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PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Experienced and Emerging Leaders

Everybody has a highlight of their exchange year, and I have one too. I was selected for the Civic Education workshop in Washington, DC. It was a life-changing experience for me—meeting alumni, NGOs, State Department officials, and students from more than 30 different countries, sharing our views and projects, and becoming good friends with each other.

The week was full of surprises. Getting to meet a lot of people and seeing national monuments was awesome. On one of the days we met our state's members of Congress. As the only one from Vermont, I had a wonderful opportunity to meet Senator Patrick Leahy, currently president pro tempore of the US Senate. A life-changing meet! I got to know him, his perspective, his way of viewing problems and solving them. We discussed democratic principles, current problems, and his future plans for Vermont. It was an eye opener for me as a future leader.

—Haziq (YES, India), hosted by the Page family (VT)

Haziq (India) exchanged ideas with Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT).

Survival Skills Put to the Test

Six PAX students set out with me to learn about "The Lost Ones" and the geology of Death Valley National Park recently. Ranger Bob enlightened all to the fact that only one soul lost his life in Death Valley during the great California Gold Rush of 1849. Everyone enjoyed the varied and unusual geology, including the badlands of Zabriskie Point, the Mesquite Sand Dunes, the mineral rock colors of Artists' Palette, and the salt flats of Badwater, which lies 282 feet below sea level. Survival skills were tested with a race across the flats—the girls won!

—Margaret Hoppe (NV), PAX community coordinator

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Alina (Germany) carries Charlotte (Germany), Marta (Spain) carries Lucia (Spain), and Johny (Czech Republic) carries Munisrau (Malaysia) in a piggyback race.

"Locked Up" in American Culture

Emily (Italy), Abrar (Bangladesh), Robin (Germany), Tarita (Indonesia), Ed (China), Kaitlin (South Africa), and Lily (Sweden) pose "behind bars" in a Fort Pulaski prison cell.

One thing exchange students really love a lot is traveling to new places. We are a group of exchange students living around Charlotte with our loving and sweet coordinator, Ms. Tracy to guide us. We take small trips at times and the fact that we all come from different countries with different languages and cultural backgrounds makes the trips we take even more fun.

So we all got really excited when Ms. Tracy broke the news that we were going to go to Savannah and Tybee Island for the weekend.

On the first day, we explored the beach on the east coast. It was great to lie down on the beach under the sun. Then we were off to Fort Pulaski, which is a historic site. The fort took 18 years to build and was used during the Civil War. It's like a castle with a huge moat, complete with alligators, a portcullis, and a drawbridge. There are barracks, canons, prison cells, etc., and the rangers are very friendly and informative explaining everything.

The last day of the trip we all went to downtown Savannah together and had a fun time there shopping, walking, trying out good food, and enjoying ourselves before we set home.

—Abrar (YES, Bangladesh) hosted by the Lamp family (SC)

The Joke's on Who?

On April 1, Stine, our PAX student from Norway, wanted to play an April Fools' Day prank on her parents! Neither Stine nor I are good at fibbing, but finally an idea did form.

Stine was scheduled to leave on April 2 for Hawaii as part of her exchange experience. During this quarter of the school year, she had missed a few classes, but we had already received permission from the guidance counselor to miss the extra school days for the Hawaii trip. Stine and I thought it might be amusing if we happened to "receive a letter" from the school stating that Stine has missed too many days to go to Hawaii.

I sent a Facebook message to Stine's mom explaining the (phony) situation and asked if she could Skype with us as soon as possible as we needed to figure out how to fix the situation. Shortly after my message, Stine got a Skype call from her mom. I don't know how we both managed to do it, but we kept straight faces for a good five minutes! Stine's parents definitely looked worried, but we couldn't let them stress too much, so we let the cat out of the bag. I can't explain the looks of relief and humor on her mom's and dad's faces! It was the best April Fools' Day joke I've played a part in!

—Sabrina Hickey (IN), host mom of Stine (Norway)

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My Special Host Sister

When I first learned about my little host sister, Randi Ann, who has Down syndrome, I was really excited and could not have been happier about living with her. I have grown and learned so much with Randi Ann. She calls me her "sissy."

When I come home from school or softball practice, Randi Ann always has a huge smile on her face, and so do I because she makes me happy. Whenever I'm not home, she asks for me over and over again.

