

Families greet choral group
By Jamie Kelly, Times Staff Writer

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KEN KOONS/STAFF PHOTO



Members of the Children's Chorus of Carroll County came home Wednesday night greeting family members at the park and ride on Md. 97.

At 7:35 p.m., cries of "Bus!" went up through the Park and Ride lot in Westminster.

The buses were 20 minutes later than expected, but for the members of the Children's Chorus of Carroll County and their loved ones, that was a minor detail. They'd spent 11 days apart already. A few more minutes just heightened the anticipation.

Twenty-four members of "Voce Viaggio" - Italian for "Traveling Voices" - visited Estonia, Finland and Sweden as part the Sister City Partnership program between Westminster and Paide, Estonia.

Some of the families had been waiting for a while. A group of five parents stood by their cars and chatted, waiting for the buses. Glenn DeLoria said as soon as he heard the plane had touched down, he left his home in Eldersburg and headed to the parking lot.

As the first members of the chorus got off the bus, they were greeted with cheers and applause. And by the time all of them had disembarked, family members had streamed up to give them hugs, filling the lot with tearful hellos.

Jim Thompson was with two of his daughters, 13-year-old Corinne and 10-year-old Carlin, waiting for their sister Moira, 12, and his wife, Dianne. The family had kept in touch by e-mail, he said, and those who stayed behind had already gotten a lot of pictures from the trip.

When she saw the buses pulling in, Carlin ran to the side of the road and jumped up and down, waving her arms in greeting. When her mother got off the bus, Carlin helped to carry luggage to their minivan.

"Oh, my gosh, it was amazing," Dianne Thompson said of the trip.

Laura Woodruff, 12, said it was a learning experience for her.

"It showed me to think outside America," she said. "It really opened my eyes."

The group liked more than the Estonian culture.

"I liked the weather better there than here," said Amy DeLoria, 13. Even just before 8 p.m., it was still muggy.

But, she said, she was glad to be home, so she could sleep in her own bed.

She said she had a good time on the trip.

"It was really cool," she said.

The trip through Finland, Estonia and Sweden went smoothly, according to Diane Jones, executive director of the chorus. They got to see three distinct cultures, she said.

"We did a lot of singing," she said.

Jim Thompson said his wife and daughter e-mailed him a story about Estonia. The chorus had been in a restaurant and started to sing the Estonian national anthem. Everyone in the restaurant stood, he said.

"They're very patriotic," he said.

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