

Friendship Exchange D9940 to D6840 New Orleans

- 1) Friendship Exchange generally is a great opportunity to visit other countries. You get to meet like minded people and stay with them in their home. They show you around their patch and take you to places you would never get to as a tourist. You go to their Rotary Club meeting and see how they do things. Their team comes over here and we reciprocate, hosting them and showing them where we go and how we do things over here.
- 2) Some of the clubs visited were Covington, Gulfport and Metairie
- 3) Covington is north of New Orleans on the north shore and to get there entailed a drive across one of the longest bridges in the world some 27 miles long. Gulfport is in the State of Mississippi to the east of New Orleans and Metairie is close to New Orleans itself
- 4) On arrival at Covington we were met by the local Mayor Mark Johnson who showed us around the town which was full of history.
- 5) We saw some beautiful old homes and visited Otis House, a Maritime Museum, a freshly renovated old hotel and a hardware store which still sells Davy Crocket hats.
- 6) We visited a Stud farm where the many famous racehorses were bred.
- 7) We visited the factory which made their food and we went to the racecourse and saw them race.
- 8) We visited a brewery which had many different flavours of beer, some of which were so high in other flavours that they no longer tasted like beer.
- 9) We were taken to a WW2 museum which was massive and covered acres of area and had a movie playing to show us how America won the war. We spent a lot of time in the French quarter of New Orleans and we learned a lot of history about Louisiana which was all originally French and sold to the new Americans by Napoleon after they became independent from England. Prior to that the British had tried to take New Orleans and we went on a Paddle Steamer ride to see the Chalmette Battlefield where it all took place.
- 10) One thing we learnt in Louisiana was that the whole area is swamp land. The highest point is the site on which New Orleans city centre is built but the whole surrounding area is pretty much waterlogged. When it rains the water table is so high that it has nowhere to goso flooding is a very common reality. Because of this people are not buried in the ground when they die as the coffins would just float up. Cemeteries are full of tombs build above ground level and there are many of them as the whole province is Catholic. Each sector or district is still referred to as a Parish. The interesting tomb in the shape of a pyramid is not yet occupied. It has been pre-built for a person who is still very much alive...Nicholas Cage the famous actor.
- 11) We had a very interesting visit to The Infinity Space Centre where they make rocket engines
- 12) A huge portion of our visit was dedicated to the Mardi Gras. Colour for the Mardi Gras are gold (or yellow), green and purple. There were many parades and nobody does a parade quite as good as America.
- 13) We saw Elvis' galore
- 14) Marchers, dancers, skaters etc. of all shapes and sizes
- 15) Military bands, sporting club bands, jazz bands, brass bands, drummer bands and all at a huge mega volume.
- 16) Each parade had up to 80 floats, each sponsored by a local business or community group. Each float had a theme with a dressed up patron who was supported by a team throwing things out to the crowds as it passed. The main thing thrown was beads and if you caught them you were allowed to wear them. If they fell to the ground they stayed on the ground. Other things were also thrown like hats, cuddly toys, balls and all manner of plastic toys.

- 17) You wear what you catch
- 18) You scurry around competing to grab as much stuff as you can. The spoils of the hunt are great.....but what do you do with it now??
- 19) After all the parades were finished that day there was a huge clean up squad with massive trucks, front end loaders and plenty of manpower.
- 20) The food in New Orleans was mainly seafood with fresh oysters, crab and shrimp (prawn sized of course). They also had a tradition of baking special Madi Gras cakes iced in the green, purple and gold Mardi Gras colours. Each cake contained a little plastic baby doll and the person who finds the baby in their piece of cake has to bake the cake for next year. We attended a cooking class at the New Orleans school of cooking where we learnt to cook Creole dishes of Gumbo (stew), Jambalaya (andouille spicy sausage rice dish) and Pralines (biscuits).
- 21) We frequented many different bars and restaurants, most of which had good quality jazz or blues music playing
- 22) The streets of New Orleans were alive with vibrant people.....some of whom were very different.
- 23) French colonial architecture with artwork and Mardi Gras decorations
- 24) We thought we were going to a happy clappy church service but it turned out to be a concert featuring one of the best jazz groups we have ever heard. Dr Michael White is on the clarinet. The band has been together for many years and the pianist is 93 years old.
- 25) Following hurricane Katrina the Long Beach Rotary club got busy and built a huge Activity Centre so that the community would have somewhere to go in the event of any future disaster. The President at the time was Billy Skellie and we got to meet this man. He presented us with a \$1 million dollar note not to keep for ourselves but to inspire us to raise a similar amount to the good of the community.
- 26) The Long Beach Rotary club then got us our planting trees in their local park.
- 27) The trip down the swampy river was very exciting with many alligators, swamp birds and other wildlife such as racoons.
- 28) One of the last outings was to the Laura plantation which covered the lives of the plantation owners and the lives of the slaves owned by them. The original bell which ruled their lives was still very prominent.
- 29) After the Friendship Exchange, Anne-Marie and I flew to New York where we visited Museums, Art Galleries, Central Park, The MetOpera and many Broadway shows.