Arkansas students experience China

BY CAROLINE ZILK  
Staff Writer

CONWAY — Jing Jing Li of the Confucius Institute in Conway has been hard at work on the relationship between Arkansas and China.

Conferences and educational programs have been going on for months, and in some cases years, to strengthen ties between the two.

The Pulaski County Special School District announced last November that it would offer Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language at Maumelle High School this August, and the University of Central Arkansas in Conway held the inaugural Arkansas and China Business and Economic Summit on July 21.

Mike Casey, associate dean of UCA's College of Business, spoke at the summit about his hopes for a continued relationship in business and education with the country.

"We want to establish relationships and allow networking opportunities to

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A group from Arkansas and Texas stands at the entrance to the Terra Cotta Warriors Village.

Among the almost 600 U.S. students and chaperones participating in the camp, Li said the goal of the camp was to promote exchange between the youth of China and the U.S. and enhance the understanding of U.S. high school students of the Chinese language and culture to stimulate their interest in learning more about the country.

The students visited the cities of Beijing and Shaanxi, where they met local high school students and toured the international Confucius Institute headquarters.

The tourists participated in traditional activities, including paper-cutting, calligraphy, painting, a tea ceremony and martial arts.

Classroom learning was the largest part of the camp, however.

Students spent three hours a day in Chinese class and 1 1/2 hours per day in a culture class.

"There were 30 hours of language class over the two weeks at the school," Seefeld said.

"Students were divided into two levels of language proficiency and were instructed by a Chinese teacher," Seefeld said.

Seefeld said the students enjoyed the classes and learned a lot.

During the few days without classes, Seefeld and the group from Arkansas enjoyed sightseeing.

"We climbed and bicycled on the city wall, visited the Terra Cotta Warriors, were taken to the Horticultural Expo," she said.

"There was so much to see in such a short amount of time."

Most importantly, the students enjoyed and embraced the experience.

"We had a great group of talented kids who 'jumped in with both feet,'" Seefeld said.

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