

- 1...the amount of years Walt Disney attended high school
- 3...the amount of times the 2,000 acres of turf is mowed at Walt Disney World each week, which adds up to 450,000 mower miles per year, or 18 trips around the Earth
- 4...the percentage of ALL amateur photographs taken WORLDWIDE are taken at Walt Disney World
- 30...amount of tons of material the Materials Recycling Center recycles every day
- 175...outfits in Mickey Mouse's wardrobe
- 20,000...different colors of paint used in Walt Disney World
- 27,443...amount of acres that Disney owns in central Florida (this is twice the size of Manhattan Island)
- 1,700,000...worms bought each year to feed the animals at Animal Kingdom
- 7,000,000...cubic yards of dirt dug out to create the lagoon for Magic Kingdom
- 15,000,000...gallons of water used daily at Walt Disney World

It's hard to believe it is over, but our trip to Walt Disney World was as amazing as we had hoped it would be. What can you say?...walking around Orlando, Florida at the end of December in shorts and a t-shirt is a very different feeling than bundling up in wool sweaters to go shovel snow! Record highs in Orlando during our stay made us feel we had hit the jackpot. And, of course, the Disney experience is like no other. There are too many memories to recount, but here is a brief but informative diary of our trip.

**“The way to get started is to quit talking, and begin doing.” - Walt Disney**

**Thursday, December 27, 2007**

The motor coaches are loaded early, a good sign that everyone is anxious to get going. After announcements and attendance and final good-byes, we're off! First stop is lunch in Effingham, IL, at 11:30 a.m., the student's first experience of “stop-eat-roll call-leave” in one hour's time. Some students could not understand why we would not let them cross a busy 6-lane highway so they could go to a different restaurant other than the four on our side of the road!...being on the road is definitely a learning experience. After driving straight through Kentucky, we stopped at the first rest stop past the Tennessee border to take a quick break and stretch. We got caught in the Nashville rush hour, which put us a little behind on time, but hit Manchester, TN in a reasonable enough time for dinner. The helpers in the Subway there were pretty surprised when a mass of people showed up to eat at their restaurant, and called in reinforcements that did a marvelous job. A quick stop in Chattanooga, TN, to switch out drivers to the ones we'll have in Florida, and we're off again, stopping in Georgia twice overnight for fuel and driver breaks. It was fun going outside during each break and feeling the temperature rise as we go farther south. Getting through Georgia took longer than expected due to some construction.

**Friday, December 28, 2007**

We stopped in Ocala, FL, to change into our park clothes, get some breakfast, and get ready for

our day in Animal Kingdom and MGM theme parks. Our Peoria Charter Coach drivers use a new tollway to make up the time we lost in Georgia, and get us to the Animal Kingdom parking lot at 9:24 a.m., only 24 minutes past our goal...not bad for driving 161 people 1,135 miles across the country!

**“Welcome to a kingdom of animals... real, ancient and imagined: a kingdom ruled by lions, dinosaurs and dragons; a kingdom of balance, harmony and survival; a kingdom we enter to share in the wonder, gaze at the beauty, thrill at the drama, and learn.” - Michael Eisner, Opening Day of Animal Kingdom, April 22, 1998**

We met our tour organizer and guide, Ken Hess from Destinations Unlimited, the parking lot, along with our band trailer drivers Ron Hartter and David Morrow...Ken was holding up his “lightsaber,” a cone-like toy that lights up, which makes it easy for our large group to see him and follow him to where we need to go. As the trip unfolds, everyone realizes how important that lightsaber really is! Chaperones passed out the 3-day Park Hopper passes and notated the numbers on the pass and which student they belong to, so that if someone loses theirs, the ticket can be replaced at no charge. Good thing, too...before we left at 1:30, one student had already lost theirs! The kids are chomping at the bit to get in the park as soon as we saw the welcoming arch over the road...but they stayed patient so that the chaperones could tell them all they needed to know before we hit the park. Everyone enjoyed the wildlife exhibits and trails, many were able to hop on the Safari, and everyone used their meal cards to get some lunch. Ken was able to get us 6 free Fast Passes to “Expedition Everest,” and the directors gave them out to two students on each bus who they felt were exceptionally well behaved or helpful. Most amazing was the “human vine,” a performer in a costume on stilts who looking like living foliage, moving gracefully and quadripedally along the entrance...a very artistic and unique thing. Next stop: MGM.

