

Can Matoaca students solve the world's problems?

By Marcy Horwitz
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Most adults would blanch at trying to solve the world's problems, but 15 Matoaca High School teenagers have no such qualms. They were among the 800 young people who attended the 26th Annual Virginia Model United Nations Summit held at the University of Virginia last month.

Model UN is an academic program designed to teach students about contemporary events in international politics. During annual conferences, participants assume the roles of delegates from countries all over the world. Students work in committees as they address economic and social issues, international crises, and other simulations taken from the real world international scene. They debate and discuss issues with other students in an attempt to write resolutions. The process exercises students' ability to speak, write, research and think critically about the most pressing issues of the day. It's "education through simulation."

Although Model UN is an academic course at some high schools, Matoaca runs its program as an after-school club. Michael-Jon Rodney, a social studies teacher at Matoaca, is the club's advisor. Rodney describes his Model UN kids as "highly motivated." They're there because they want to be.

Student Victoria Todd has wanted to work in government since she was five years old. Participating in Model UN activities is helping her toward that goal.

Model UN is "awesome," says Victoria. "You get to meet amazing people, hone your public speaking and debate skills, and learn about the governments of other nations and the importance of diplomacy around the world."

Elizabeth Grizzle, who plans to study abroad during college, agrees. "I like just getting together and meeting new people."



Elli Morris/Chesterfield Observer

Matoaca High School students including (from left) Lachelle Henderson, Lauren Rotsted, Chris Purdin, Tori Todd, Jennifer Tedder, Dwayne Whitt and Casey Brazil (podium) practice for an upcoming Model United Nations conference.

Social opportunities aside, there's hard work to be done during the conferences. Just as in the real world, committee meetings can drag on and on – some for as long as 10 hours. Both girls say the schedule can be tiring. Still, both plan to continue to participate.

That's good news, because Matoaca's Model UN students will attend the regional High School Model UN conference in February at Old Dominion University. The Matoaca teens are already raising funds for registration, travel and hotel fees by selling soft drinks and running other fundraisers.

Principal Stephen Cunningham is proud of the Matoaca Model UN team, and supports the program fully. Model UN is valuable, he says, "because it requires students to take learning outside of the classroom and actually apply it in real situations. Also, it puts students in a different setting so that they interact with students from other schools and share ideas and experience a different culture in that sense – not to mention the value of the research that they do prior to going."

Collecting collections

If I get another bright idea about buying Christmas cards that aren't "ready to go," I am going to vaporize my credit card before my other half finds out that I bought yet another set of cards that need to be stored until next year.

Last year I found great card kits with stickers and rubber stamps. I found them after I found this year's (or is it last year's since I bought them in January '06?) stashed with my holiday decorations. Anyway, the newest cards are complete except for the message inside which I am going to emboss – someday.

One of the problems is that I love a bargain. The retailers put things on sale before the holidays, but the few things that are left on the shelves in January are almost giveaways. So I buy them knowing that I have an entire year to fix, paint or craft them before I need them.

But, I just collect so much better than I "do." Take knitting for example. I have three skeins of fancy yarn with little fluffs coming off the strand waiting for me to learn how to turn a skein into a scarf.

Just about every female I know has learned to knit. I want to know how to knit. I just don't

want to take time to learn how to knit. It is the latest in crafts to sweep the nation. All I have to do is ask someone to teach me, or take a class, or watch the knitting show on TV. None of that is happening, so I am looking for an alternative use for tufted yarn.

I successfully dodged the whole scrapbooking craze. Not that I wouldn't love to have a shelf full of wonderful creative scrapbooks of the kids and our family. But, I only got as far as collecting those fancy scissors to create curved corners and wavy edges. I can now cut my coupons with waves, ripples or perforated edges.

Even before I took a jewelry-making class – my other half reminds me that it was one afternoon and not a semester – I was collecting beads and things made of beads that I could take apart. I could make key chains and bracelets for all of the women in my zip code with the beads I have collected.

Only a few of these beads were actually selected for a specific project. That means that I look at my collection and say, "What can I make out of these?" So I have beaded bracelets, watch bands and necklaces that I will never wear because the beads are cheap (hey, those beads were free), they are colors I never wear, or they look homemade – fine for cookies but not for bracelets.

My other half has asked me to seriously consider collecting things that cost little but increase in value instead of choosing things that have little or no value in the first place and then take up valuable storage space.



Loose Ends
Susan Nienow

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