

Crockett students talk to American Oarsmen

About 50 middle school youngsters got a chance to talk via satellite phone

BY RUTH CAMPBELL

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After following them on Twitter for the past month and half, about 50 Crockett Middle School students got a chance to talk via satellite phone Wednesday with a member of the American Oarsmen, a team of Texans that participated in the 2016 Talikser Whisky Atlantic Challenge.

The squad included Brian Krauskopf of Houston, Mike Matson of Missouri City, Texas, and David Alviar of Houston. The 3,000-mile journey took the team from the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa to Antigua.

Matson answered students' questions as they were getting close to the end of the race, which included 12 boats total that had anywhere from one to four rowers.

The American Oarsmen's craft was called the Anne, had sleeping quarters in front and was self-righting. The Anne had two support yachts, but they were there as a last resort for rescue in case of severe sea sickness or damage to the boat.

Matson said the biggest challenges were boredom, fixing things that broke, stashing food so they didn't eat it all too fast and the toll the rowing, blisters, open wounds, heat, salt and constant wetness took on the team.

"You're never really dry," Matson said. He added that scenery had been "ocean, ocean, ocean" with some cloudy and rainy days thrown in.

He said the crew was lucky because all three of them hadn't had to get in the cabin at the same time, which would have been cramped.

Matson said the crew had a close encounter with a shipping container, saw dolphins, a large sea turtle and whales. He added that the stars were breathtaking at night.

"There was a lot of really, really cool wildlife," he said. He added that he would probably make the journey again, but not over the Christmas holidays because it was hard to be away from his family.

around to ask their questions. Students at the campus also had a chance to talk to the American Oarsmen via Skype before they started the race.

"I thought it was really cool that it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to talk to somebody who just used a rowboat to go over the Atlantic Ocean," 15-year-old eighthgrader Francisco Chavez said.

Thirteen-year-old eighthgrader Seth Regaldo said he thought it was really interesting to talk to the rowers because it gave him a firsthand look at exploration.

"I love the discovery part, just being able to see what it's like, really seeing the challenges and things that you have to go through to do something like that," Regaldo added.

Josalyn Lopez-Carrasco, 13, and Sheanna Poucher, 15, both eighth-graders, said they would like to take a similar journey and they wouldn't mind being in close quarters.

Poucher said a trip like the American Oarsmen took would fit in with her future plans to be a marine biologist. Poucher said she would like to see the sea creatures the rowers did.

"I think it'd be cool to actually get to see that in real life," she said.

Chief Innovation Officer Jason Osborne said told students this was a way to interact with real-life explorers and he hoped their cherished the experience and would keep following them. He said he's hoping to get one of the American Oarsmen to speak to students at Ector County Independent School District.



Matson said the last time he talked to his family was early December. As he spoke to students Wednesday, he said his wife and two children were on their way to see him in Antigua and he would arrive at the island in the next few hours. He said the last time he talked to his family was at the beginning of December.

Ector County ISD Science Coordinator Ashley Bryant holds the phone while Crockett Middle School students talk to members of the American Oarsmen, a team of Texans rowing across the Atlantic in their craft ‘Anne’ competing in the 2016 Talikser Whiskey Atlantic Challenge, Wednesday morning.

“I definitely did miss them, but this was something that was worth it,” Matson said.

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Because of technical glitches, the phone call connected in the hallway outside the Crockett library, so the students gathered

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