

LOCAL NEWS



PAGE 3
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103 SECTION B

SPRING TRIPS

Students will get to see best of D.C. after all

Looming government shutdown had forced valley teachers to plan alternative itineraries

By Sandeep Ravindran

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They'll get to see government in action after all.

And see Charles Lindbergh's "Spirit of St. Louis" hanging overhead at the Smithsonian National

Air and Space Museum or learn how money is made at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing..

The looming government shutdown — averted with a tentative 11th hour deal late Friday — had forced Santa Clara County teach-

ers to plan alternative outings for their middle school students heading out this week on traditional spring trips to Washington, D.C.

"We've had snowstorms, we've had summer heat, we've had hurricanes. But never a shutdown," said Bret Harte Middle School teacher Diane Delbridge, who has been organizing the school's

trips to Washington for almost three decades. Thankful for Friday night's deal, the group will fly out Saturday and follow through on their original plans. "Some of the students saved money for a long time and have had brothers and sisters who've traveled in the past," she said.

See **SHUTDOWN**, Page 4



MERCURY NEWS

Shutdown

Continued from Page 1

Zachary Jagannathan's eighth-grade class at Redwood City's North Star Academy will leave for Washington on Friday. Everybody was "angry" at a Thursday meeting to discuss the trip, as the school discussed changes in case the government failed to extend the budget and shut down federal museums and many buildings.

Zachary's mother, Cheryl Putnam, said her son really is looking forward to the Smithsonian. She said the schoolchildren also would have had to skip the National Archives, the Library of Congress, various Civil War battlefields, and their visit to Capitol Hill to see their representatives at work.

"I've been saving up for the trip since the seventh grade," Zachary said. "The whole year we've been studying about American history, most of it based in the D.C. area. The whole point of trip is to really drive home American history."

The shutdown would have affected a lot of issues, Putnam said, "but robbing school kids of their innocence and idealism about American democracy, that's the worst of all."

For their part, schoolteachers did their best to stay upbeat.

Like Ross Helsaple, whose eighth-grade social studies class from Terman Middle School in Palo Alto had tickets to fly out Friday at midnight.

Helsaple and 77 eighth-graders will spend five days in Washington and New York City.

If the government had stopped working, he said his students wouldn't have been able to visit Ellis Island or the Statue of Liberty, but they would have taken a harbor cruise near those landmarks instead.

"The kids are so happy to go on the trip; to cancel the trip would be heartbreaking," he said.

"We've had snowstorms, we've had summer heat, we've had hurricanes. But never a shutdown."

— *Diane Delbridge, Bret Harte Middle School teacher*

And Helsaple was confident that the schoolchildren would still have had fun and learned a lot. "There's so much else to see, so much history," he said. And the threat of a shutdown may have helped the students learn something about their government. "But they're learning a little bit more than they expected."

Usual highlights of Bret Harte Middle's trip include the Smithsonian, Arlington National Cemetery and a visit to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to see how money is made. That reservation was made almost a year in advance, Delbridge said. She also reserved visits to the Capitol, the Washington Monument, the Supreme Court and the Holocaust Museum, all of which would have closed if the government had shut down. "It takes a lot of planning," she said.

"We can only hope that as we are sleeping, preparing for our early morning plane, that our legislators are doing the job they're paid to do," Delbridge said.

Hope fulfilled, by the time they landed in Washington Saturday morning, the federal government would be on the job — at least for now.

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