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Local

Students travel to Cape Verde, discover democracy and roots

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Three University of Massachusetts students from the Cape Verde Student Alliance traveled this summer to Cape Verde to examine the country's new democracy and their own roots.

"I've been wanting to do this since I was a kid," said junior communications major Malke Gomes. "I was born here, but I'm a Cape Verde descendent. In America, I grew up around a lot of Cape Verdians and Cape Verdian culture. [I wanted] to go and actually see everything I grew up with and learned about here.

"After I graduate, I'd like to go over there for a couple of years and work for a year or two teaching English. Just to give back a little bit," he said.

Along with Gomes, Nicole Roberts, a senior in psychology, and Manuel Alves, a sophomore engineering major also traveled to Cape Verde.

"I didn't know much about Cape Verde until I got [to UMass]," said Roberts. "It was more out of curiosity to see what the heritage is like there, the style of living. Also to find family there."

Alves was born in Cape Verde and spent half his life there.

"I grew up there and I moved here at the age of 10," Alves said. "I was very young in 1975 — when Cape Verde gained independence — about six years old. I was old enough to know what was going on, but I didn't understand it."

Alves explained that before the independence, Cape Verde was a Portuguese colony. "When the government changed I was scared," he said. "It didn't effect me that much, I just heard about it.

"I enjoyed it a lot because when I left I was very young and the impression I left with of Cape Verde was of a place that was very poor and everything was very primitive," Alves said. "When I was there I found out otherwise....back then, there were no roads to go anywhere. So if you had to go to the hospital or you had to mail a letter, you had to go on foot and it took usually half a day to walk there. And now there are cars

everywhere."

The 10 islands that make up the Cape Verde chain lie off the western coast of Africa and were discovered in 1460 by the Portuguese.

Gomes said the first Portuguese settlers included clergy, political exiles, criminals, government officials, Jewish exiles and slaves from West Africa.

"Basically those two cultures formed the Cape Verde culture or Crioulo culture we have today," Gomes said.

Gomes explained that Cape Verde has been under control by PAICV, the Partida Africana Independencia Cape Verde for 15 years. The second party, MPD, Movimento Para Democracy, started early this year and won the country's first free election.

"It was good to see that there were free elections and that it really ran smoothly. Because most of the time when you see countries that have free elections, people are going crazy, wars are starting. I'm just glad to see that there is some kind of change. Fifteen years is a long time to be under one kind of government. I'm anxious to see in 1995, when the next election is, how well this MPD party is going to do," Gomes said.

"While there, we saw the effects of the election, at the time it was written on the walls, 'Vote for PAICV' or 'Vote for MPD,' a lot of things like that," Alves said.

He continued, "[MPD] are starting to do things and haven't done much yet. While we were there they were doing elections for Mayors and things like that. We'll see what happens."

The Cape Verde Student Alliance was founded in 1982 and is located in 401 New Africa House in Lower Central.

"[The Alliance's] purpose is for us to preserve our culture and our history throughout the Five College area, to make people aware on campus and in the Five College area, and also to provide social and economic support for our members," Gomes said.

"Most people come from rural areas and don't know who Cape Verdians are. You tell them Cape Verdian and they think you're from Cape Cod or something like that," Alves said. "We're here to let them know who we are and about our culture."