

Students from Azores Welcomed in Taunton, Attend Sustainability Summit



Daniel Schemer *The Taunton Daily Gazette*
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Nine high school students and three teachers from the Azores, part of an environmental and cultural-themed study abroad program, got a warm welcome in Taunton recently during Portuguese Heritage Month.

“I had never been to America; I knew this was going to be the experience of my life,” said Ana Rosa Silva, one of the students, when they were honored with a reception on June 8, organized by the Greater Taunton Area Day of Portugal Committee, at Holy Ghost Society Hall in East Taunton.

“We’ve been extremely welcomed here,” said Ana Simas, at the reception. Simas is one of the teachers who, along with the rest of the class, traveled here from the capital city of Angra do Heroísmo, located on Terceira Island in Azores, for the 10-day trip.

“It’s always great when our kids meet kids from other parts of the world. It’s a great experience to exchange culture and ideas, but also realize, living thousands of miles far apart, how much they still have in common,” said John Cabral, superintendent of Taunton Public Schools, at the Holy Ghost reception.

The class was also in attendance for the Day of Portugal flag-raising ceremony on June 10 at Taunton City Hall.

“We like to bring international understanding to the community, which we’ve done for years,” said Louie Loura, district director for the Office of State Sen. Marc R. Pacheco. Pacheco helped bring the class to Massachusetts.

Global Sustainability Summit

What brought the class across the Atlantic was a special Global Sustainability Summit, hosted by the environmental nonprofit organization Stone Soup Leadership Institute, which was held from June 5 to 9 at Bristol County Agricultural High School.

Director Marianne Larned explained the Summit is meant to give training and educational tools, whether in-person or virtually, to youth focused on sustainability initiatives so they can disseminate the information and employ strategies in the real world.

“We’re training young people to be leaders,” said Larned.

Larned said past summits have involved youths from different parts of the world, including Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and various Caribbean islands, as well as locally herein New England.

Larned said she was encouraged by Sen. Pacheco, who’s been a colleague and supporter of Stone Soup for years, to look at connecting youths from the Azores to the Institute’s programming.

Pacheco helped introduce Larned to the mayor of Angra de Heroismo when she visited Terceira last year. Because the city is a sister city to Taunton, both Pacheco and Larned said an agreement was made with the mayor of Angra de Heroismo to form a partnership where student delegates would come to the United States for the Sustainability Summit. “Beyond establishing new pipelines for our modern workforce, climate-based curriculum opportunities also ensure future generations understand the existential challenges affecting our planet,” said Pacheco in a June 8 press release about the Summit.

All the students and teachers came from Escola Secundaria Jeronimo Emiliano DeAndrade.

Teacher Nuno Azevedo from the school said the qualifications for all the students included in this program are a basic understanding of English, exceptional grades, and a clear interest in sustainability.

“My class gave me the honor of being a representative from my island to talk about sustainability,” said Joao Carvalho, a student from Terceira. Carvalho said his chief educational interest during the summit was addressing world hunger.

The Summit, held at Bristol Aggie, also included 15 students from the school already involved in sustainability education sponsored by Stone Soup.

During the weeklong Summit, which featured keynote speakers and sustainability experts from around the world, students from Bristol Aggie and Terceira engaged together to develop presentations focused on goals for sustainable development, in relation to climate change, outlined by the United Nations.

Subjects approached by the students during the Summit included sustainable agriculture, clean water, renewable energy, food security, and creating sustainable cities and communities.

Terceira student Alice Oliveira said what she is taking away from this week are pathways to a future career with sustainability and the increased “desire to participate and influence people” in working to preserve the resources in the Azores.

Ana Rosa Silva concurred, adding sustainability initiatives are “very important to us because we live in the middle of the ocean,” making the Azores very vulnerable to the effects of climate change.