**"The world you have entered was created by the Walt Disney Company and is dedicated to Hollywood - not a place on a map, but a state of mind that exists wherever people dream and wonder and imagine, a place where illusion and reality are fused by technological magic. We welcome you to a Hollywood that never was - and always will be." - Michael Eisner, Opening Day of MGM, May 1, 1989**

After lunch our buses took us next to MGM where we were able to watch a character parade, visit attractions themed after Disney movies, and eat dinner. The large group evening activity was watching “Fantasmic,” an incredible laser, pyrotechnic, and theatrical presentation in an outdoor amphitheater overlooking a large lagoon. The costuming, lighting, music, and visual effects provided a stunning and imaginative look into the possibilities of individual dreams and creativity, using Mickey and some of the most famous Disney villains as the main characters in this “good vs. evil” showdown. At the end, I think everyone was inspired to be creative and imaginative...how could you not be after seeing that?! “Fantasmic” reminds us that Walt Disney World, the resorts around it, everything there is the result of the creative mind and dreams of one

individual, Walt Disney, and that an individual truly can change the world.

On to the hotel for check-in, and once everyone was settled, some pool time and pizza for those who took the time to bring swimming clothes or were smart about using the Orlando phone book! Chaperones relayed all the important information for the following day, and lights out was at 11:00 p.m. Our security company provided two guards to patrol the hallways to make sure kids stayed in their rooms and ensured we observed the hotel's quiet hour policy, which also made it possible for chaperones and directors to get a good night's sleep without having to worry about getting up to search for wandering students.

**Saturday, December 29, 2007**

**“Our goal is to inspire the visitors who come here, so they will be turned on to the positive potential of the future and will want to participate in making the choices that shape it. We believe that in a world where cynicism and negativism abound, there is another story, and we have chosen, with forethought and conviction, to tell it, and to be that voice of optimism.” - *Opening Day, Dedication of EPCOT, 1982***

Rise and shine! An early breakfast of toast, muffins, bagels, bacon-egg-cheese sandwiches, fruit, cereal, etc. awaited us downstairs. It was fun to get your meal and take it out in the courtyard by the pool to eat “al fresco,” since it was already a balmy 71 degrees by the time 7:00 rolled around. This is clinic day and EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow) theme park for both choir and band, so the choir left at 8:00 a.m., followed by the band at 8:30. Once there, after looking at the parking situation and the distance required to get to the park, Ken realized that students in both choir and band will not have enough time to enter the park and eat in between clinics, so Ken, myself, and Mrs. Morrow were able to convince a Disney food vendor, “Electric Umbrella” (yes, you read that correctly) to package some sandwiches and water and have it ready by 11:30 so that the students would have something to eat, all provided by the Music Boosters at no charge to the students. We enjoyed going inside the giant silver geodesic dome structure that houses a tour through the history of communication, and a glimpse into future technology. The Christmas tree at EPCOT was especially beautiful, and the large walkway that leads to the lagoon and the countries of the World Showcase that surround it was covered with a lighted archway that, later in the evening, used lights to sync with the music that was playing in the park. The band clinic, “You’re Instrumental,” began at 1:30 at the Event Building, which is near EPCOT. Our clinician was Rich Ervin, a Disney musician and performer who I played with in college for two years while attending ISU! He knew he would be our clinician a month ago, but waited till we came down so he could surprise me...I haven’t seen him in ten years, so that was a great moment for me. Rich focused the clinic on the how a professional musician down at Disney approaches their craft, and how different their approach is than a school musical program runs things. He talked about how the business works, how expensive studio time is, how limited rehearsal time is (an example he gave was 15 minutes for an hour and a half musical presentation), and how students can use the focus and concentration levels required of professional musicians

and apply them to their own playing to help make themselves and their band better, and had the band play musical examples of increasing difficulty to show them how this improvement takes place. The band recorded a segment of music from Tarzan, which was constructed using common studio practice (creating vamps, changing and altering written parts, etc.), and they asked Ms. Yonker and myself to provide “jungle noises” for the track. The band worked on two segments of music to match to animation from Tarzan, and was recorded using the same techniques that are used in the studio, complete with film, frame tracks, and cues. The finished product was great, and there are some candid photos taken of the group during the clinic at the end of the DVD. It was an important educational component to the Disney experience, and I am glad we took part in it.

