

Ms. Griffin, tear down this wall!

German teacher helps North County students to mark anniversary of fall of Berlin Wall

By SEAN PATRICK NORRIS
Staff Writer

Katrina Griffin wanted her students to understand the pain of a division that afflicted a continent for 28 years.

So to diversify what she saw as a sagging curriculum, the German teacher at North County High School got her students actively involved in history.

On Thursday night, at around 6 p.m., the German 3 class erected a wall in the middle of a busy school passageway to mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

"A lot of kids want to run through the wall and tear it down, but that's kind of what you want," Griffin said.

With no warning students constructed the wall from tables, paper, cardboard and tape. It effectively annoyed and dismayed the school's population as the walked into the building yesterday.

"Someone asked me if they could just run right through it. I said, 'Yea have fun with that.' Concession!" joked student Sharon Brown.

Griffin got the idea when she

heard students at University of Maryland campuses and Johns Hopkins University were building commemorative walls.

"I liked that we did it overnight because that is how it happened in Germany," student Mason Clegg said.

Griffin also saw the wall as a way to involve other disciplines. The wall was adorned with art provided by the school's Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics art program, and another student gave a presentation about the wall in their government class.

"We gave the art students some photos of what the wall looked like and this is what they did. I think it looks great," Griffin said.

The real Berlin Wall was built by communist East Germany on Aug. 13, 1961. It consisted of multiple fences, guard towers, smooth surfaces for footprint tracking, tank barriers, lights and finally the wall. Its purpose was to isolate the portion of the city controlled by West Germany, the United States and its European allies.

The wall was fortified between 1974 and 1976 with the additions of guard dogs and stationary automatic weapons. Over the years, 100 to 200 people were killed as they tried to cross the barrier into the free portion of the city.

On June 12, 1987, President Ronald Reagan gave his "Tear down this wall" speech, urging Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev to



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Katrina Griffin with her German 3 class standing before a faux Berlin Wall they built in a lobby at North County High School. Griffin and her students assembled the wall after school Thursday without alerting students. On Friday, students expressed their frustrations with the wall, something Griffin compared to the feeling Berliners had when the famous wall was constructed between East and West Berlin in Germany.

open communist Europe to the rest of the war. During a revolutionary phase that swept communist Europe two years later, the wall was demolished on Nov. 9, 1989.

North County's wall is accompanied by several dioramas explaining the history of the Berlin Wall. Some of the photos were contributed by faculty who visited the Cold War landmark before and after its destruction. It also included a display of actual pieces of the wall.

Students spent the day walking by, asking questions and sometimes trying to destroy it.

"A lot of students are confused about it. One kid asked me, 'What's Berlin?'" student Matt Rager said. "I was excited because I love to problem solve and build things. It actually gives you the experience instead of just reading."

The class dismantled the wall shortly after fourth period. Dan Nataf, a political science professor at the Anne Arundel Community College, was impressed by the project.

"I think it's nobly inspired, certainly it makes them think

what it would be to have a wall to separate one part of the campus," Nataf said.

"The inconvenience that it poses would be similar to the inconvenience it posed to the people who wanted to travel freely between East and West Berlin. It's hard to impress upon a group of people who were not yet alive the impact of a wall in the middle of a city and how morose that situation was."

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