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PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Christmas Traditions Abound

YES students in Portland, OR, made a trip to Scanfest to share their Christmas wishes with Santa. They experienced the crowning of the Lucia Bride, a Swedish custom of choosing a girl honored to wear a crown of candles and represent the Scandinavian community for the next year. They watched folk dancers and choirs perform, saw Scandinavian crafts, and ate traditional foods while watching a Scandinavian meatball-eating contest. The students felt they had learned things about traditional cultures of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Estonia—all while in the US!

—Mimi Sanders (OR), community coordinator

Santa takes time out from his busy schedule to pose with (from left to right) Mimi, Suleyman (YES, Turkey), Deniz (YES, Turkey), Ari (YES, Indonesia), Betul (YES, Turkey), and PAX welcome representative Janet Trygstad.

A Brazilian in the Snow

I believe Rafael, who's Brazilian, wished this snow upon us! This was his first experience with snow, and he wasn't too excited when I woke him up as soon as it started falling. But once it began to accumulate, he enjoyed the adventures of playing in it!

Rafael and CJ (Germany) bundled up to go sledding. Then, my son and his family visited, which meant Rafael experienced his first snowball fight! It didn't last too long—they were soon ready for some hot cocoa and cookies. The snow only lasted three days, and it hasn't returned since. That said, the Bailey family is hoping for a white Christmas!

—Tina Bailey (IN),
host mom of Rafael (Brazil) and CJ (Germany)

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Rafael discovers that snow has its advantages!

International Education Week

IEW Contest Winner: Bela!

I have done seven projects so far, for a total of approximately 2,000 people. I have shared my language, culture, and thoughts to my audiences, who were middle school and high school students, as well as journalists, and I have learned a lot from them too. I'd like to thank YES and PAX for the amazing opportunity you have given to me. I will keep doing projects to share my culture until the end of my exchange year and am submitting this International Education Week report of my work thus far.

—Bela (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Rowland family (FL)

Contest #2 winner Bela (left) poses with fellow PAXers Rania (YES, Tunisia), Alejandra (Mexico), and Sheren (YES, India).

Culture of Kosovo

I gave my presentation in my German class. I was surprised to see that they didn't know a lot about other cultures. I felt proud and honored to be the person that is informing the society about another culture. I learned how good it actually feels to tell others about yourself.

—Migena (YES, Kosovo), hosted by the Dohms family (WI)

Migena explains how Kosovo gained its independence just a few years ago.

Giorgi from Georgia!

This year is getting more and more amazing and full of unforgettable memories. All of my International Education Week audiences seemed surprised and interested in Georgia's culture, environment, location, cuisine, and songs. The best part of my presentation was a Georgian song I performed on guitar. When I finished singing and opened my eyes, I saw them standing and clapping hands with smiley faces. These warm feelings will stay in my heart forever.

—Giorgi (FLEX, Georgia), hosted by the Evenson family (MT)

Giorgi got a standing ovation for his performance!

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International Education Week

Beautiful Bangladesh

I had loads of fun teaching Bengali to American students. Everyone wanted their name to be written in my language!

Giving presentations not only helped the American students learn about Bangladesh but also helped me learn more about my country. It was truly a wonderful experience talking to my curious and genuinely interested peers.

—Fariha (YES, Bangladesh), hosted by the Sprada family (NY)

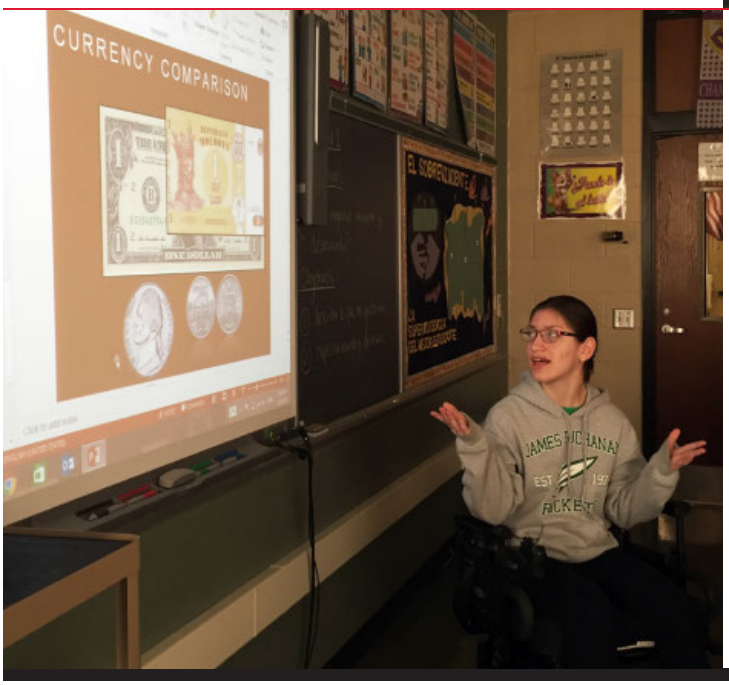
Fariha shows students what Bengali looks like.

