

The North County News

Students unveil living history project

By Maria Calidonna

It isn't every day that seventh grade students get to dress up as Revolutionary War soldiers and teach history to seven-year olds.

But at French Hill Elementary last Friday, four Mildred E. Strang Middle School students got to do just that as the Yorktown Central School District, in conjunction with the Yorktown Historical Society, dedicated the French Hill site as an historic landmark with a sign along the Washington-Rochambeau Trail.

Christopher DiPasquale, a history teacher at Strang, along with members of the Historical Society and four students, explained the living history sign that the students researched and designed.

Throughout the year, the social studies students engage in historic activities such as 18th century apple cider making, candle making, and drilling. DiPasquale said he came up with the idea to have students research and create an historic marker.

"When you see the sign," Pasquale said, "it really shows how great things can come when schools, the community and local government come together."

DiPasquale spoke to the audience of children, district administrators, and teachers about the school's unique role as a French encampment during the Revolutionary War. He and his students re-enacted a military drill that included swords and rifles, along with other members of the historical society, such as retired Colonel Jim Johnson, former historian for West Point and



Photos by Maria Calidonna

(Above) Members of the Yorktown National Historical Society perform a military drill before French Hill second grade students on Friday.

(Inset) The Yorktown Historical Society dedicated the site as an historic landmark and installed a sign on the property, with the help of funding obtained by Assemblyman Greg Ball.

member of the Washington-Rochambeau Commission.

The Historical Society fronted the costs for the historic marker and Assemblyman Greg Ball, honorary

guest at the ceremony, obtained funding for the project.

"These young men should be proud," Ball said. "They not only had an impact on our community but have

furthered national efforts to have a historic national trail."

At the ceremony's end, students Chris Price, Brandon Habal, Luke Metzner, and Corey Solow unveiled the plaque.

Designating this site and others as historic markers will allow people from around the world to retrace the steps of the French and American soldiers. The historic Washington-Rochambeau Trail, also called the W3R, links nine states from Massachusetts to Virginia.

Luke Metzner, a seventh grade student at Strang, admitted that he learned more from the project than if it had been a research report about the war.

"We learned that the French marched to Virginia from here," Metzner said, "and that they camped from here to the power lines. I didn't know that."

Introducing himself as "Corporate Solow," student Corey Solow talked about his role in teaching kids.

"I got so many questions from [the second graders]," said Solow, one of the seventh graders who assumed a teaching role. "The kids were interested in stuff like formations, army rankings and battle tactics. One kid wouldn't stop asking questions."

To learn more about the living history project, visit the students' podcast at the Mildred Strang library Web site: www.yorktown.org.