The balance of the day was spent back in EPCOT, and students had a long time to go visit attractions, sample the food in each of the different countries around the lagoon, and to experience different cultures like never before. I enjoyed attending an outdoor performance of Christmas music by a choir and a full orchestra, dramatically presented along with the text of the Christmas story from the book of Luke. At 9:30 p.m., it was time for “Illuminations: Reflections of Earth,” a fireworks and pyrotechnic display above the lagoon featuring a globe that can break down and reform to reflect different projections of light and video on it. The subject was the world community and how we as individuals fit in that community, and it was an inspiring and thrilling continuation of last night’s “Fantasmic” theme. The fireworks were absolutely incredible...synced to the music with texture and drama that took your breath away.

**Sunday, December 30, 2007**

**“Walt Disney World is a tribute to the philosophy and life of Walter Elias Disney . . . and to the talents, the dedication, and the loyalty of the entire Disney organization that made Walt Disney’s dream come true. May Walt Disney World bring Joy and Inspiration and New Knowledge to all who come to this happy place . . . a Magic Kingdom where the young at heart of all ages can laugh, and play, and learn - together.” - Roy O. Disney, Dedication of Magic Kingdom, October 25, 1971**

Performance Day at Magic Kingdom! Everyone is checked out of the hotel and is leaving by 8:15 a.m., despite cell phones falling down elevator shafts, misplaced wallets and/or luggage, and getting all of our stuff into the right compartments on the bus for later events. The band students were taken to the back lots of Magic Kingdom, which looks incredibly “un-Disney”...trailers for offices, float storage, construction equipment, etc. Cell phones and cameras are not allowed in this area because it is not for public viewing. This is where we warm up and prepare for our parade, and after following a path to a large gate, we space ourselves correctly, and then... ***“Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls! Walt Disney World’s Magic Music Days is proud to present the Eureka High School Marching Band, under the direction of Todd Stalter and Denise Yonker.”*** With that announcement, the gates are swung open, and all the splendor of Magic Kingdom suddenly appears before us as we march right on to Main Street and parade past Cinderella’s Castle and all the way down to Frontierland. What a sight! People everywhere lined

up on the side of the street taking pictures, cheering, waving, and enjoying the moment, which was an exhilarating experience for everyone involved. Every so often down the street the announcement would come on again, which really makes you feel important as you stroll down Main Street U.S.A. We stopped at Frontierland and played our music standing still, and after that was finished, paraded out of the park back into the back lot area to change and prepare to enter the park. After all the details were sorted out (“Where’s my uniform bag,” “I can’t find my hatbox,” “Where do I put my horn,” “I can’t find my Park Hopper,” etc.) we were able to enter the park and enjoy the attractions and shops that are so unique. Choir students met at the entrance of Magic Kingdom to take the monorail out to the parking lot so they could head to Downtown Disney for their performance. The outdoor mall-like area has a large pond complete with friendly seagulls, and the seating was full for the choir performance. Despite the wind and the heat of the lights, the choir sang very well, and the crowd was pleased.

After the 2:00 p.m. choral performance, the exchange of students to parents took place so those families could get on with their stay in Orlando, and we could open up some bus space to let some people stretch out for the long ride home! We wished them good luck, as we know the temperatures are supposed to drop dramatically in Orlando after we leave!

Our time in Magic Kingdom was truly magical...upon our return to the park, another character parade down Main Street complete with Santa Claus and all of the classic Disney characters. There was another parade after dark featuring bands and floats, and students took advantage of the long day and rode attractions like crazy. The fireworks display behind Cinderella’s Castle, “Nighttime and Holiday Wishes” accented the meaning of Christmas and the beauty of the holidays, complete with fireworks that looked like smiley faces, baseballs, drums, and other toys. Cinderella’s Castle was decked with lights that made it look like it was in the Swiss Alps and covered in snow and ice, and provided the perfect backdrop for the evening. Walking down Main Street after the dark, you could see “snow” falling, gently, a neat touch that put just the right spirit in the air. I think I like snow machine snow WAY better than the real thing!

We all met at the park entrance at 10:00 p.m., took final roll, and headed to the monorail for our trip back to the buses. Once on the buses, we departed Walt Disney World at 11:15 p.m. filled with amazing memories of our experiences, and exhausted from a busy four days of travel, performance, and the sheer exhilaration of being in one of the world’s greatest theme parks.

