

Dinosaurs, gorillas, and bears, oh my!

Sound like fun? Then a trip to the zoo may be for you...

The North Carolina Zoological Park is located in Asheboro in Randolph County, in the Uwharrie Mountains near the geographic center of the state, approximately 75 miles west of Raleigh.

On a bright June day, PR Mgr Rod Hackney led a tour to the food prep facility at the North Carolina Zoo. The workers prepare veggies and some fish for various animals, working from a shipment of five tons of frozen fish, fresh bottles of cow's blood for the vampire bats, and live mealworms and crickets.

Inside the Zoo, Hackney pointed out the rocks and boulders for the under-construction children's play area, where Cristal McGee was finishing the rock. She also does a large amount of the finishing in the park. Frank Valadez was constructing the wire mesh and rebar base in the new, top-of-the-line polar bear exhibit.

Next was the dinosaur exhibit, which Rod said helped to draw their largest crowd in 2012. The dinosaurs are built by Billings entertainment in Texas. They are computerized and air pressure creates their movement. This is a great part of the Zoo to see!

The gorilla exhibit has some pretty rare items: 10-month old baby gorillas Apollo and Bossama, and another due any day. The gorillas eat an all vegetarian diet and are fed by workers who throw the veggies from platforms overlooking the exhibit.

Open seven days a week, the zoo is a dazzling natural habitat park with 1,600 North American and African animals; 53,000 plants from two continents; a huge collection of public art; five miles of walking trails; and presents multiple opportunities to 'connect' with wildlife.

Contributed information & photos by BILL WARD



Young writer wins study abroad spot in Israel



Will Harris and girlfriend Ashley Dailey are both travelling overseas this summer to participate in school-related programs. Will is off to the Mideast to take journalism and history classes. Ashley will spend a month in Central America studying anthropology.

College student with KM connections hopes to sharpen skills, learn more about Mideast culture

DAVE BLANTON
dave.kmherald@gmail.com

Will Harris is combining his love of travel, writing and photography in a study abroad program this summer that will put him in journalism and history classes by day and the larger classroom of a bustling and vibrant Tel Aviv by night.

The rising senior at Georgia's Valdosta State University arrived earlier this week in Israel's second largest city to take part in a one-month program at Hebrew University, where he'll take courses in international reporting and the history of Zionism.

The place and curriculum appear to be a good fit for Harris, an aspiring writer who has an eye toward working as a war correspondent down the road. The majority of his schoolwork in the small Mideast nation will be reporting on Israeli and Palestinian culture and politics and the people who inhabit the often contentious region.

Kings Mountain is somewhat of an adopted home to Harris. His mother, Jan Harris, heads a downtown revitalization initiative called Main Street that functions as a department of the city's government. The family is originally from Georgia.

Harris is no stranger to international travel. He has been to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, where his father works as a consultant, and the two of them from there took a trip to Singapore.

He's also already been making his way through the world of professional journalism, having worked his way up from a staff writer to managing editor at Valdosta State's student-run campus newspaper "The Spectator," which he says has a staff of about 25.

Harris spent the weeks before the trip reading up on the history of Israel and preparing for the classes he's slated to take. He was also scrambling to find a way to rig his smart phone for overseas use. Chatting in a downtown office last week, he said

he was excited about the opportunity to meet new people and learn from some of the best in the business.

"They're from all over the world," he said, referring to the students participating in the program. "It's going to be an interesting group of people when we meet in the airport."

The international reporting class is taught by several journalists and professors, including Linda Gradstein, a freelance reporter in Israel who reports for public radio, AOL News and Slate and Ilene Prusher, a foreign correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor.

One section of the seven-page syllabus hints at the intensity of the coursework. "Students will go into the community to find and report stories that would be of interest to an international audience," it reads. "Students will also attend press briefings and meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials, community leaders and other sources."

Only a few semesters ago, Harris was majoring in political science and planning to attend law school after college. "That didn't suit me. I think what I'm doing now is more interesting to me." He's an English major now.

Over the winter, he applied for the study abroad program, got the nod from his college advisor and then for months he waited on some good news, saying he was nervous about missing out on such a golden chance. He says that after much consideration he chose Tel Aviv over the other choice, Istanbul.

Will's not the only member of his family beefing up his education over the summer. His younger brother Alex, who is 16, earned a spot in a Stanford University program where he'll take classes in mathematics and social media.

Harris' girlfriend Ashley, also an English major at Valdosta State, will be traveling overseas as well. She'll spend a month in Belize participating in an anthropology research program.

We have a winner!

James Owens, at right, holds the mandolin he won in a raffle at a bluegrass and gospel concert Saturday in Patriots Park. Owens is a member of The Gospel Hymn Boys, which provided entertainment along with two other acts at the concert.

Also pictured, from left to right, are James Ramey, Hospice of Cleveland County VP of Access Patti McMurry and Keith Ramey, a member of the Timberidge Bluegrass Band and the mandolin's maker. Other prizes offered by Jammin J's Pizza Factory, Love's Fish Box, Mi Pueblito, Bojangles, Pizza Hut and Kelly's Seafood were also raffled off at the fundraiser to benefit Hospice of Cleveland County.




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