



Fiddle player Paul Schlesinger, band leader for Knights of Texas Swing, works up a crowd of Danish students and other visitors at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College.

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Photos by Andy sharp



Roy Carroll, left, steel guitar player for Knights of Texas Swing, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as joins the rest of his group in playing traditional Texas music for a group of Danish students visting Texas for a month. Behind him are guitarist Ray Tesmer, drummer Rick Weiss, fiddle player Paul Schlesinger and bass guitar player John Buehler. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College. While in Texas, the Danish youngsters are getting the opportunity to experience Texas culture at events like this.



A group of high school students (foreground) from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, are pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as they learn some Texas dance steps from Elaine Machu (in glasses, long jeans). The Danish students, left to right (not including Elaine) are Camilla Friis-Jensen, 20, Martin Kamp Larsen, 18, and Daniel Agerholm Johansen, 19. Playing the guitar at far right Ray Tesmer, a member of the Knights of Texas Swing. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College. While in Texas, the Danish youngsters are getting the opportunity to experience Texas culture at events like this.



Mathias W. Madsen, 19, left, one of a group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as he learns some Texas dance steps from dance partner Elaine Machu, right. Providing music in the background are members of Knights of Texas Swing, including Ray Tesmer on guitar and Rick Weiss on drums.



Mathias W. Madsen, 19 (in shirt with skull on it), one of a group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as he learns some Texas chicken dance steps from Donna Schlesinger, left, and Lydia Burow (next to Donna). The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College. While in Texas, the Danish youngsters are getting the opportunity to experience Texas culture at events like this.



Rikke Christiansen (girl in black and white dress), 18, and Sune Westhalen, 18 (next to Rikke, in black shirt) members of a group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, are pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as they join others in learning the chicken dance. Pictured at left, wearing glasses and a black shirt, is Albin Machu, one of the dance teachers for the evening.



Fiddle player Paul Schlesinger, band leader for Knights of Texas Swing, works up a crowd of Danish students and other visitors on Wednesday, October 24, 2012. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College. While in Texas, the Danish youngsters are getting the opportunity to experience Texas culture at events like this.



Kasper Marqvardsen, 19, right, one of a group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as he learns some Texas dance steps from Donna Schlesinger. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College. While in Texas, the Danish youngsters are getting the opportunity to experience Texas culture at events like this.



Mathias Hoejbo Mattson, 18, foreground, one of a group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as he joins fellow Danish students and guests clapping to the Texas music of the Knights of Texas Swing. Mathias was wearing a Foo Fighters t-shirt. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College. While in Texas, the Danish youngsters are getting the opportunity to experience Texas culture at events like this.



Rikke Christiansen (girl in black and white dress), 18, one of a group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as she joins others in learning the chicken dance. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College. While in Texas, the Danish youngsters are getting the opportunity to experience Texas culture at events like this.



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A group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month are pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as they learn some Texas dance steps from Elaine Machu (in glasses, long jeans). The Danish students, left to right (not including Elaine) are Camilla Friis-Jensen, 20, Martin Kamp Larsen, 18, and Daniel Agerholm Johansen, 19. Playing the guitar at far right Ray Tesmer, a member of the Knights of Texas Swing.



Kasper Marqvardsen, 19, right, one of a group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as he learns some Texas dance steps from Donna Schlesinger. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College. While in Texas, the Danish youngsters are getting the opportunity to experience Texas culture at events like this.



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Mathias Hoejbo Mattson, 18, standing at left, one of a group of high school students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as he learns some Texas dance steps from Donna Schlesinger. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College.



John Buehler, bass player for Knights of Texas Swing, is pictured on Wednesday, October 24, 2012 as he helps provide traditional Texas music for a group of students from Denmark visiting Texas for a month. The event was hosted at the Taylor home of Joe O'Connell, an instructor at Austin Community College.

# Taste of Texas served up for Danish teens

By Claire Osborn

American-Statesman Staff

TAYLOR — It all started when an Austin Community College teacher wanted a group of Danish high school students to experience native Texas culture.

Joe O’Connell, an ACC professor who teaches a Texas literature class, took them to eat barbecue in Taylor and listen to live country music at his house. Six years later the tradition continues.

Twenty-one students from the Denmark city of Odense arrived at Louie Mueller Barbecue in Taylor one afternoon in late October to fill their plates with brisket, sausage, beans and potato salad.

It wasn’t like anything they had ever eaten in Denmark, some of them said. “In Denmark the definition of barbecue is fried meat,” said 18-year-old Dion Stokholm.

“The sausage is spicy and the skin is thicker than it is in Denmark but the brisket is nice,” said 19-year-old Rasmus Ellegaard.

While the students ate they commented about what they had learned about Texas. “The most surprising thing is the people,” said 18-year-old Alexander Ferrari Koburg. “When you are in a store aisle and they pass by you they say ‘excuse me,’ and they are very polite,” said Koburg. “We are not like that in Denmark.”

Austin also has bigger cars, less bicyclists and many more fast food restaurants than Odense, the students said. They are studying Texas history, Texas literature, video gaming and speech and have each spent about \$5,000 to spend the month in Texas as part of their curriculum, program organizer Jennifer Burke-Hansen said.

Burke-Hansen is an ex-Texan who lives in Denmark and teaches at the students’ school.

After eating barbecue the students came to O’Connell’s house in Taylor where Paul Schlesinger and his band The Knights of Texas Swing — dressed in cowboy hats and bolo ties — were waiting for them.

The band played several songs, including San Antonio Rose and Waltz Across Texas. O’Connell said the students had been studying “Horseman Pass By” by Larry McMurtry which is set in the 1950s. “This is the music of that era,” he said.

Albin Machu and his wife, Elaine Machu, tried to teach the boys to dance the two-step and the cotton-eyed Joe, but most of the students just wanted to sit and watch. Except for one dance they found familiar — the chicken dance.

All of the students stood up in a circle, flapped their arms and squawked. “That was very funny,” said 19-year-old Kesper Marquardt. “We do it in Denmark at confirmations,” he said.

At one point during the performance Schlesinger played the fiddle behind his back while laying on the floor doing a partial back-bend.

“It was brilliant,” said Lars Tambjerg-Ravn, one of the students’ teachers from Denmark. “I’ve never seen that before.”