Dance Like a Palestinian

International Education Week was amazing for me. I gave three presentations for nearly 600 people. I wore a traditional Palestinian scarf while I talked about my country's interesting history and traditions. I also taught some moves of our traditional dance; it was really fun, and they fell in love with it!

—Abdallah (YES, Palestine), hosted by the Fehrman family (IN)

Abdallah (second from left) teaches a traditional Palestinian dance enjoyed by all.



All Things Moldovan

Giving the International Education Week presentation was so much fun! I was very surprised to see so many people come to look at the presentation about my country. The audience was so interested in what I was saying. They asked questions about how Moldova is and what we do there, what we eat, how we dress, currency, etc.

I'm really glad that I was able to do this. I improved my presentation skills and learned how to engage an audience.

—Victoria (FLEX, Moldova), hosted by the Martin family (PA)

Victoria is right on the money with her presentation.

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International Education Week

Soukaina (seated, center) and her classmates are all smiles after learning about Morocco.

Making Morocco Known

My goal was to present my country to as many new people as possible during International Education Week. I was wearing traditional Moroccan clothes and used PowerPoint to show my home country's location, major cities, history, food, music, religion, architecture, and much more. I played the Moroccan national anthem and taught my audience some basic Arabic words. I am really grateful to share my culture and traditions with my host community.

—Soukaina (YES, Morocco), hosted by the Depriest family (GA)

Muskan's teacher (right) takes a break from the delicious biryani to pose with Muskan and the school princpal.

Presenting Pakistan

During International Education Week, I gave 30 presentations to about 800 people, including town officials! The elementary school students loved the Urdu poems and story time while my high school friends enjoyed learning many different things about my country and culture—including getting to taste Pakistani cuisine that I prepared. This week gave me a chance to discover myself!

—Muskan (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Siik family (NH)

Anastasiia dons a traditional Ukrainian headpiece during her presentations.

Singing Ukraine's Praises

"You never know your level of patriotism until you move to another country far away from home," says Anastasiia. "My presentation helped me to understand that."

Oksana agrees, having literally sung her country's praises while performing *Shche ne vmerly Ukrainy I slava I volya*, or "The glory and the freedom of Ukraine has not yet died," the Ukrainian national anthem.

—Anastasiia and Oksana (FLEX, Ukraine), hosted by the Sanders (IN) and Saeur families (AZ), respectively

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PAX Party Time!

We had a holiday party at a church in Robbinsdale with as many Minnesota host families (13), students (24), and coordinators (3) as could attend. Each student/host family was asked to bring a dish to share from their home country. Oh, so many yummy things to try—hardly any food left over at the end!

Each student introduced themselves and their host family and was asked to answer two questions. First, "What do you miss from your home country?" Then, "Tell us something about your home country we might not know." The highlight was when students played a game, unwrapping a large saran-wrapped ball with small gifts inside (had to wear gloves to make it a little harder). We all had fun making new friends, seeing old ones, and eating foreign food!

—Kris De Mattos, community coordinator (MN)

Brayan (Mexico), Angie (Mexico), Joachim (France), and Caro (Mexico) are all smiles at the PAX holiday party!

Real Men Wear Purple

When my host dad invited me to a Minnesota Vikings professional football game, I was really excited! I was right to be excited too, because it was really fun with a great atmosphere and a giant stadium. Luckily, I have been watching a lot of my high school team's games, so I knew most of the rules. When I was confused, my host dad was glad to explain.

Everyone asks me if it was cold. Yes, especially since I forgot my gloves. But who cares? The most important thing is that the Purple People Eaters prevailed!

—Christoph (Germany),
hosted by the Prochaska family (MN)

Christoph and host dad Mike cheer on the Vikes!

My First Snowfall

When you wake up in the morning and look out
Sky is dark and ground is white.
It's my first snowfall and I go out
I feel in a land of magic and fairytales.
Snow is like kisses from the nature of lord.
So gathered with the family, thanked the lord
For snow, for turkey, for stuffing and lots of pies.
Seized the moment because it's first in life.
Thank the lord for the blessing of exchange.
Exchange is having two homes in life.

—Mehria (YES, Pakistan),
hosted by the Brunner family (IL)

The snow inspired Mehria to write this poem!

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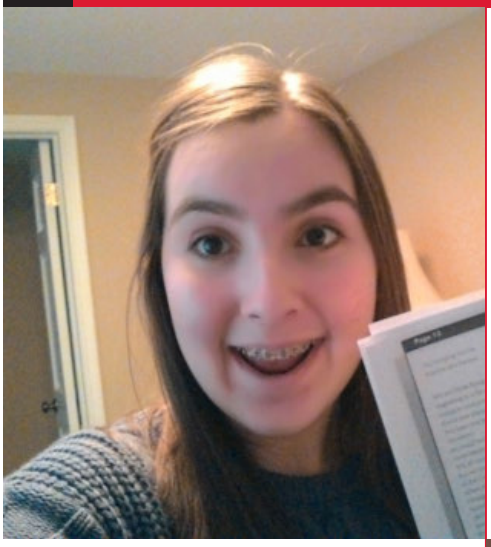

Marina shows the poem she wrote for English class, which was published in the school's literary digest.

