

Our Florida Suncoast Club visited the Friendship Force Club in Cankaya Turkey

April 28-May 14, 2011

The Cankaya Club did an admirable job arranging home hosts for our 18 members. We were quite pleased with our gracious hosts who made every attempt to accommodate our needs. Lasting friendships were made as we enjoyed their generous hospitality and caring attention.

Our itinerary was quite full yet fairly relaxing – with travel not starting until 9:00 most mornings. In addition to visiting the major museums and sites of importance in Ankara, we were treated to several memorable additions. The most delightful and meaningful event was our visit to the Gulen Muharrem Pakoglu Primary School. We were greeted and treated royally by their staff and excited students for several hours, including a fabulous luncheon! They were primed and ready for us because of the ongoing correspondence between Ms. Seda Helvacoolu and Sandy Lambert, daughter of Charlotte Gildea, and teacher at Walsingham Elementary School in Largo. We presented them two inscribed books on Florida; and they, in turn, gave us an attractive glass plaque with a message from their headmaster, Mr. Bahri Yildizbas (presented at the Farewell Dinner). Two huge parks were sites for a train ride and a chilly hilltop picnic lunch. Itinerary 2: The side trip to the Cappadocia region (SE of Ankara) treated us to many fascinating views of “fairy chimneys” and other geological formations. VES Tourism provided an entertaining and well-informed guide for us who explained the history of the area and its importance to the early Christian community who worshiped in underground churches and lived in cave homes carved out of the rocky hillsides. Our overnight accommodations were in an authentic boutique hotel carved out of rock on the edge of Pigeon Valley. Ten ambassadors enjoyed the experience of viewing the landscape from hot air balloons at sunrise! The Goreme Open Air Museum was included in our schedule. The Farewell Dinner was a gala affair held at a tennis club facility. As always, the food was delicious. We entertained each other with a variety of skits, songs, and other shenanigans. Gifts were exchanged, and effusive thanks were offered on both sides. The overall experience was fantastic and will be etched in our memories far into the future. Boundaries of culture cannot separate people of the world when they accept one another with love and respect. Respectfully submitted, John Hayner, ED

