

# Pax Press



## Conquered the Mountain

Always up for a challenge and an adventure, students in Ohio Coordinator Laurie Sciaciba's group hit the ski slopes this January. In the photo are host sister Lyndi Vinson, Franz Klein (Germany), Ilaria Pittaluga (Italy) and host sister Beth Brown.

## Perseverance Leads to Triumph

On my first visit to my new American school, Bastrop High School, to select my classes, I saw these amazing and beautiful photos of marching band students wearing their glamorous uniforms. I said to my host mom, "I want to be among that group." Automatically we went to the office and changed one of my classes so I could be in the marching band.



Every day after school, we rehearsed the steps and how to march at angles and in different styles and designs. But, it was discouraging to me because I didn't know how to march in those ways. I never knew there would be so much to learn and that I would have to stay every day after school to practice. I had thought it would be easy. I started to say to myself that maybe I should quit band.

Fortunately, during the week I started to think about quitting, one boy in the marching band took me aside to teach me all the steps, one by one. He showed me how to go from one angle to the other. He quit his own spot for a whole week and started marching beside me. It was like a miracle when I went home one day after practice and I realized that I memorized all the steps he taught me. I was then able to march by myself.

Today, I am glad that I stayed in band because being in the band gave me a lot of opportunities to visit different stadiums and schools, and above all, to make new friends. In band, we are like a family who helps each other. It would have been the worst mistake if I'd quit band.

Thank you to all my friends who helped and encouraged me, not only in band, but in all of my classes, too.

Ishmael Sheriff (Sierra Leone)  
Hosted by the Davila family  
Bastrop, TX

## Santa's Brigade: Bringing Gifts to Hundreds on Christmas Morning

Shortly after Thanksgiving was over, we got our Christmas decorations out of the attic, including our "Let It Snow" signs. In Florida, sadly, it is not possible for Santa to bless us with snow, but that doesn't take the Christmas spirit away! Every night, the lights of the Christmas tree shone brightly, giving us a cozy feeling.

After midterm exams, winter break had finally arrived! But for my host family, Christmas is not a time to relax. Every year they hand out gifts to children in poor neighborhoods.

On Christmas Eve, we packed and organized the presents for the children. We went to bed early because on Christmas morning there was a lot of work to do! At 6 a.m. my two host sisters and I got up and took a fast look at our full stockings and the presents under the Christmas tree. This only piqued our curiosity! We saw that Santa had drunk the milk and eaten the cookies that we had put out for him on Christmas Eve. But there was no more time – we had to hurry! Children were waiting for their presents!

We arrived at the firehouse where we gathered more gifts and people. With a



Kassandra and Kori Christmas introduce their German host sister, Luca Fasold, to their work as real life elves.

couple of big fire engines, police escorts, a lot of volunteers and Santa, we were off to deliver gifts. We drove from neighborhood to neighborhood, giving gifts to hundreds of children. When we were finally done, it was mid afternoon and we came back home to open our own presents.

Luca Fasold (Germany)  
Hosted by the Christmas family  
Boynton Beach, FL



## Silent Night, Stille Nacht

After the Dillman family learned the German words to *Silent Night* from their student, Justus Hartwig (second from the right), they performed the famous carol in its original language at their church in Indiana.

## Getting by Giving

I am having an awesome experience doing community service here in Washington, first of all, because I am helping the community, and second of all, because I am learning about experiences that will help my home country's future.

I'm in a youth group at my church called STAYIA (Saint Andrews Youth In Action). We help the elderly, serve lunch after church, build homes for Habitat for Humanity and do many other community services. But we also have fun as a group. We go to camp, play sports, play paintball and do a lot of fun things.

The only challenge I've faced was in the beginning when people spoke so quickly. Now I am used to it.



And to conclude, let me say that I love my host family. They are so nice. They have explained things to me and helped me learn about American culture. Thank you, YES and PAX, for letting me have the best experiences in life.

Aristenio Caluamba (Mozambique)  
Hosted by the Martinez family  
Aberdeen, WA

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"I never thought I would say this, but I love school!" says Ukrainian FLEX student Anna Arabadshi, on the right. "Manchester Central High has more than 2300 students."

## Embracing It All

Lots of things happened to me since I came to the U.S. I rode a roller coaster, went to Disney World, had American holidays, visited Boston, saw President Obama and learned to play American football. Most important is my host family and new friends who helped me to do all of these things. They are the people who support me and make my experience unforgettable.

It is not better or worst here. It is just different, and this difference is what I want to be part of.

Anna Arabadshi (Ukraine)  
Hosted by the Goekjian family  
Candia, NH



## More Than a Game

"We enjoy watching our host daughter, Laura Nowak, succeed at new challenges," says host parent Julie Fischbach. "In the fall, she played volleyball and had the time of her life. Now, she's learning basketball. The practices are not easy but she is committed. She says that in Germany sports are not in the schools, while in Warner, South Dakota, it is a huge part of school."



## A Weekend of Meditation

Thai student Kun Bunyakan, pictured in monk robes, and host brother Jeff Gant attended a three-day retreat at a Thai Buddhist temple in Layton, Utah.

PAX—Program of Academic Exchange is a not-for-profit educational foundation. Established in 1990, PAX sponsors international high school students from over 40 nations on five and ten month academic homestay programs.

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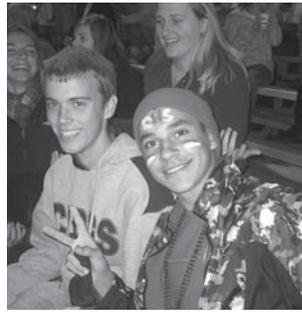
## Academic Honors

Congratulations to Tabytha Souza (Brazil) for making the High Honor Roll and receiving the Lion's Pride Award from C. Leon King High School. Tabytha is hosted by the Richardsons in Tampa, Florida.

