attention to places and events in the news because of the topics we discussed at Governor’s School.”