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Exchange students thrive on sustainability in Sarasota

Engineering students from Lycee Pablo Picasso High School in Perpignan, France will spend November 7-15 with students at Riverview High School as the first part of a student exchange program between the two cities. Perpignan's goal is to become the first "positive energy" city in France, meaning they will generate more power from renewable sources than they consume.

Since the exchange will focus on the environment, conservation, alternative sources of energy, and sustainability, the visiting students will spend an educational day on Nov. 12 with staff from the University of Florida/Sarasota County Extension Service at Twin Lakes Park.

During their stay, the French students will learn about Sarasota County's sustainability programs; current federal, state and local incentives for renewable energy; green architectural design; and local sustainable agriculture efforts. The students will tour the FPL solar array at Rothenbach Park, the Florida-friendly landscapes at the Twin Lakes Green Building and the Florida House and enjoy a fresh, locally harvested lunch prepared by Ritz Carlton chef Greg Howe.

The exchange program is designed to foster an exchange of information about sustainability, ideas and culture. "One of the goals is to make this a regular exchange of students between Perpignan and Sarasota," says Harry Dunn, Sister Cities Director for Perpignan, "Riverview students will go to Perpignan in the spring of 2010." The seniors will shadow Riverview students on their internship jobs and enjoy excursions to Mote Marine, Spanish Point, Myakka State Park, Siesta Beach, the Ringling Museum, PAL Circus and other local attractions. Riverview students will learn from their French counterparts about the alternative energy projects in France, including the world's largest solar furnace, ground-mounted solar power plants, the Themis solar photovoltaic power generator, and research facility, 40 wind turbine generators and 70,000 square meters of solar photovoltaic roof collectors.

Says Dunn, "Although there are hundreds of Sister City programs throughout the US, the Perpignan-Sarasota partnership is really special because of the commitment of both communities to the principles of sustainability, and this student exchange represents a real opportunity to move both communities closer to their goals."

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask about the Sister Cities Exchange Program