



The team, sponsored by the Pittsburgh Turkish American Association, represented the United States in the International Children's Festival held in Turkey. From left: Bailey Hospodor, Alayna Cagno, Samantha Pritchard, Nika Gill from Pine-Richland High School, and front row: Katre Soran from Falk School.

Local team takes the stage in Turkey

By Cindy Cusic Micco

Dancing to the sound of a driving beat, five girls take the stage as a crowd of 15,000 cheers a performance broadcast live to Europe and Asia.

The girls are from Pine and Richland. The place is Izmir, Turkey. The event is the International 23rd April Children's Festival.

Katre Soran, Nika Gill, Alayna Cagno, Bailey Hospodor and Samantha Pritchard were dressed in red baseball caps, blue tank tops and white shorts with USA accents to represent the United States with a hip-hop and rock routine.

The invitation came through Katre's father, Dr. Atilla Soran, who is the president of the Pittsburgh Turkish American Association. He accompanied the girls to the festival, along

with Samantha's father, Mike Pritchard, and the dance team's coach, Kosha Oleniacz.

More than 50 countries were represented, with many doing traditional folk dances to represent their countries. Samantha said the dance coach encouraged using hip-hop because it is native to the United States.

"It was cool to do something unexpected," said 10-year-old Katre, who is a student at Falk Elementary Lab School in Oakland. The other girls are freshmen at Pine-Richland High School. "People were surprised."

The children stayed with host families and were entertained with a trip to the zoo, a boat ride and other festivities organized by the Turkish Radio and Television Corp.

Alayna Cagno said she met a lot of people from different cul-

tures. Most asked each other what life was like in their native countries, she said.

Turkish Radio and Television sponsored the trip, explained Katre's mother, Dr. Ozlem Soran. "TRT initiated The International 23rd April Children's Festival in 1979 ... to share the spirit of the festival which unites the children of the world and to show them the way that leads to a future full of peace, friendship, love and understanding for human beings."

Festival performances can be viewed on YouTube. For the American performance, search for the video titled "USA Dance - The 23rd April Children's Festival 2009 Live from Izmir/Turkey."

Freelance writer Cindy Cusic Micco can be reached in care of suburbanliving@post-gazette.com.