Randi Ann cannot do as many things as other children her age, but she has activities she does every day such as watching movies, singing and dancing in the car, and swinging outside. It is amazing how she watches movies and then remembers the whole movie in her head and starts repeating it. She even copies the voices!

I hope the next exchange student my host family takes will get along with Randi Ann as well as I do, because I think it is so easy to get along with her. It breaks my heart to think about leaving her.

I love that special little Randi Ann so much!

—Alina (Germany), hosted by the Avery-Grassi family (NV)

Alina and Randi Ann just make each other smile.

Learning, Drawing, Celebrating!

Seri from Indonesia portrays what she has learned during her exchange year via original cartoons before getting the entire school to throw a party for her video!

With singing and dancing school officials accompanied by cheerleaders and back flipping students, you do not want to miss this production!

—Seri (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Barnett family (TX)

A Night to Remember

All those American teenage movies make anyone imagine that prom is "the coolest thing." Well, you can't really tell until you live it yourself. Fortunately I got that chance, getting asked by one of the nicest and most popular guys at my school. Every girl's dream, right?

Our date day was filled with laughs and fun, but the dance at night couldn't have gone better. My date got designated to be the Prom King! Not sure if that makes me a queen, but I sure felt like it.

Gotta say, those American movies are not that far from reality!

—Alexia (Spain), hosted by the Nelson family (UT)

Alexia (Spain) dances with Prom King Devin Porter.

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A Big Role for a Talented Dutchman!

On four consecutive nights, our very own Pieter (Netherlands) captured the attention of hundreds of attendees with his magnificent rendition of Seymour, lead character in "Little Shop of Horrors." On stage for almost the entire two-hour performance, Pieter impressed all with his heartfelt solos and his superior acting skills. We knew Pieter would be good, but we did not know he would be AWESOME! Kudos for all of the hard work and a job well done!

—Donald Leonard (NV), host father of Pieter (Netherlands)

Food, Glorious Food!

On March 29, Tanalian School hosted their second annual International Food Festival. Tamerlan, a FLEX student from Kazakhstan, was happy to share his delicious soup of cabbage, potatoes, and meat—traditionally horse! He said with the help of his host mom, it tasted pretty similar to what he eats at home. Muneeb, a YES student from Pakistan, assured community members that he had not made his chicken dish as spicy as he would eat it at home. When asked about the food he had prepared, he admitted it was not as good as his mom's, but it was still pretty tasty.

Both students did a great job representing their countries. Community members were delighted in the differences and similarities in dining across cultures.

—Sonnet Smith (AK), PAX community coordinator

Muneeb (YES, Pakistan) offers a taste of his native land.

Zhakirah (Indonesia), bottom row, fourth from the left, with the winning symphonic choir

Singing in Perfect Harmony

We have two-and-a-half months left, but I know we all have had unforgettable experiences, so let me share one of mine! I joined symphonic choir at my school. I was so happy that I made it because we needed to audition first. Around last month, we did a choir contest. And if we got perfect score, we could make it to the state contest. And guess what? We got perfect score! All the judges liked our performance. I was so proud of my choir, and I can't wait for the state competition. My advice for everyone who wants to be exchange student is don't be afraid to try anything new!

—Zhakirah (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Whittaker family (OH)

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Volunteering for the American Red Cross

My wife Sissy and I have hosted 14 foreign exchange students at our home. In addition to serving as host parents, I am an American Red Cross volunteer in the area of Disaster Services and operate the Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV).

Since the American Red Cross is part of the world's largest volunteer network found in 187 countries, I thought why not collaborate with a group of foreign exchange students and a day of volunteering?

Students from various countries joined together February 22 to check supplies and water freshness dates, take inventory on cots and blankets, and clean and restock two ERVs and a pick-up truck as part of disaster preparedness for the Northeast Mississippi Chapter office.

Some of the students had never participated in such a project and others were just vaguely familiar with what was taking place. But they all worked together and fully accomplished their mission in cooperation with good work ethic, some fun, and of course, pizza!

Exchange students in Mississippi volunteered for the American Red Cross.

Many of the students said they were unfamiliar with the idea of volunteering, or with an organization that performed these duties through volunteering in their country. It also showed them that with people of various backgrounds, talents, and skill levels, all were important and all were valuable.

—Joe Lukas (MS),
host dad of Tereza (Czech Republic)

Munisrau (Malaysia), Kristina (Slovakia), Rocio (Spain), Johanna (Germany), Tatiana (Krygystan), Alina (Germany), Lucia (Spain), Johny (Czech Republic), Charlotte (Germany), Jan (Germany), and seated, Andrei (Moldova) take a break from a beautiful hike.

God's Country Greets PAX Students

I had the privilege of accompanying nine PAX students from Nevada, two from Utah, and their corresponding community coordinators (Margaret Hoppe (NV) and Laurel Paul (UT)) for scenic hiking and challenging rock scrambling along the Emerald Pools Trail at Zion National Park.

Sadly, the Utah students had to leave early, but the Nevada kids had plenty of time to enjoy this national treasure. After an overnight stay, six students and their coordinator headed out for a trail ride in the rain.

Poor weather spoiled plans for another hike, but everyone was awed by the splendor and majesty of the southern Utah landscape—in the rain, hail, and even snow. It is indeed God's Country!

—Scott Knox (NV), host father of Jan "Johny" (Czech Republic) and Munisrau (YES, Malaysia)

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Endless Gratitude

Students, you are almost finished with your time here in the United States. Do you remember how it felt when you got off the plane from your home, when you met your new family for the first time, when you saw where you were going to live, when you realized that you were going to stay in a new land—quite different from yours—for many months? You may have counted the days until you could go back to your own, familiar home. Now, you are counting the days for a different reason.

Saying goodbye is difficult. You have made some wonderful friends. You have learned to love a family that took you in. You have more memories than you can put in a shoe box or save in a camera. How do you say thank you to those who helped you to become stronger, more understanding, and more self-reliant? How do you tell them how much they have done for you?

If you give something that you have made or that represents you, it will be cherished forever. Let me suggest giving a picture book of your year or sending special handwritten notes. How about creating a gift that is really meaningful—like writing a poem or painting a picture? Preparing a meal for your family and friends would also be a way to celebrate and share your appreciation.

To thank the community, the school, and your friends and family, a letter to the editor of the newspaper expressing gratitude for their support would also be wonderful. Finally, place a picture of yourself on your pillow when you leave the house for the last time to go to the airport.

You have been a part of the lives of those you have met and every one of those people has changed you in some way. Make a "to do" list, so that your final days are not so filled that you miss spending time with those people you love. Leaving is inevitable. Fill your last days with kindness.

—Patricia E. Smith, Ph.D.
PAX, Support and Supervision Manager

Learning to Lead

Jan (Germany) and Munisrau (YES, Malaysia) participated in a three-day overnight leadership training retreat at Mt. Potosi near Las Vegas, NV, to learn leadership skills. Along with 22 local high school students, Jan and Munisrau became members of small group "families" and worked with facilitators to gain an understanding of their individual strengths and weaknesses; to solve challenges cooperatively; and to learn about personal leadership styles through sharing and interaction activities. The leadership retreat took place in the beautiful surroundings of Toyaibe National Forest. We're so happy that these two had this special growth opportunity while here!

—Gwen Harvey (NV), host mother of Jan (Germany)

Jan joins fellow budding leaders.

Conquering the Adjustment Cycle with a Positive Attitude

Shortly after arriving this year, Malek made this phenomenal video, which presents what she loves about the US and the state of Washington. Her energy and spirit are inspiring. If you've ever seen an exchange student on a honeymoon high, you'll recognize this in Malek—only she's never come down!

She is a fabulous example of a student who has truly pushed herself, recognizing that the adjustment cycle need not be so daunting if you have a positive attitude. PAX is very happy to finally share this video with you—perhaps, the best video you have never seen!

Malek (YES, Tunisia), hosted by the Hermann family (WA)

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Host Parents: Goodbye Will Come Sooner than You Think

As your student's departure nears, you will soon no doubt be experiencing a range of emotions. We'd like to share some observations about this process, what it entails, and how it affects us all.

Both you and your student may need a lot of support from one another during this time of transition. Saying goodbye can be difficult. When separation is imminent, people often unconsciously pull away from one another in order to make the imminent separation easier. This may manifest itself in your student's behavior in different ways: sulkiness, withdrawal, displays of anger, poor performance, etc. Like your student and for the same reasons, members of your family may also begin to focus a bit more inwardly.

Another possibility is that your student may begin to feel that semester or year-long goals have not been achieved. This can lead to disappointment. Now may be a good time to talk about possible goals for the remainder of their time here.