## Heating Things Up

"You brought the heat with you!" is a comment I have been receiving a lot lately. It barely snowed this winter in West Virginia where it has been one of their warmest winters yet. But here is the ironic part – it is snowing in Egypt, the land of sand! The desert! I guess I did bring the heat with me. What a crazy world!

Farah Khaled Elaboudy (Egypt)  
Hosted by the Carter family  
Charles Town, WV



## Just Awesome

Egyptian YES student Mahmoud Mowafy, right, describes his hosts, the Hendrickson family and his friends in Ruther Glen, Virginia, with one word: awesome.



Congratulations to Bermet, center, for being chosen as the U.S. State Department January FLEX Student of the Month for her activities with her school's Writing, Key, and Cultural Diversity Clubs, Green Team, Future Business Leaders of America and other groups.

## A Dream Turned Into Reality

There are some people, who live in a dream world, and there are some who face reality; and then there are those who turn one into the other. My dream came true.

Studying in the USA was one of my dreams. I consider myself extremely fortunate to be here. This year has not only made me independent, but also made me even more mature, active, attentive, confident and interactive.

I am grateful to my host family for having me and treating me in the same way

as their own daughters, and for sharing their love and time with me. I have three beautiful sisters: Kristen (23), Allison (21), and Lauren (17). Marion, my host mom, cooks the most delicious and healthy foods. Sean, my host dad, is the funniest and smartest person I have ever met.

Bermet Zhakypbekova (Kyrgyzstan)  
Hosted by Kraemer family  
Springfield, MO



## The Wild Bunch

My coordinator, Marcella Hansen, brought the other exchange students and me to Leavenworth, a small city in Washington State. I heard a lot about the beauty of the city, but I never imagined how beautiful it was. It took us three hours to get to the city and we had a lot of fun on our way.

The city is full of small shops with a lot of souvenirs. It was so hard to decide what to buy. Late in the evening there was a Christmas tree and city lighting. It was so beautiful to watch a huge tree light in a second. The whole city was ablaze in lights, even the trees. It was amazing.

We had an appointment at a special photo studio where you can dress up as if you are in old times. It was hilarious. I finally understood that I had to be born in that era. Some of guys made funny faces and we tried to behave like women from that period of time. We wore corsets, pearl necklaces, hair feathers and hats. The boys had big guns, hats, vests and jackets.

Though we came home late and we all were tired, we had so much fun! I love all these kids and I love my coordinator for organizing this trip.

Elene Minashvili (Georgia)  
Hosted by the Ghan family  
Kennewick, WA

## Break a Leg

On the first day of school my drama class began preparing the play *Metamorphosis* for the state festival in Houston. At first, practice was hard, but thanks to my wonderful classmates, the rehearsals became much more fun. After two months, we had a public performance. I will never forget the moment when I first heard the strange phrase, "Break your leg", which is what people say to wish actors luck.

For the Houston festival, several of my classmates and I decided to do a second event – the group musical. Every day after school we practiced singing and dancing, hoping to win. In early December, we went to Houston where we became finalists for the group musical! It was so exciting. We couldn't believe it!

In addition to the contests, there were lots of workshops. I even tried African dance, which was really difficult. At an actor's workshop, a teacher told us about the famous Russian actor Stanislavsky. I was proud that Russian actors are famous in America, too. The festival was a wonderful opportunity to meet many people from around the state and to make new friends.

Now we are preparing for the spring show, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. I'm sure it will be amazing, too.

Maria Gladysheva (Russia)  
Hosted by the Weeks family  
Cibolo, TX



## The Most Magical Places

I have an amazing host dad. I've never met such a great person as him. Gil is like my natural dad. With him, I'm never bored or homesick because he knows fun activities.

Recently, we got back from a trip down Eastern America. It was an incredible experience. Thanks to my host dad, I've seen so many great places: Disney World, Universal Studios, Miami, Daytona, Clearwater Beach and Tampa. I hope that my little brother and sister will have the chance, too, to shake hands with Mickey Mouse, stand near Cinderella's castle, save the world with a favorite comic character and visit the world of Harry Potter.

I'm grateful to Gil. He is the best. Both my exchange brother and I would also like to thank the PAX and FLEX programs and our local coordinator, Bunny Geisler, for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be an exchange student.

Amir Vafin (Russia)  
Hosted by the Roy family  
Oakland, ME

Exchange brother Vasily Chernov (Russia) also wrote about the trip. He adds, "When I was six years old I had a dream to go to Disney World. After eleven years it came true. I thought it would be difficult to travel by car for such a long distance, but after the first day of driving, I realized that traveling by car is one of the most exciting things I have ever tried! My host father, Amir and I talked and joked around the whole way."



## An Apple a Day

"One of my greatest adventures was apple picking at Hamilton Orchards in Massachusetts with my host dad, Cliff Fournier. We climbed into the trees to pick the best apples." Keegan Manuel (South Africa) recounts. "We made apple sauce for the first time!" He is pictured in the center with fellow YES students Shayan Sikander (Pakistan) and Johnny Elias (West Bank).



## First Snow

"I'm really enjoying the snow. It is so much fun to go sledding!" Nayer Siddique exclaims. The Clendaniel family hosts the Pakistani YES student in Anchorage, Alaska.

## Health, Wealth and Luck

I marvel at the differences between Americans and Cameroonians. For instance, Christmas in Cameroon is all about dressing up in new clothes and enjoying Christmas dishes of food brought from one home to the other. I noticed that Christmas in America is mainly about gift exchange between loved ones and families coming together for a traditional turkey dinner.

In the U.S. on New Year's Day, there is a reason for preparing each dish. My mom prepared cabbage in which she added a dollar coin, which she said stood for wealth. She also made pork, which she said stood for health. And, she made some black eyed peas for luck. I hope this works for me!

