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50 CENTS

Visiting professors get to see 'real America'

By Paul Mrozek

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LE ROY — Saturday's Genesee County Bicentennial Parade featured marching bands, floats and cheering crowds, but it was more fundamental things that stood out for visitors from other countries.

"It is very patriotic. It is very optimistic," said Galina V. Kirsanova, an English and deaf education teacher from Russia.

Kirsanova was part of a group of university academics from foreign lands who visited Le Roy Saturday to get a first-hand look at middle America.

The contingent, from Japan, Russia, the Czech Republic and the Philippines, attended the Bicentennial Parade, Oatka Festival and a backyard barbecue.

"There's no better slice of Americana than a parade and a festival like this," James J. DeCaro said. DeCaro, a professor at Rochester Institute of Technology, organized a conference the visitors are participating in this week at RIT's National Techni-

cal Institute for the Deaf.

Kirsanova works at Bauman Moscow State Technical University, Russia's equivalent of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She came to the United States with four other Bauman teachers and professors, Valery Ye. Safronov, Ludmila A. Ivanova, Olga A. Oreshkina and Margarita Kulikova.

Kirsanova has visited the United States several times in the past decade. Still, she said, the openness of American society and its people is impressive.

"You can see how friendly they are to each other. People who don't know you, asking how things are," she said.

Kirsanova also translated into English some observations made by Safronov, who was visiting America for the first time.

Safronov, 36, said he could see the unity among parents and children and how proud the children were to march in the parade.

American openness was also noticeable in a physical way, Safronov said.

"For example there are no fences (between prop-

erties)," he said.

Jonathan Tusalem, a teacher at College of St. Benilde in Manila, said his visit to Le Roy reminded him of the American heartland depicted in movies.

"What I've seen today is the real America," he said.

Tusalem, 45, has been teaching English to deaf students for about 10 years.

He said English is the second language of most Filipinos and the information he will glean at RIT will be helpful to him at St. Benilde. It won't be the first time Americans have assisted hearing-impaired Filipinos.

"Deaf education in the Philippines was started by American missionaries," Tusalem said.

Daniela Janokova teaches reading and writing and is director of Language Resource at Charles University in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. She is a Fulbright Scholar who in 1999-2000 spent six months at Galaudet University in Washington, D.C.

See Professors — page A-2

Professors

— From page A-1

She said the parade and festival were "marvelous."

"You are more open-hearted, open-minded people. After socialist regime we are still scared to show our emotions," she said.

Czech students used to be taught Russian in school. Now they are taught English and English proficiency is required for post-secondary education, Janokova said.

"You Americans help me the most," she said. Even things most teachers here may take for granted, such as lecture materials and instructional videos, can be difficult to obtain in the Czech Republic, Janokova said.

Asked if she knows former Buffalo Sabres goalie Dominik Hasek, Janoko-

va laughed.

"I don't much care about sports," she said.

Saturday's cookout was hosted by Corinne and Chris Heschke of Myrtle Street. Mrs. Heschke works for DeCaro.

The teachers were able to travel to RIT through a \$1 million grant from the Nippon Foundation of Japan. The goal of the conference is to learn new teaching methods, technologies and language skills.

DeCaro said the long-term plan of RIT's NTID is to establish satellite and Internet connections so multi-national teaching seminars and classes can be conducted.



Paul Mrozek/Daily News

ENJOYING THE DAY: Visiting academics attended the county's bicentennial festivities in Le Roy Saturday including Daniela Janokova, left, of the Czech Republic and Valery Ye. Safronov, right, of Russia. James J. DeCaro, center, is director of the Post-secondary Education Network, National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology.