

USA LINKS WITH WEST LOTHIAN COLLEGE

This is as an international partnership created to enhance student learning and experience. West Lothian College has a number of industrial links both nationally and internationally to support students learning and work experience opportunities.

Last years West Lothian Council was finalising a twinning agreement with the Texas City of Grapevine and as part of the process a member of staff from the college joined Council members on a twinning visit to Grapevine.

Where he Established a successful partnership with Grapevine City's Convention and Visitors Bureau Centre provided direct contact to local leading Hotel and Hospitality establishments to secure student placements programmes.

The emphasis was on the student learning, in a workplace environment whilst experiencing a different culture and lifestyle.

Grapevine and in particular the Dallas/Fort Worth Region is an area renowned for it's thriving hospitality industry, from which our students received a rich learning experience from leading global experts.

Following the initial visit in 2008 to Grapevine Texas contact through the City's Convention and Visitors Bureau Centre was made with three leading hotels in the area. Each rated as a five star full service hotel located in the City of Grapevine, in the Dallas/Fort Worth region.

The hotels involved were:

The Grand Hyatt (Dallas Fort Worth Airport)
The Gaylord Convention and Conference Centre
The Hilton (DFW Lakes)

From the outset the hotels, showed a tremendous interest in placing students for work experience, each providing mentors to ensure the students gained the best learning possible experience

To support the students travel and living costs the College hospitality department organised a dinner and Ceilidh coinciding with the Homecoming Scotland Celebrations. Sponsors donated raffle and auction items, including the food for the dinner demonstrating real community spirit. Grapevine Tourist Group even sent bottles of their local wine. 200 guests in attended the event and a grand total of £3,900 was raised.

The placement covered three weeks in June 2009, one week familiarising themselves with their new surroundings, agreeing their work placement learning programme and settling in with their host families. The remaining two weeks were used to learn a wide range of different hospitality skills which they recorded and evaluated as part of their college course. The students were also able to enjoy various leisure and cultural activities organised by the host families.

As a thank you and culmination of their hard work students, prepared and presented a dinner to 50 guests at the Hilton Hotel. Guests included; host families, members of the City's Convention Visitor's Bureau and student's mentors.

Hospitality students who participated:
Barry Henderson SVQ Level 3 Professional Cookery
Jill Phillips SVQ Level 3 Professional Cookery
Jamie Campbell SVQ Level 2 Professional Cookery
Amanda Fergus SVQ Level 2 Professional Cookery

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The project's success was the approach by all organisations here and in Texas working partnership to ensure students achieved the best learning experience.

Key factors to be taken into account were timescales to plan fund raising event, arrange placement programmes with the hotels and accommodation with host families.

This was successful because of the shared desire to promote education and work experience opportunities. All college hospitality students had the opportunity to participate in the project, of which four would be successful.

It was important the project be self financing therefore, sponsorship from the business community along with the support of the twinning association and West Lothian Council was sought.

Part of the evaluation, required each student to complete a Log Book recording their learning experiences. On return each student shared their learning experience with the new and continuing hospitality students.

A big thanks to all who helped make this happen!

The project was resourced wholly through sponsorship from a number of organisations, individuals and businesses including the Ceilidh which raised over £3,900 to support travel and student subsistence.

This project would not have been successful without the support of those who volunteered to help, plan, organise and support this project on both sides of the Atlantic.

West Lothian College will continue these valuable links with Grapevine Texas whilst using the experience to develop further links both nationally and internationally.

West Lothian College has extended an invite for a reciprocal visit to Scotland by Grapevine students who wish to sample the learning experience and warm hospitality Scotland has to offer. This has included arrangement being finalised with the top Scottish Hotels in the locality for joint work learning and assessment programmes.

Contact with American community college lecturers discussing curriculum commonalities and development has led to an expansion of the programme. This will include a broadening of the learning scope and joint programmes of learning and assessment being undertaken in both countries.

This will be a bi-annually additional programme available to all hospitality students from West Lothian College to undertake work experience in Grapevine Texas as part of their final year.