Evangeline Safeh (Cameroon)  
Hosted by the Gohl family  
Bossier City, LA



## Meet Mr. Snowman

After a winter storm in Michigan, Begona Mula Martin and exchange sister Katie Engelbertand got enough of the white stuff to make a snowman. In fact, it was Begona's first "big" snowman because it doesn't snow much where she lives in Spain.

## Time is Flying By

I spent my first semester with the Peterson family. We had a lot of funny moments together. During Christmas break we decorated the church while my brother Derek hid under the table and scared everyone. It was really funny.

Now I am living with Karen and Ron Makela, and we've already had a lot of good times. The second semester at school started and I am very busy. The teachers give a lot of homework now. The time seems to go too fast.

Svitlana Kozybovs'ka (Ukraine)  
Hosted by the Makela family  
Ipswich, SD



## The Windy City

Saba Saleem (Pakistan), who is living in Neenah, Wisconsin, says one of her best times was going to Chicago. The YES student is pictured with her host father, Thor Thomsen, on the 103rd floor sky deck.

## Jumping into 2012

Christmas was a big holiday and the best time of the year! A lot of presents, cards, big dinners and happy smiles!

But the biggest thing I was waiting for was our trip to Myrtle Beach. The twelve-hour drive from snowy Pennsylvania to sunny South Carolina was worth it. I've never seen palms and pleasant sun weather in the middle of the winter.

The week was exciting: the aquarium, an upside down house, a moving theater, hours at the beach and a lot of shopping!

However, New Years Eve day was strange. It was warm with no snow. I almost forgot it was New Year's Eve.

As it got closer and closer to 12 o'clock, I could hear fireworks and excited screaming people. I told my parents I wanted to do something extraordinary and crazy!

My mom suddenly said, "Let's go jump



into the ocean!" I refused at first, thinking she was joking, but she decided to do it, so I thought, "Why not?" At exactly at 12 midnight we jumped into the cold ocean and people began to scream and sing. I never expected polite Americans to be so wild and crazy. I loved it!

Anisa Atalova (Kyrgyzstan)  
Hosted by the Hoover family  
Chambersburg, PA



## A Flurry of Fun

"Now in winter, it doesn't stop snowing and it's beautiful! Madrid has never snowed in this way. I love it!" Carla Santamarina exclaims. She is pictured in the front with her sister Sadie to the left, host sister Emma Deboer from Holland, above, and sister Jenna to the right. The Knaffle family hosts the Spanish student in Cheboygan, Michigan.



## Five Days That Changed My Life

My parents gave me a wonderful gift for my Christmas break. I got the spectacular opportunity to experience winter camp at Camp Forest Springs. Those five magic days have changed my life in many ways and helped me to grow more than I have ever thought possible. I met a lot of interesting people and enjoyed winter in Wisconsin. I skied and snowboarded for my very first time, and I did a great job of falling down.

With the help of the instructors, I finally learned how to do both. Camp didn't just teach me snow lessons, it also opened my soul, taught me how to be myself and how not to be influenced by the bad in the world. I'm very thankful to my parents for these amazing days that I spent at camp.

Mariya Buinaya (Kazakhstan)  
Hosted by the Zwaska family  
Appleton, MI



## Dashing Through the Snow

Early morning at 6 o'clock, the alarm woke me up. The day I had been waiting for had arrived. December 10 was the PAX Christmas trip to Leavenworth, the most beautiful place in Washington.

As soon as we arrived, the snow amazed me. It was my first time seeing snow right at my feet. We got into a snowball fight, and then everyone tackled me and filled my clothing with snow. It was unfair, but a lot of fun. And our fun had just begun.

The sleigh ride was so cool. I got to know the pine and coniferous trees much better with the guides on the two-horse sleigh. We even sang *dashing through the snow on a two horse open sleigh*.

Then we went to see the German town that was set up with all types of German decorations and lights. We even went sledding down a hill there. I had the best experience walking on water - frozen water that is. It was so fun that I can't express it in words.

Prashant Mishra (India)  
Hosted by the Kerr family  
Kennewick, WA



## Slip Sliding Away

"Sledding is very exciting and adventurous because the sled goes really fast," Feiyu Lu (China) says. The Miller family hosts her in New Mexico.



## Owned the Hill

First timer skier Congrong Zheng (China) had great success on the slopes with Connecticut's Ledyard High School ski club. Congrong told Coordinator Deb Evans that she had a lot of fun and "learned to fall" many different ways. "She never gave up," said Mr. Woodruff, the club advisor. "One day she will be a natural!"



## Holiday on Ice

At an skating party in Indiana are: Rafael Gomez (Mexico), Oscar Dillman, Benoit Debled (Belgium), Maxime Piquel (France), Darya Konkryeva (Russia), Janica Katrcia Diamalon (Philippines), Vio Nandana (Indonesia), Jost Buescher (Germany), Rylie and Kenzie Pfledderer, Max Dillman, Luna Gruesgen (Germany), David Pena (Mexico), Justus Hartwig (Germany), Nele van Den Hasevelde (Belgium), Charlotte Limborg (Belgium) and Coordinator Trudy Krintz.



### Baby's First Christmas

Guess why the title is so? Because I really felt like a baby during the Christmas season! My host family did everything possible to make my very first Christmas a special one. Now I really wish we did Christmas in Bangladesh, too! The whole season is full of love, about being loved and loving others with all our heart.

We got up early on Christmas morning and I was very excited. The thrilling experience of unwrapping gifts was awesome. I was showered by presents. Plus, it snowed, adding to my joy!

My host family loved their presents. I gave traditional Bengali outfits that I brought from Bangladesh. They were all surprised. I also cooked Bengali shrimp curry for dinner. I felt like I was in my home. I am really blessed to be here.

Shomy Chowdhury (Bangladesh)  
Hosted by the Reinhout family  
Cheboygan, MI

### A Holly Jolly Time

I think the most special moment with my host family was Christmas. We don't celebrate Christmas in Russia the same way as Americans do. Here, Christmas is more about FAMILY. You try to visit everyone at Christmas time, and it's really cool. In Russia, it is more religious, so we really don't have a lot of fun during the Russian Christmas. It was a really great experience for me. I hope I'll get a chance in my life to come back and feel that spirit again.

Daria Eronteva (Russia)  
Hosted by the Jewells family  
Skowhegan, ME



### Sweets for the Sweet

In Mississippi, Xiaoqian Niu (China), Julia Los (Germany) and Greta Seren Rosso (Italy) mastered the art of decorating Christmas cookies.



### Warm Wishes from North Carolina

Coordinator Tracy Bolin's students say hello. Starting in the back: Tojan Alghishan (Jordan), Robert Harutyunyan (Armenia), Ryusei Nii (Japan), Antonio Sanoguera (Spain), Robby Arsyahdani (Indonesia), Moldir Sertayeva (Kazakhstan), Yao Ma (China), Bingwen Ren (China), Daniela Danuta (Moldova), Lydia Albe (Germany) and Diana Malwa (Kenya).

### Treats from St. Nick and the Three Kings, too

We've learned about Christmas in our students' countries. In Germany, they have St. Nick who comes on the evening of December 5th. The children place a pair of clean shoes by the front door. If they were good, their shoes will be filled with goodies. We did that this year as a surprise to Alena. My two girls were so excited! In Spain they get gifts from the wise men on the night of January 5th, so we did this tradition as well. We were so thankful as a family to add traditions to our Christmas celebration this year. We are excited about learning more.

Janet Mooneyhan, host mother for  
Adriana Aracil Orduna (Spain) and  
Alena Seidlich (Germany)  
Jacksonville, NC



### Joy to the World

In San Obispo, California, Coordinator Jan Walter's son, Isaac, got a big kick out of marching with Mexican students Pablo Quintanilla Gonzalez and Marcella Trevino Villarreal in the holiday parade.

## Holiday Happenings



Toasting to 2012 are FLEX and YES students Haitham Alhammedi (Bahrain), Shayan Sikander (Pakistan), Keegan Manuel (South Africa), Vova Budnichenko (Ukraine-Alum), Coordinator Cliff Fournier, Johnny Elias (West Bank), Sammy Dusekeev (Kazakhstan-Alum) and Jowahdi Salik (Philippines).

### New Year, New Beginning

It was 30 degrees here in Orange. The whole town was really excited for the New Year's Eve "Starry, Starry Night" event. I, along with my mom, went to the town hall as volunteers for the concert. The whole town was there. Five minutes prior to the concert, I was asked to introduce the event at the podium! I did get a little nervous at first, but as soon as I stepped onto the stage, I felt a lot better. I did a good job according to everybody over there.

After the concert, I went around the town with Haitham from Bahrain and Vova from Ukraine. There was a lot going on: shows, food stalls, concerts and stand-up comedy. My favorite part was the ice sculptures.

Afterward, all of the exchange students went to the home our coordinator, Cliff Fournier. We ate a lot of food, played

different games, talked, et cetera. Near midnight, there was the countdown. All of us cheered and hugged each other. There were a lot of fireworks. All the exchange students huddled up and made some funny New Year resolutions like, "I promise I'm going visit your country... if I get 10 million dollars". At 1:00 a.m., we decided to stay over so we could watch movies and talk. It was the best New Year's Eve ever!

Shayan Sikander (Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Hume family  
Orange, MA

### A December to Remember

On my sixteenth birthday, I invited all my friends from school over and we played *Apples to Apples*, *Twister* and many other games. I got many gifts, too. On December 23, we had a Christmas party where all the exchange students came to my house. My host mom arranged a dinner for the families, and we had a White Elephant Christmas gift exchange. I won a big box of chocolates.

I was so excited for Christmas Day that I went to sleep at two in the morning but still woke up early. We had a big Christmas dinner that was so tasty. We went to see a movie, too. It was my first and best Christmas. I will never forget it.

After Christmas, one of my friends had a sleepover at her house. We did play dough and the "Just Dance" video game. On New Years Eve, the exchange students went to a party at one of the homes. We brought food showing our culture and played games arranged by the host dad. Then we watched fireworks.

Mah Nadeem (Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Carroll family  
Bunker Hill, WV



### The Mountains Spoke

This winter holiday I went to Canada for a couple of weeks with my host family and my other host sister who goes to college there. Everyday I rode a snowboard and had a fantastic time with them. My host family is very cheerful like seven-year old kids. They took me to many special places. That generosity is a good culture shock for me.

Canada's great mountains, covered by snow, looked like heaven. I could hear the beautiful peaks say, "Your hardship in this journey, studying abroad, is smaller than this huge world. You can do it. Do your best." This amazing experience gave me courage.

Manon Okabayashi (Japan)  
Hosted by the Bleecker family  
Gig Harbor, WA

### Our Snowball Queen

Congratulations to Russian FLEX student Anna Ignatova who was chosen to be the Snowball Dance Queen for her high school. The DeVores host her in Lyon, Kansas.



### Twas the Night Before...

In Las Vegas, Nevada, two PAX families gathered for a southwestern Christmas Eve, complete with Mexican food and a live mariachi band playing *Feliz Navidad*. Pictured on the left are host parents Mark and Tondi Hobaica with Papim Dejakaisaya (Thailand), and on the right, former host parents Lori and John Candalino with their 2010 student Seongjae Hong (South Korea).

