

Brazilian ambassadors receive Shafter tour

By Melissa Hill

Many people gathered under the shaded pavilion at Mannel Park in Shafter on Sept. 17, enjoying a late morning brunch and swapping stories of travel and family.

Slowly, the voices began to fade as the sounds of a strumming guitar and the light beating of small drums melted into the light melody of Portuguese folk songs began to sound. Many of the 29 ambassadors from Brazil began to sing along, sharing part of their culture with their American hosts.

The ambassadors came to Kern County on Sept. 16 as a part of the Friendship Force International club of Curitiba, Brazil. During their week-long stay, the 29 ambassadors stayed with host families from the Friendship Force of Kern County.

TOUR ON PAGE 7



After enjoying a luncheon in the heart of Mannel Park on Sept. 17, 29 ambassadors from Brazil who stayed in Kern County last week posed with members of the Kern County Friendship Force Chapter and their host families..

TOUR FROM PAGE 1

According to Patricia Goossen, member of the Friendship Force Kern County, seven of the ambassadors, including three children, stayed in Shafter with the Goossens and George and Sandra Larson. Four others stayed in Wasco with Marie Krause.

While in Kern County, the ambassadors had a chance to see the best of what Kern County has to offer. After the luncheon on Sept. 17, the group traveled to Weeks Nursery in Wasco to learn about rose cultivation and agriculture.

The ambassadors also attended an official welcoming celebration with the Kern County Board of Supervisors on Sept. 18, and enjoyed an authentic Basque lunch at Woolgrowers Restaurant in Bakersfield. Shafter City Manager John Guinn, Shafter Mayor Cathy

Prout and Councilman Jon Johnston also attended the luncheon at Mannel Park and answered questions about local government.

They also took a day trip up to Sequoia National Park, and spent time at the Kern County Museum learning about the county's history.

"When you travel in a group with Friendship Force, everything is planned out, and you get to see everything from the ground up," said ambassador Linei Petschel. "You don't get that on a tour. You get to see beautiful things while on a tour but you get to meet the people. We get to see how the people here live."

Linei traveled to Shafter with her husband Peter, and are staying with the Larsons. Both Peter and Linei say their home

in Curitiba, Brazil is very different than life is in Shafter. Curitiba is the capital city of the Brazilian state of Parana, and is very crowded and had a lot of traffic. Although Curitiba is greener than other cities in the country, Linei says Shafter is very tranquil, organized and clean.

"The people are very nice. Whatever happens is going to be fun or new," said Peter, of what he expected of his time in Shafter.

Now retired, Peter and Linei like to travel with Friendship Force to see the world. They have also been to Columbus, Ohio and Florida. Peter, who flies ultra light airplanes, was fascinated with an air show in Lakeland, Fla. The 29 Brazilian ambassadors left Sunday to travel to Hawaii on the next leg of their journey.

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PAGE 1, con't on 7A
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