

# Sister Cities Committee hosts Swedish students



City Councilor Abdel Elnoubi welcomed the ProCivitas students to Alexandria, reflecting on being welcomed to the city himself.

PHOTO/SYDNEY KODAMA

## Committee continues long tradition of bringing students together

BY SYDNEY KODAMA

The Sister Cities Committee and Office of Historic Alexandria hosted students from ProCivitas Privata Gymnasium in Helsingborg, Sweden, as part of the city's longstanding tradition of inviting international students to the Port City.

The Committee and OHA hosted the students in the Lloyd House on Oct. 9 for a cultural exchange and dinner reception. Students from St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School and Episcopal High School joined to eat dinner with the visitors.

City Councilor Abdel Elnoubi welcomed the students, and Simon Velez, a museum educator at the Office of Historic Alexandria, provided the students with Alexandria's often grim history.

Paul Anderson, vice president of the Sister Cities Committee, said the connections between the cities are deeply personal.

"When Katharina came here last year with a group of students, she came up to me and said, 'I was here 20 years ago, and I stayed with this really nice couple ... and they lived in this mid-century modern house,' and immediately I

figured out that she had stayed at my parents house," Anderson said. "My mother was on the Committee back then. It's an incredible coincidence."

Katharina Nobs and Matthias Juelsson, teachers at ProCivitas Privata Gymnasium, accompanied their 12 students throughout their exploration of Alexandria and Washington, D.C.

Juelsson said the visiting students, in their second of three years at the gymnasium – the Swedish equivalent to high school – have visited both national monuments and local high schools.

"We went to Capitol Hill, saw the Capitol and many of the sites. ... We were given a tour of the [World Bank]," Juelsson said. "Wednesday, we were at Alexandria City High School for a full day, and our students shadowed American students. .... Today we've had a full day at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes, where our students have shadowed students there."

ProCivitas students said they observed many differences between their school and the American high schools.

"People aren't very social in Sweden. ... And I think it's been such a nice change that people are very social here. For example, when we went to different schools, they've been very nice and open, sociable, wanted to talk and everything like that.

It's been really nice," Ellen said.

Abbe, another ProCivitas student, said out of the two high schools the students visited, ACHS and SSSAS, he preferred SSSAS because it bore more resemblance to ProCivitas.

"I think St. Stephen's is more like our school, it's formal," he said. "... So I like that one more."

Even so, Abbe and his classmates expressed excitement about seeing a Titans football game; they attended the home game on Oct. 10 where ACHS fell to West Potomac High School 21-20.

Anderson said in an interview that he is excited to see the program grow, and SSSAS students are planning visits to Alexandria's other sister cities, including Helsingborg; Dundee, Scotland; and Caen, France.

Anderson said the "cultural and educational exchange" is an important part of the Sister Cities program. He'd like to continue to welcome students so Alexandria students can continue meeting students from around the world, and vice versa.

"I think they were all getting along really well ... with the Alexandria students," he said. "I think it's important to do that, and we'll continue to do that."

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ProCivitas Privata Gymnasium students from Helsingborg, Sweden, and students from St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School and Episcopal High School joined each other at the Oct. 9 Lloyd House reception.