### The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

I didn't know that Christmas could be so fun. On that day we were up very early in the morning to open our presents, all excited to see what surprises Santa had left to us. He brought decorations, filled our stockings, left presents, put a Christmas card on the counter, and then drank the milk and ate cookies we left for him! My host parents, nanny, two little siblings and I were very happy. It was my very first Christmas!

Nuska Osmonova (Kyrgyzstan)  
Hosted by the Gonzalez family  
Berryville, VA

## Let the Memories Begin

This is my third year taking exchange students and it has been a wonderful. Instead of doing the tree thing and buying them gifts this year, I decided to give the students a Christmas they will remember for a lifetime: a two-week vacation.

Our first stop was Washington, DC. We saw the White House, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and the Archives. They wanted to see the original "Declaration of Independence" which they did. Our second stop was Disney World in Florida where they saw Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck and many other characters. And of course, they enjoyed the fantastic rides. Our third stop was Universal Studios. I think they loved that more because there were many scary roller coasters. We also stopped at Daytona and Miami Beach. Fort Lauderdale was our home base once the sightseeing was over. On the way home we traveled across the state to Clearwater Beach. Vasya had a friend that was being hosted in Texas, and he was there, so I thought it would be great for them to have a full day together. Our final journey back to Maine was terrible. It rained from the time we left North Carolina until I arrived in my garage 19 hours and 900 miles later.

In total, I drove 4,200 miles and I'm ready to do it again! The students could not thank me enough.

Gil Roy, host father for Amir Vafin (Russia) and Vasilii Chernov (Russia)  
Oakland, ME



### The Gift of Friendship

It is said that the greatest gift of life is friendship. Together at a Christmas party in North Carolina are friends Lydia Albe (Germany), Moldir Sertayeva (Kazakhstan), Daniela Danuta (Moldova), and Bingwen Ren (China).

### The Best of Times

In the U.S. they have many holidays that are not celebrated in my country. My favorite one so far is Thanksgiving. I celebrated it with my coordinator and her family. It's similar to Eid-ul-Adha, when we have a lot of food and spend time with family. Instead of turkey, we have lamb during the Eid.

Halloween was just amazing. I was Cleopatra. I trick-or-treated with my host siblings and we got a lot of candy. I still have some. After that, we had a haunted Homecoming at school. It was very fun.

According to me, December is the most busy and stressful month in America. We decorated the Christmas tree, bought presents and had a wonderful time at my host grandparents' house. I received a lot of presents and the famous Russell Stover chocolates. I love chocolate!

For the New Year, I went to the movies with my host mom. Before that, we watched the big concert in Times Square.

Kadidia Samassékou (Mali)  
Hosted by the Pearson family  
Peyton, CO



### Ho! Ho! Ho!

"This was my first Christmas," says Filipino Jowahdi Salik, pictured with his Massachusetts hosts, the Chapmans, and fellow YES student Haitham Alhammadi from Bahrain.



### At Your Service

Johnny Elias (West Bank) has already racked up over 210 hours of community service during his five months in Orange, Massachusetts with the Fournier family. Above, the YES student is pictured with Haitham Alhammadi (Bahrain) working at a community dinner.



### Reaching Out to Immigrants

For a community service project, my host mother and I took Nepali kids to the library. They read books to me and we practiced math together. As we spoke, I found out how hard it is for them to come live in a foreign country. Well, I tried to help them and with time, I became close with them like a sister. We talked and they asked questions. I feel like their culture is a little bit similar to my country's culture. Now when they come to my house, we talk. I think this is a good experience.

Ashkhen Arakelyan (Armenia)  
Hosted by the Maxwell family  
Westerville, OH

### Ring for Charity

My host mother and I went to the Market Basket Store to help fundraise. I was given a bell to ring outside the grocery store. As I rang, I said "Merry Christmas" to everyone who came in and out of the store. The people would drop money in the bag for the charity. It was really fun because I had never experienced such an event before. It was awesome.

Comfort Dum (Nigeria)  
Hosted by the Brunjes family  
Milford, NH



### Utah's Elves

These FLEX and PAX students adopted a family with two children through the Coins for Kids charity in St. George. Coordinator Laurel Paul said that the group raised the funds for the Christmas gifts, and then bought and wrapped the presents. Pictured are Madiyar Dartayev (Kazakhstan), Rodrigo Amado (Brazil), Guntaphon Tangkitsanguan (Thailand), Aleksandra Shalimova (Kazakhstan) and Natalia Cojuhari (Moldova).

# Making a Difference

## PAX Students Think Global and Act Local

### Young Spirits Lifted with Operation Christmas Child

Volunteering is an amazing opportunity to serve the world and help people, especially the deprived and those in need. One of the best learning experiences I've had was with Operation Christmas Child, a charity that sends gifts to millions of children in countries suffering from war, disease, famine, poverty and natural disasters.

To start, I had to buy children's items such as toys, stationary, candies, et cetera. On a Sunday at church, we started packing these materials into boxes. We stuffed material appropriate for the particular gender and age into each box. We also put in a card stating our name with a picture and contact information in case the receiver wants to get in touch with us sometime in life. More than fifty of these boxes were made.

Then came the processing and packaging of these boxes at the Operation Christmas Child Center in Denver. It was very important to recheck the boxes to make sure they did not contain any item that might have been detrimental to the kid. Plus, the small boxes had to be arranged in an orderly



Pakistani YES student Faryal Hasan with her shoeboxes full of gifts.

manner in one large container to make the delivery easier. We were divided into groups. While some had to check the items in the boxes, others had to seal the boxes and put them in the large container. We worked non-stop for six hours.

By the end of our day, 27,000 boxes were made! Just imagine how a single box can bring a smile. Our problems are insignificant compared to the adversity facing these kids who do not know what it is like to play with a toy or write in a notebook.

