

Cecilton students form enormous 'living flag'

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What has 628 legs and is red, white and blue all over?

On Tuesday morning, it was an American flag that the students at Cecilton Elementary School built with the help of the American Flag Foundation.

The 27th-annual Living American Flag Program, a project the foundation tours around the state, made its first stop in Cecil County this year.

Students lined up in rows holding colored placards above their heads to form a flag while a photographer captured the scene from an airplane.

For foundation President John Butler, the preparation and work to organize 314 elementary school students was worth it.

"Their smiles are what this is all about," Butler said. "Being a part of something that is bigger than yourself."

The American Flag Foundation was created in 1982 as a non-profit organization that encourages patriotism in Maryland through education and outreach programs focused on the American flag.

This is only the second year that the project has reached out to public schools. Previously, the foundation brought school groups to Fort McHenry in Baltimore to form the living flags. But more recently, they have taken the project on the road in an effort to save schools money, program chairman Paul Rose said.

The first living flag was formed in 1914 by 6,500 Baltimore students wearing red, white and blue robes in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the British bombardment on Fort McHenry in the War of 1812.

That attack inspired Francis Scott Key's poem, "The Defense of Fort McHenry," which would later become the national anthem when it was put to music.



CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY JAKE OWENS

The 314 students at Cecilton Elementary School formed a "living" flag Tuesday as part of the 27th-annual Living American Flag Program, a project the American Flag Foundation tours around the state each year. editors_pick



That history influenced Cecilton fifth-grader Stephen Lemerand, who was named the winner of an essay contest among the county's elementary school students. He was rewarded with a trip to a Baltimore Orioles game.

His essay outlined the symbolism of the flag's stripes, stars and colors, as well as its place in history.

"It represents and symbolizes so much about our nation," Lemerand wrote. "I strongly believe that everyone should show respect towards it."

Students also watched presentations by the Cecil County Tourism Heritage Troupe, who portrayed county residents from the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period, including Kitty Knight who persuaded British Admiral George Cockburn not to burn down part of Georgetown during the War of 1812.

Principal Gail Mink said the day turned out to be both a celebration and a learning opportunity. "I hope that our fourth- and fifth-graders really took something away from our celebration today because they are studying the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 in their social studies curriculum," she said. "I think the day also fostered a sense of pride and unity in our students."

For the foundation, the living flag project is an important part of educating new generations about their country and its flag.

"It's important to teach our children to have respect for their flag and country, and in order to do that you have to start when they're in elementary school," Butler said.