



The United States mural at the 2017 World Rowing Championships at Nathan Benderson Park sees the Statue of Liberty, George Washington, Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Lincoln depicted for the World Rowing Championships at Nathan Benderson Park.

## Students from Manatee, Sarasota counties make art, meet athletes at World Rowing Championships

BY JASON DILL  
[jdill@bradenton.com](mailto:jdill@bradenton.com)

SEPTEMBER 25, 2017 4:45 PM

### SARASOTA

Ireland's iconic Cliffs of Moher rise from the water as a boat with four rowers, each with red hair and wearing tri-colored green, white and red shirts, sits below on the mural that's visible to spectators arriving at the 2017 World Rowing Championships.

This scene is one of many that students from Manatee and Sarasota counties depicted through artwork that's displayed in the spectator parking lot adjacent to the Mall at University Town Center before fans enter Nathan Benderson Park, site of this year's WRC.

As part of the WRC's Adopt a Team program, students from the two counties learned about a specific country competing at this year's event before drawing murals that are now hoisted above the ground and jut around the parking lot to give fans multiple spots to see them from.

Monday was the first of three days for students at Benderson Park for the 2017 WRC. The program, in coordination with Sarasota's non-profit art organization, Embracing Our Differences, and sponsors such as Detwiler's Farm Market and Benderson Development, gives the students a learning opportunity about the world.

"A lot of kids don't get to leave their neighborhoods or get to leave their city or the country," said World Rowing Championships special events and programming manager Stephanie Manzano. "What an amazing opportunity that we have the world coming here to our backyard to Sarasota-Bradenton. But we can bring the world to these kids."

There were small American and Australian flags accompanying some students, while one had two small Japanese flags attached to his baseball cap.

Another had a white cap with a green shamrock on it, showing support for the Irish.

**A LOT OF KIDS DON'T GET TO LEAVE THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS OR GET TO LEAVE THEIR CITY OR THE COUNTRY ... BUT WE CAN BRING THE WORLD TO THESE KIDS.**

World Rowing Championships special events and programming manager Stephanie Manzano

"It's really nice that they're interested in a country that's so far away," Australian rower Caleb Antill said. "I, obviously, have a lot of pride for my country, so it's awesome that kids from all around the world get to learn about our culture and what we're about in Australia."

In the grandstands, most were loudly cheering "U-S-A! U-S-A! U-S-A!" during Monday's races.

"They're never going to forget this week," Sugg Middle School art teacher Karen Meinberg said. "They get here and are like, 'Oh my God, this is huge.' They feel like they're at an NFL game."

Sugg Middle was one of two Manatee County schools to make the trip to Benderson Park on Monday. Sugg produced the Ireland and Czech Republic murals. To get to that point, Meinberg said they picked country names out of a hat, then began watching videos and movies on rowing to understand the sport. Then they researched countries with YouTube videos.



Team Australia greets students that created artwork on display in the spectator parking lot for the 2017 World Rowing Championships at Nathan Benderson Park.

Eventually, students began coming up with ideas. About 100 students turned in designs before a vote was conducted on what was the best, and those that were chosen are in view for spectators taking in the World Rowing Championships this week.

Students from Bradenton's Sugg Middle; Palmetto High; Sarasota's Ashton Elementary, Lakeview Elementary, Alta Vista Elementary, Phillipi Shores Elementary, Wilkinson Elementary, Fruitville Elementary, Tatum Ridge Elementary, Gocio Elementary, Brentwood Elementary and Gulf Gate Elementary; North Port's Cranberry Elementary and Toledo Blade Elementary; Venice's Garden Elementary and Venice Elementary; and Osprey's Pine View School visited Benderson Park on Monday.

Schools are scheduled to continue piling into Benderson Park through Wednesday to see rowing and meet athletes. That includes Johnson Middle, NewGate School, Blackburn Elementary and Visible Men's Academy from Manatee County.

For Team Australia, which met with Venice Elementary students Monday, they already see the splash the artwork has made.

"It's so colorful and it represents a lot of different things from Australia," Antill said.



Bradenton's Sugg Middle School created the Ireland and Czech Republic murals displayed at the spectator parking lot for the 2017 World Rowing Championships at Nathan Benderson Park. **Jason Dill** [jdill@bradenton.com](mailto:jdill@bradenton.com)