Faryal Hasan (Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Pearson family  
Peyton, CO



### Community Connections

One of the stereotypes that I had about the people of the United States was that they were self-centered. However, when I got here, the people all around me proved that I was wrong. People really care about each other. There are so many things that people do for one another from the small act of holding the door for someone to an incredible number of fundraisers. I was astonished by how active the community is, and I was eager to get involved in lots of volunteer activities. I love to share my time and energy. I now volunteer in a local nursing home in my town, and I was surprised by how much I enjoy it.

My most exciting volunteer activity so far was when my youth ministry gave away free clothes and meals. The "City Youth Church Going Orange" event took place on

December 17th. Our church sanctuary was filled with clothes that were sorted by sizes, genders and ages. Each person who came was able to take: 5 pieces of women's clothes; 3 pieces of kids' clothes; 3 pieces of men's clothes; an accessory and a pair of shoes. After they gathered the clothes, they were guided upstairs for a fantastic free meal. We served turkey on fine china. Approximately 175 people came.

I'm so glad that I helped at this event. I made new friends, including two little girls who attended and came to our church the next day, which made the result of this event even more extraordinary.

Natasha Christy (Indonesia)  
Hosted by the Fidler family  
Chambersburg, PA



### The Heart of the Holiday

I enjoyed Christmas 2011 so much! I went to several parties and got thousands of presents, but what was most important to me was experiencing the warmth of the family! I also had the opportunity to make the Georgian national food called *gozinakhi*, a walnut honey candy that is usually made for Christmas. I want to thank my host dad for giving me the best Christmas ever!

Lado Sirdadze (Georgia)  
Hosted by the Blunt family  
Lee's Summit, MO



### Matters of State

Alabama Governor Robert Bentley met with PAX students during their tour of the state capitol. Appearing with the governor are: Gaspard Henry (Belgium), Eduardo Claros Cendoya (Spain), Dimailly Banzi (Brazil), Mateus Padilha (Brazil), Saikal Muratbek Kyzy (Kyrgyzstan), Batima Myrzabekova (Kazakhstan), Claudia Colacicchi (Italy), Lotta Kuulasmaa (Finland), Gorda Godoladze (Georgia), Marharyta Golobrodska (Ukraine), Lucian Grote (Germany), Francesca Luca (Italy) and Coordinators Lisa Dabb and Cindy Thigpen.



### Featured FLEX Student

For the last few months, Yerassyl Toleugazinov has been featured on the FLEX page of the U.S. State Department FLEX website! The Phillips family hosts the Kazak student in Lacey, Washington.



### Civic Lessons

In Arizona, Congressman Jeff Flake answered questions from FLEX and YES students Yara Nazzal (West Bank), Gresa Murati (Kosovo) and Anisa Akrimova (Tajikistan). The visit was arranged by Coordinator Marcia Goebel and George Sedic, a former staff member of the Youth Programs Division at the State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

### Bringing Knowledge Home

Kavan Sheth isn't waiting until he returns to his homeland to share what he learned in Pennsylvania. The YES student has already been in contact with his school in India with some ideas about how to put together a better yearbook. The Thornton family is hosting Kavan this year.



### On Stage in Alabama

At the Birmingham International Center, FLEX students shared stories with the public at the "Holidays Around the World" event spearheaded by their coordinator, Rebecca Kinney. Pictured are Yurii Veremchuk (Ukraine), Ekaterina Efremova (Russia) and Nadezda Ionova (Russia).

### A Thai Ambassador

It is the fifth month of my big journey in the USA. I've seen a lot of things and feel like I'm growing up. So far, I've done 32 hours of volunteer work. I usually work at the Habitat ReStore. I enjoy my life at school so much. The lessons here are easier than in the Thai schools, but they seem more effective. People are nice and I have lots of friends. Some of my friends used to think that the Thai people speak Taiwanese and ride elephants, but others have been to Thailand or like Thai food. I've helped people get a correct understanding of Thailand.



Thai YES student Sawasdee Charoengchang (Thailand) with his host little brother, Carl.

Sawasdee Charoengchang (Thailand)  
Hosted by the Bertaut-Strange family  
Purcellville, VA



**Students: You can win prizes for your environment-saving projects! Get information about the PAX Goes GREEN contest on the "What's New" page of the website [www.pax.org](http://www.pax.org). Don't delay! The next round of project entries is due April 30, 2012.**

### Save Our Planet

Bermet Zhakypbekova (Kyrgyzstan) has been an active member of the Green Team at her Missouri school. She is pictured with a poster they created to encourage teens to become more environmentally sensitive and to participate in their recycling campaign. But the FLEX student didn't stop there. She put together a media show called "Save Our Planet". Bermet says, "If everyone tries to keep our planet clean, we can save our planet!"





### An Unforgettable Moment

Indonesian Robby Arsyahdani leapt for joy during his visit to the Biltmore Estate, one of North Carolina's most important historic sites. The YES student told us, "It was a good day to see the trees changing colors. There were beautiful views as far as my eye could see. And the big house looked like a kingdom."



### Food for Thought

For her cluster international dinner, YES student Nursafia Sideh, center, dressed in traditional Thai clothing, festooned her table with Thai decorations, and prepared Thai dishes. Pictured with her are her hosts, the Smith family, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

### American Dream

You can't just wish that your dreams will come true. You have to make your dreams come true. It wasn't exactly easy to come here. And still, I took the risk and I don't regret it. It was the best decision of my life. Now I have an awesome little sister who I can talk to for hours and a big brother who I can always ask for help. I have a cute little dog who's always happy to see me when I come home from school. I live in a big, beautiful house with a lot of my friends living in the same neighborhood, which is, of course, in a big city. My school is a lot bigger than I'm used to and I can only describe my classes as awesome. I even got things I would have never dared to dream of. I made a lot of new friends who are always there for me when I need them. Friends I can laugh and do silly stuff with and friends I can talk to about serious things. Friends to help me in every situation. I have a wonderful second family who accepts me how I am and supports me in everything I do. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and ask myself if this is just a dream, just the picture of my perfect world in my head. It's simply too good to be true. Right now, I'm living my American Dream.

