

The Day

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Back Home, Joy And Celebration

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After the oaths of office, the speeches, the music and the poems, the people who gathered at the Shaw Mansion in New London to witness Barack Obama's inauguration on television stood and, with their hands over their hearts, sang the National Anthem.

And they didn't just mumble the words and then shout out the last line as fans often do at sporting events. No, this diverse group of locals, young and old, black and white, sang "The Star Spangled Banner."

"This is a great setting. To be surrounded by our history and see history in the making ... it's a day to be with people," said Michael Langlois of New London, one of about 35 who gathered at the more than 250-year-old house for an inauguration celebration.

Guests stood and cheered at the first glimpse of Obama on the big screen and murmured when George W. Bush and Dick Cheney were introduced.



"Bye-bye, Dick" someone mumbled when Joe Biden took the vice presidential oath.

The New London County Historical Society hosted the event, bringing in a flat-screen television and placing it atop a dropleaf table at which George Washington may have sat. The darkened living room that once belonged to the Shaw and Perkins families was filled with the glow of the television.

"For this place, it's amazing," Mac Pope, a member of the historical society board, said of the turnout. He was among those who dabbed at their eyes during Obama's address.

"It was emotional," he said. "It was a good speech. It was strong."

- KATHLEEN EDGECOMB

Goose bumps for school kids

Without any prompting, the 21 students in Grace DeGroot's fourth-grade class stood up, held their hands over their hearts and started singing the National Anthem that played on television at the end of Tuesday's inauguration.

The excitement and the patriotism made its way to the Lillie B. Haynes Elementary School in East Lyme. Students and teachers, many wearing red, white and blue outfits, took time out to watch the broadcast of Barack Obama being sworn in.

DeGrooth asked her students what they thought of it.

"I liked his speech because it gave me goose bumps," said student Corinne Lucas, sitting on the floor with some of her classmates in front of the room's television.

Throughout the ceremony, DeGrooth quizzed her students about how the Constitution and inauguration are related and pointed out to them who was being shown on the television.

As Obama finished taking the oath of office and the millions of people shown on television began to applaud, DeGrooth's students cheered, clapped and hummed along with the sounds of "Hail to the Chief."

Later in the afternoon, the school held its own version of an inaugural parade with students carrying the flag and some wearing Uncle Sam hats. During a ceremony in the school's auditorium, students explained the meaning of the inauguration and what it means to take an oath.

Then, the students all took an oath promising to be kind, respectful and responsible.

DeGrooth said it's a little difficult trying to convey such a historic moment to a group of children who are old enough to only know one president.

"It's all a different perspective," she said. "This is going to be the norm for them. The most important thing is the fact that they know that anybody has the right to become president within the boundaries of the constitution."

- MICHAEL NAUGHTON

'A long time coming'

At the Garde Arts Center in downtown New London, where the inauguration ceremony was broadcast on the big screen, schoolchildren, businesspeople and retirees roared, clapped and rose to their feet as they got their first glimpse of President Obama. Families pushed strollers into the theater and cameras flashed.

They chanted "Obama" along with the crowd at the national Mall and across the nation, then settled into a respectful silence to listen to the songs, prayers and speeches.

"It inspired me to believe I can do anything," said Demetrius Hernandez, an eighth-grader from the ISAAC school, as he filed out of the theater with his classmates.

Cecelia Baxter, an older woman from New London, said she came to be part of history.

She watched the children in the crowd, who knew when to cheer and when to listen.

"Those small black children will never know what their parents and grandparents went through," she said. "Those struggles will fade away into the distance. This is a long time coming."

Bud Mcalister, a local activist, listed a number of initiatives he believes can now go forward.

"We're going to take on homelessness, the high cost of energy, universal health care, recycling," he said. And he was just getting started.

"I keep saying, 'It doesn't get any better than this,' and then it gets better," he said.

- KAREN FLORIN

A moment to savor

Principal Lou Allen of the Science and Technology Magnet School in New London wanted the school's 280 students to watch the inauguration together because one of Barack Obama's campaign messages stressed unity.

"We wanted to set the stage for that," he said.

Students filed into the auditorium around 11:15 a.m., where Allen, school resource officer Anthony Nolan, Dr. Martin Luther King Scholarship winner Simone Barner and city Recreation Director Tommy Major, a New London High alumnus,

gave short speeches addressing the historic nature of the day.

"My age group, we never thought - we never thought - a black man would be president of the United States," Major said. "Well guess what? Things have changed.

"Each of you have the potential to be someone, and you have to press forward," he said.

Most students stayed in the auditorium to watch the inauguration on a giant screen, while a few went upstairs to the student union to cluster around the flat screen TVs that dot the room.

They got 100-item questionnaires to fill out with prizes for those who answered the greatest number correctly, as well as prizes for artwork and essays they had the option to submit responding to the day's events.

Sophomore John Diaz watched it all through a viewfinder, filming and photographing for a school project. He said he sought classmates who showed their interest on their faces. He said what he saw on the giant auditorium screen made him optimistic.

"I'd say I'm looking forward to the year. I think we need some change. We need to get stuff moving around," Diaz said.

Allen said he planned to continue emphasizing the historic dimension of the inauguration.

"I'm going to hound the kids for the next couple weeks - savor this moment," he said.

- KIRA GOLDENBERG

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Rebecca McBee, left, and Maya Lynne Robinson watch President Barack Obama being sworn in on a large TV screen at the Garde Arts Center in New London. Both women, from New York City, performed onstage as members of Theatre Works in "Color of Justice" prior to the swearing-in ceremony.



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Kindergarten students at Lillie B. Haynes Elementary School in East Lyme join the rest of the student body as they take an oath of good citizenship, part of inauguration festivities Tuesday at the school.



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Tamara Drayton, Shaniece Jones, both of New London, and Rachael Gavin of Old Lyme watch the inaugural activities Tuesday at the Science and Technology Magnet School in New London.



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Kindergarten students march down the halls of Lillie B. Haynes Elementary School as part of the inauguration festivities.



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Shanice Jones of New London reacts when she sees Barack Obama for the first time Tuesday on TV at the Science and Technology Magnet School in New London.