Exchanging Smiles

We are birds flying in the sky
Migrating to a faraway land
Trying to overcome a barrier and
Find a new place to stay.
We have not been together for a long time.
However, we could not be more alike or
Be more happy to be together.
We all come from different places,
But we found ourselves
In the United States
Where the leaves change.
Somehow, kids who never met each other,
Can become best friends forever.
Somehow, Brazil, Senegal, Jordan, Israel,
Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Ukraine
Can be the same.
We all smile so much.
We smile because we are happy.
Happy that we found our place.

—Marina (Brazil), hosted by the Arthur family (NY)

Sweet 16 in America!

November 14 was my birthday, and I was very excited because my host family told me that the 16th birthday in the U.S. is a big deal. That's why it is called "sweet sixteen."

That day finally arrived, and my American family and I celebrated by visiting Stone Mountain, a famous park in Atlanta where there is one of the biggest rocks in the world. We went to the top of Stone Mountain and did other fun activities inside the park.

The next day, my host family and some friends went to the best burger restaurant ever, Five Guys. After eating, we went to Infinite Energy Arena to watch a hockey game of the Atlanta Gladiators. I absolutely loved it! Hockey is a great sport, and the Gladiators won the game 4-1. When the game finished, we had the opportunity to meet a couple of the Gladiators and get their autographs.

—Pablo (Spain), hosted by the Sisley Family (GA)

Host sister Elizabeth, friend Evan, Pablo, friends Ben and Hendrik, and host sister Jackie are excited to pose with Atlanta Gladiators Tyler Shiplo and Thomas Frazee.

And the Band Played On...

Minaho (Mina) stepped off the plane and into uniform for the 165-member strong Silverado High School marching band in Las Vegas! She has been lauded for her skills as a musician as well as her ability to learn the band movements across the field.

Host parents Michele and David Walker are proud to have been part of the Senior Walk during the last game of the football season, when band seniors were individually introduced. "We are thrilled to see Mina so involved in band," said Michele. "She's made friends quickly and had an experience she'll never forget. I am really proud of her courage to jump right in."

Mina was also selected for the Las Vegas Honor Band. She'll play in the group's performance at the Smith Center in January.

—Margaret Hoppe (NV), community coordinator

Mina has always felt right at home with her bandmates.

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The Christmas Miracle

This year, my annual cookie project was extra special. Exchange students and I baked for several hours and took the cookies to a nursing home a couple of days later. We take residents from their rooms to the music room, sing carols, and serve Christmas cookies.

While the residents were enjoying our cookies, one lady sat and watched intently, and it seemed like she wanted to talk to the kids. I told the students to go around and tell the senior citizens where they are from.

When I said this, that particular lady said, "I'm from Russia." My response was, "Oh, then meet Artem; he is from Ukraine." But then she said, "I'm from Ukraine!" Artem stepped up and spoke to her in Ukrainian, and she immediately started conversing with him. They talked for 20 minutes, and she was so happy.

Here's the miracle: one of the nurses said, "We have never heard her talk since she has been here!" What an amazing gift!

—Jane Ciancio-Green (NY), community coordinator

Artem connects with a compatriot in an unexpected place.

Nevada PAX Angels on the Job

Santa doesn't come to everyone's house, so seven Nevada PAX angels made sure that Juan, age 12, would have gifts this year. Juan asked for a bike, and we brought him one, and we got him a lot of other cool stuff too.

Two PAX angels, Virginia from Italy and Leah from Germany, couldn't come with us, but they donated money for gifts. The rest of us had lunch together, then started our holiday shopping with our coordinator. We found good prices on jeans, shirts, bright Nike shoes, and a *Star Wars* LEGO set for Juan. We had a lot of fun searching for gifts for this boy we only knew by name, and we were really happy to be able to give him a fun Christmas. We had the luck to come to live in the U.S. with our host families, so we wanted to give back a little bit of our good fortune to a less fortunate American boy. Merry Christmas, Juan, from your PAX angels!

—Ilaria (Italy), hosted by the Nelson family (NV)

PAX Angels Mina (Japan), Inge (Spain), Luca (Germany), Ilaria (Italy), and community coordinator Margaret Hoppe delight in their gifts for Juan.

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As Seen in Social Media

Click on any image to view full post or watch video

We Want to Hear from You!

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**.

Already involved and have something to share for a future issue? Regardless of your relationship to PAX, we are always accepting interesting content (stories, photos, videos, etc.) at paxpress@pax.org.

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