Daniela Hirsch (Germany)  
Hosted by the Johnson family  
Livonia, MI



### Let's Go Spain

"During International Education Week, my host mum, Susan Ellis, and I went over to the elementary school where she works in Akron, Ohio," Harry Ball Lindsay (Spain) recounts. "Not only did the students learn loads about the Basque Country and language, but they also followed with great interest and respect, making it a very multicultural enjoyable day!"



Pictured with Senator Hatch are Aleksandra Shalimova (Kazakhstan), Madiyar Dartayev (Kazakhstan), Natalia Cojuhari (Moldova), Mayor Dan McArthur and former PAX host fathers and city councilmen Gil Almquist and Jon Pike.

### Senatorial Surprise

During the 150th birthday celebration of St. George, FLEX students assisted the mayor and city councilmen by serving root beer floats from a historic soda fountain. Over 1,000 people were served. Imagine our surprise when U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch arrived with the mayor for a float!

Laurel Paul  
Area Manager Utah

### A Taste of Pakistan

It has been a great experience for me to be part of the American culture, making new friends and having a totally new family. I am doing my best to let people know about Pakistan by having conversations, listening to each other's opinions and especially by cooking food. One of my school projects was to direct the cooking of Pakistani dishes including *biryani*, *pakora*, *gajjar ka halwa*, mango shakes and tamarind dip. Everyone loved the food. The taste and smells were totally new and different for them. My basketball coach loved it, too.



Arooj Ali (Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Werner family  
Hoquiam, WA

# Expanding World Views

## FLEX Students Pioneer a Russian Club

Bravo to Vladislav Nersesyan (Russia), Vladislav Duma (Ukraine), and Alexandra Dessyatova (Kazakhstan)!

Our Russian Club has existed for about three months at Woodgrove High School. We have meetings two or three times per week. We teach the language and traditions along with sharing our perspectives and breaking stereotypes. So far, we've taught the alphabet and some basic expressions: types of greetings, how to introduce yourself, how to describe subjects, colors, verbs and the right construction for sentences.

My host dad knows a nursing place where a lot of Russians work, so our club will go there to volunteer and practice the language.



YES student Yasha Ali (Pakistan) gave Principal Steve Anderson a PAX certificate of appreciation during her talk.

### Treasures Past and Present

For International Education Week, I thought about giving presentations to each of my classes, but then I thought why not introduce my country to those I don't know. So I did it in the commons during lunchtime in front of all the students there. My presentation included a cultural shop where I showed traditional jewelry, dress and elegant works of art made by talented artists. I offered potato cutlets and *pakorey*, which are Pakistani spicy snacks.

Yasha Laila Ali (Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Whittaker family  
Westerville, OH



### Belgium Up Close

Jeremy Proot taught his French class about his homeland. The Bruner family hosts him in Springfield, Ohio.



### All About Egypt

YES student Adham Abdelrahman practiced his country presentation at the Optimist Club in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

## Expressing Thanks with an International Feast

This past November in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, PAX students put on an elaborate dinner for 180 family members, teachers and school officials at Mount Vernon High School. Along with the country-themed table decorations and delectable national dishes, there was an array of entertainment. YES student Adham Abdelrahman from Egypt sang, and Ilaria Cerutti of Italy showed a video. YES student Muhammad Usman Ghani gave a talk on Pakistan. In addition, the students gave a PowerPoint presentation with information about themselves, their families and homelands.



Starting in the front are Adham Abdelrahman (Egypt), Abdullah Abohaimeidm (Saudi Arabia), Coordinator Jeff Schmat, Halima Chambo (Tanzania), Nursafia Sideh (Thailand), Ndeye Tall (Senegal), Nerea Ugarte (Spain), Zeina Ahmad El Jahjah (Lebanon), Akram Al-Ja'di (Yemen), Gladhys Syahutari (Indonesia), Gunay Kerimova (Azerbaijan), Yuliya Vavryshchuk (Ukraine), Leyla Madatkhanova (Azerbaijan), Ama Owusu-Darko (Ghana) and Muhammad Usman Ghani (Pakistan).

### An Exceptional Coordinator

In the photo to the right, Coordinator Rayetta Fetter, center, is honored for her nine years with PAX by Coordinator Anne Spina, right. Engaging and upbeat, Rayetta has been a popular coordinator for 88 students and their host families. In addition to heightening global literacy in Iowa, she has helped forge ties between communities around the world. Her husband, Gordon Fetter, left, has also played an active role with the students and their hosts. Thank you, Rayetta and Gordon, for the many lives you have changed.



### Learning and Teaching in Mississippi

Host father Joe Lukas (now hosting his twelfth student) arranged for area exchange students to visit the Tupelo City Hall for a tour and a meeting with Mayor Jack Reed, Jr. After learning how local government operates, the students went to nearby Saltillo High School to speak to classes in honor of International Education Week. Above are Seulji Park (South Korea), Cova Pisonero (Spain), Lorenz Scharr (Germany), Viencent Bussens (Belgium), Iris Rautenberg (Germany), Rui Wang (China) and Yujie Wang (China).



YES student Zeina Ahmad El Jahjah from Lebanon and Gema del Pozo from Spain.



YES student Akram Al-Ja'di from Yemen chatted with guests as he cleaned up.