### **Monday, December 31**

Not much to talk about because everyone was SLEEPING! Although, being unable to sleep very much, I was able to keep track of some things, such as our trek through Georgia being so SLOW again due to construction, the amount of fog in the air (I almost got lost walking from the truck fuel bays to the gas station itself, it was so soupy), and watching the cell phones change from Eastern time to Central time in the blink of an eye. It was very foggy going through the mountains of Tennessee, and when we came down it was dark, so that is one sight that I wished we could have seen. We made it to Chattanooga, TN for breakfast at 9:15 EST, and changed out

drivers once more for the trip home. Lunch was in Clarksville, TN, and at this point, I was tired of eating fast food, so some of the chaperones and I ate where we parked, “Golden Rule BBQ.” We asked our waitress what the golden rule of BBQ was, and she had no idea, so, after having no sleep in what seemed like forever, we got punchy and decided it was: “Thou shalt serve BBQ unto others the way thou would want BBQ served unto you.” I wrote it down and gave it to somebody there...so if “Golden Rule BBQ” ever becomes famous, you will know who to blame. Their sauce, by the way, is out of this world.

A stop to rest at Metropolis, IL, and we notice on the Weather Channel there that home is getting some snow. Some call home and find that 2 inches is on the ground already. Toto, we’re not in Florida anymore! Off to Effingham to eat a quick dinner before we get home (half hour stop at the same place we ate lunch on Thursday), and we watch the outside temperature drop as the roads get worse from Champaign to Bloomington. Seeing several cars in the ditch, it reminds me how lucky we are to have such capable drivers taking care of us...and how thankful I am I don’t have to drive in it myself. We arrive in Eureka shortly before 9:00 p.m., ahead of schedule, but glad to be home...probably more glad to be able to sleep in our own beds, and to take a nice, long, hot shower!

## **Highlights for Everyone**

### **Culture Immersion**

Immediately as you enter any one of their theme parks, you are surrounded by people...thousands of people...who are speaking German, Italian, Spanish, Swiss, Norwegian, Japanese, Chinese...you name it. If there was ever a place where you can be standing next to people from all different continents at one time, this is it. What a great experience for our students.

In EPCOT, people who work in the different countries of the World Showcase around the lagoon are actually from that specific country...they work over in the US on a special visa that Disney and the government created so that they could intern here for one year, and return to their homeland. Each year Disney receives over 20,000 applications for those visas. This program gives those people an opportunity to see our culture, and gives the visitors to EPCOT interaction with people who are truly from China, or Japan, or France...the realism is what makes the experience unique and special, and is crucial to the theme of the World Showcase.

### **Attention to Detail**

It is amazing that in the vast complex at Walt Disney World...all the resorts, the theme parks, the transportation...everything works like clockwork. The fact that they move hundreds of thousands of people every day where they need to go with the most minimal problems blows me away. Every costume, float, store, attraction, is perfect to the smallest degree possible. The attention to detail is what makes it real, both figuratively and literally. From my own experience...in the “Chronicles of Narnia” attraction at MGM, there was only one live actor, the Ice Queen, and she was a dead ringer in terms of likeness...I could have sworn it was the original

actress. Everything moves seamlessly...in Magic Kingdom, I was looking at Main Street, turned around to look at the Christmas Tree, and when I looked back down, there were taped arrows on the street to help guide the parade floats. Who did that, and when? In EPCOT, while just walking around, one of our students had an ice cream treat that was knocked out of her hand by a fairly brave seagull. Despite the thick crowds, a Disney employee saw it happen, and went and got her a new one immediately.

### **Christmas in the Air!**

Everything was decked out for Christmas...the giant Christmas trees at the entrance of every park, the gardens with evergreen and planted poinsettias, the garland, the Christmas music playing in the park as you stroll from one section to the other, the lights...the holiday spirit was everywhere. Since the trip came so close to Christmas, and (at least for me) with the business of the holidays it almost seemed like there was no chance to just relax and enjoy ChristmasTIME; at Walt Disney World, it was there in abundance. I can certainly see why the week between Christmas and New Year's is the busiest week of the year for them.

### **Attitude and Change**

Everywhere you look, people are happy...they are enjoying themselves and spreading that attitude towards others. They are going through the attractions, seeing the characters and reliving memories from their childhood, and rediscovering the joy of their youth. They see the programs like "Fantasmic" and "Illuminations" and become inspired by sharing the awesome spectacle with thousands of people, and by the realization that they can create and live their dreams if they want to; after all, they are standing in the very result of one man's creative dreams. I hope that this trip has inspired our students to become more interested in the cultures of the world, to create more, to dream more, to LIVE...more.