On the whole, and as we're sure you are aware, honest communication can help a great deal. Explore and validate each other's feelings of possible disappointment, anxiety, excitement, anticipation, loss, or sadness. Tell each other what you'll miss most after you've said goodbye. Share how you've changed and grown during this time.

Before it's too late, perhaps you want to plan a farewell party together, prepare a few favorite meals, revisit some of your favorite places, or make little mementos as goodbye presents. Depending on your student's departure date, it may feel too soon to begin considering these things, but we would like to emphasize that the time is now. When you look back, you will be very glad you took advantage of the concluding period of this powerful experience.

—The PAX support and supervision team

Still Hosting After a Decade!

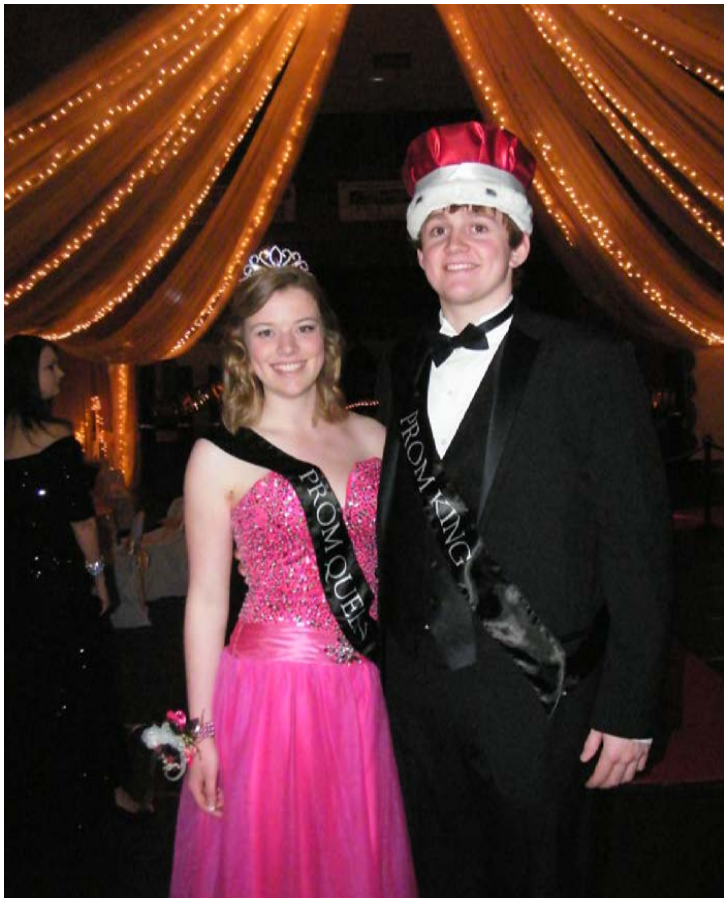
We hadn't planned on hosting this year, but when I started reading profiles, it became clear that one of them had to come to live with us.

We picked Orane from Belgium, and it has been the best choice we have ever made! When she arrived, we fell in love with her. She is so down to earth and funny, not to mention very intelligent. She has jumped into life here with both feet. She is not afraid to help and always asks what she can do to help. She will even text me and ask if she can start supper.

She has been a cheerleader at school for football, volleyball, and both girls' and boys' basketball. In speech and drama, Orane and her partner competed in Classical Duo and placed 5th at the state competition! She and her partner placed 2nd in state at the FCCLA convention, qualifying them for the national competition in San Antonio, TX! Orane was also just crowned Prom Queen and has done all of the above while earning straight A's.

I am going to be so lost when she returns to Belgium and hope someday we will be able to meet her family. Orane is the 10th student we have hosted, and we still keep in contact with most of them. I would recommend hosting a student to anyone. We have learned and grown so much over the years.

—Marlene and Steve Koziara, (MT), host parents of Orane (Belgium)



Prom Queen Orane (Belgium) poses with the Prom King, Payden.

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As Seen in Social Media

Click on any image to view full post or watch video

Get Involved in International Exchange!

Whether you have considered hosting a high school exchange student, sending your teen abroad, having an exchange student at your school, working locally to support an international student, or you simply want to learn more about what it is we do, feel free to give us a call at **800.555.6211**. We'll put you in touch with the regional director for your area and see if there isn't a way to either begin or deepen your relationship with PAX and international educational and cultural exchange.

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