



Submitted photo

Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis welcomes fourth-graders from Western Coventry Elementary School to the State House. The students got the rare opportunity to sit on the stairs of the Rotunda, where official press conferences are often held.

Mollis gives Coventry students a backstage tour of State House

PROVIDENCE — Fourth-graders from Western Coventry Elementary School were treated to a backstage tour of the State House recently that included a private visit with Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis.

His office will take more than 10,000 youngsters through the State House this year. The tours are led by specially trained interns from Johnson & Wales University.

"It is important to preserve and discuss the history of our road to independence. This fu-

ture generation of citizens must know our past in order to have the insight they will need to be tomorrow's leaders of our state and our country," said Mollis.

The tour included stops in the Bell Room, where Rhode Island's replica of the Philadelphia Liberty Bell is displayed; the State Room, where Gilbert Stuart's famous portrait of George Washington hangs; and the Rotunda, where visitors can gaze upward at one of the world's largest unsupported domes.

The youngsters even got to peek at one of the state's most historic documents — the Royal Charter of 1663. Granted by King Charles II, the charter guaranteed Rhode Island settlers freedom of religion and the freedom to govern their own colony.

"I think the kids were surprised to learn that Rhode Island may have inspired the Bill of Rights. I hope exposure to documents like this will inspire them to learn more and aspire to be better citizens," said Mollis.