

Buongiorno. Benvenuti ai nostri cari amici italiani. Benvenuti cari studenti, cari professori, benvenuto. Benvenuti a College Hagelstein per la 25esima volta.

Good morning. Welcome to our dear Italian friends. Welcome dear students, welcome dear teachers. Welcome in College Hagelstein for the 25th time. We are delighted to have you with us for the 25th time.

From now on I will go on in English, I apologise for this.

Welcome and good morning to our Flemish students and colleagues as well.

Since this is the 25th visit of Liceo Magrini (or Magrini Marchetti) to College Hagelstein I think this deserves some special attention.

About 25 years ago our science teacher Ignace Nerinckx attended a European conference for schools and there he met one of your former colleagues or teachers, Paolo Bagattini. How they convinced each other we don't know. Maybe it was the prospect of setting up a scientific exchange programme between both school? Maybe it was the idealistic idea of creating opportunities for young people to meet with other young people from a different country? Maybe Paolo was tempted by the taste of our excellent Belgian beers or Ignace by the fine Italian wines? We don't know.

What we do know is that the 29th of March 1992 the first group of students from Gemona del Friuli arrived here at College Hagelstein. It was the start of an exchange programme between both schools which has never been interrupted ever since.

Listing all the places your and our students have visited in those 25 years would really take too much time, but I am sure they discovered lots of places they would like to return to later on.

One part of the exchange programme is scientific and so different scientific research projects were set up: I remember the comparison of the effectiveness of solar panels both in Friuli and in Flanders, the study of water quality in nature reserves in the neighbourhood of both schools, the study of lichens (licheni) and many more.

Maybe the most important thing was that Italian and Flemish students got to know each other's world. With the Italian teachers we have discussed lots of topics: each other's school or educational systems of course, the political situation in both countries (and in Europe and the world), economic, social even philosophical topics. Maybe you, students, talk about different thing, but I am sure you do talk.

A great success of the exchange between both schools has always been the fact that students stay with host families. That way they discover what everyday life is like in each other's country and they learn about simple things, how to eat spaghetti in a real Italian way, for example, or that 'pronto' is not the name of the host family but the specific way you pick the telephone in Italian families.

Here I would like to pay tribute to all Italian families who ever hosted one of our students. By the way they often pamper our students they really setting an example of real hospitality. Without host families the exchange project might not have lasted that long.

I would like to thank all teachers who have cooperated in this enriching exchange project: Paolo, Elisa, Francesco, Rudi, Sandra, Renzo, Gianni and many others. From our side Ignace has not missed a single exchange week, and he has been assisted by many others as well.

For this 25th visit we would like to offer you something.

The plate contains different symbols referring to our village, Sint-Katelijne-Waver. We also wanted to offer you something for you and your colleagues.

I hope this is the start of an interesting week, and at least the weather forecasts sound more Italian style than Flemish. I hope you all will enjoy this 25th visit.