## Project Runway Meets The Year of the Dragon

In Greencastle, Indiana, the Dean family was decked out in style when they went to DePauw University to celebrate the Chinese New Year on January 23. Their student, Bonnie Ge, had sent the family's measurements to her parents in China who had had ten silk shirts made for them, as well as for her host grandparents and aunts and uncles.

## Fired Up

Our student, Martha, is taking advantage of every opportunity to be a part of her school community including playing on the basketball team. She enjoys everything about it and doesn't even complain about the Saturday morning practices!

Martha and her American sister play on the same team and are making many wonderful memories. Martha's teammates enjoy her fun-loving personality and look forward to hearing her Spanish "victory howl!" in the locker room after every win!

Hosting Martha has been a privilege for our family. We and the Lady Horsemen team are certainly going to miss her!

Clarice Berhost, host mother for  
Martha Carranza-Montero (Spain)  
Santa Fe, NM



## Go Gators!

If someone asks me what one of my favorite things about America is, I would say football. It is completely new for me because we don't have this sport in Ukraine. I have become a real football fan. You can imagine how excited I was when my host family gave me a ticket to the Florida Gators game. The huge stadium was filled with people wearing orange and blue shirts shouting "Go Gators". The marching band played and the cheerleaders made the crowd even more excited. And what finally catches your attention are the football players running, passing and making touchdowns! What else could be so thrilling?

Kateryna Hil (Ukraine)  
Hosted by the Halal family  
Ormond Beach, FL



## Linked In

In Vermont, South Korean Jeongyeon Moon (left) and Italian Luigi Burlando (fifth) bonded with their host siblings, Chloe, Eli and Lilly Cartularo, and friend Aylin Engel.

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## Counting Down Mexican Style

In Bowerston, Ohio, Sofia De Landero Alariste taught her friends and hosts, the Gopp family, how New Year's Eve is celebrated in her country.

## Bon Appétit

We are Charles and Sarah Northrop, and we are hosting Florian Brottes from France and Hanna Norlin from Sweden. This is the story of Sarah's birthday dinner. On her birthday, Florian and Hanna sent Sarah off shopping and told her not to come back until dinnertime! When she returned, Florian and Hanna were busy with dinner preparations. The table was elegantly set with a menu rolled up and tied with a ribbon at each place. It read:

*"This meal is a typical French meal. It will be composed of four dishes. To start, we will eat an appetizer (entree). Then it will be the main dish (le plat principal) and the cheese (le fromage). We will finish with a French dessert. Enjoy!"*

Lemon and salmon cake  
Gratin dauphinois

Chêese  
Chocolate mousse

The best part was this disclaimer at the bottom: *The chef is not sure about the result of these dishes, though. Please take consideration that it is the very first time he is doing something like this. The Chef and his crew wish you a great meal and a great day. We wish you happy birthday again! Bon appétit.*

The meal was delicious! The "lemon and salmon cake" was like a salmon loaf. The gratin dauphinois was a creamy potato and cheese dish, and the cheese was Sarah's favorite -- brie. The chocolate mousse was Hanna's contribution -- so it was a combined French/Swedish dinner. It was the best birthday dinner Sarah has ever had!

Charles and Sarah Northrop, hosts for  
Florian Brottes (France) and  
Hanna Norlin (Sweden)  
Richmond, IN

## Making His Mark

During International Education Week in November, Daniel read "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" in German to two first grade classes. Daniel was surprised that the students knew the story and could translate some of the German words into English. He also brought in a map to show the students where he lives in Germany and how far away it is from Turtle Lake. They enjoyed their time with Daniel, and he's been asked to present to other classrooms.

Daniel played football for Turtle Lake's high school team and is now playing junior varsity basketball. It has been an exciting experience for Daniel. He had never played football before and was thrilled to be the kicker for the team. Daniel stated that it is not much different than kicking a soccer ball! He is thinking of playing golf for a spring sport.

The Stachowiak family  
Hosts for Daniel Breuer (Germany) and  
for Daniel's sister, Valentina, in 2009-10  
Turtle Lake, WI



## My Patch of Green

When my host mum heard that I loved plants, she decided to give me space in her garden to plant the flowers I liked. She told me that I will always have a piece of land in America, wherever I may be. I planted a Blue Angel plant and she planted the Dragon Tails. We bought some tulips and lavender, too. On Christmas day, we planted our Christmas tree in the garden. Mum said she would send a photo of my tree to me every year. I will never forget that I have my own tree. And when the flowers begin to bloom, my host mum will think of me.

Xinlu Yu (China)  
Hosted by the Day family  
Yakima, WA

## The More, the Merrier

My wife and I, along with our three daughters, have hosted students and businessmen for decades, but for at most one month at a time. The last of our girls graduated high school and moved out last May. We decided to try hosting for a whole school year. It has been a completely different experience living together with such wonderful young women. God has opened my heart and stitched it together with theirs. Having two young women added to our family for a longer term has given us a chance to build a deeper relationship. We've been through many experiences together: happy, sad, wonderful, exciting and relaxed. We've shared our hopes, fears, frustrations and expectations. Our lives have been forever changed for the good. Now my wife and I have five daughters!

Sam Maxwell, host father for  
Ashkhen Arakelyan (Armenia)  
Westerville, OH



## Friday Night Lights

Luis Navarro (Spain) and his host mom Karen Wiley make an entrance at the senior night football ceremony in Williamsville, Illinois.

## A Year of Growth

I love New York and I am enjoying the experience that I am having. My English has improved, and a part from that, I have learned how to become a better person: more mature, independent, knowledgeable about money, and aware of how important family and friends are in my life.

One of the best moments that I have experienced with my host family is when we went to Alaska on vacation. We had an awesome time! I never imagined myself being in Alaska and I am very thankful to them that they let me go with them. Alaska is gorgeous!

Itxaso Jauregizar (Spain)  
Hosted by the Ramat family  
Albany, NY