

# 100 students, 22 countries, one mission

2018-07-18 : 16:40



Participants pose together for the 2018 “Youth Peace Camp” which was held from July 3-9. The camp drew 100 students from 22 countries. /Courtesy of Ned Forney

By Ned Forney

Early this month, students from around the world came to Seoul as guests of the Korean government.

Invited by the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs to participate in the 2018 “Youth Peace Camp,” a program celebrating its 10th year, these young men and women, most of them in their 20s, spent a week in Korea from July 3-9 enjoying what was for most their first trip to the peninsula. Their enthusiasm and gratitude were contagious.

Since 2009, young people who have a relative (usually a grandfather) who served during the Korean War have visited Seoul for an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn about the country where their grandfathers fought so many years ago.

### **Miracle on the Han**

During this year's camp, which was run by MPVA officials, student volunteers from the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, and a team of organizers from TN Korea, the participants toured the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the Joint Security Area (JSA), visited the National Cemetery and the War Memorial of Korea, and experienced the excitement, energy, and vitality of Seoul.

They walked the city, talked with Koreans, enjoyed Korean food, and listened to traditional Korean music and K-pop. In a nutshell, they witnessed, firsthand, the Miracle on the Han. They were impressed.

The people and places they observed throughout the week were a stark contrast to images in their history books. The poverty, death, and destruction of the early 1950s were gone, replaced instead by wealth, vitality, and growth.

Seoul and its people fascinated them. Every student I spoke with said that his or her grandfather would be proud of what the hardworking Koreans have accomplished since securing their freedom in 1953.

### **The F.U.T.U.R.E**

But the main focus of the program isn't the past. It's the future, a future of peace on the Korean Peninsula and, ultimately, around the world. Each day during the program a specific theme was highlighted: friendship, understand, tribute, unite, revolution, and echo (F.U.T.U.R.E).

And the approach worked. The students took their daily assignments, projects, and responsibilities seriously. They reflected on the theme of the day, and the peace process in Korea and their role in it.

They were inquisitive about, and empathetic towards, their Korean hosts and one another. For most of the students it was their first time to meet, live, and work in an eclectic, international group. Not surprisingly, they thrived.

### **Mission Accomplished**

On the final day of the program, student teams gave presentations on what they experienced, learned, and wanted to remember about their visit to Korea. They talked about the Korean War; they talked about the incredible sacrifices made by U.N. and ROK soldiers; they talked about the future; and most importantly, they talked about peace.

There's no doubt that they will always remember their time in Korea, the friends they made here, and the program's theme of promoting harmony on the Korean Peninsula and throughout the world. Mission accomplished.



*Ned Forney (ned@nedforney.com) lives in Seoul, where he is writing a book on the Chosin Reservoir Campaign and Hungnam Evacuation.*