February 2015 Vol. XX, No. 7

Pax academic exchange

PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Overcoming Obstacles Contest Winner: Bayu from Indonesia

This month's winner is Bayu, who narrates his moving poem "Exchange Student World" that beautifully encapsulates how the life of an exchange student isn't always easy. There are obstacles to get past, but in the end he reminds all of his peers from around the world who are here in the U.S. that "…the Exchange Student world is not bad, it is just different. And you, my friend, are the sun that will keep your mind open."

—Bayu (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Oestreich family (WI)

From Ghana to Arizona

Khardijah is great to have as part of our family! Of course, coming from Ghana to Sedona, Arizona, is quite the culture change. However, her positive attitude, along with her sense of adventure and interest in our culture, has resulted in a mutually beneficial experience.

Just in the last month, Khardijah has gone hiking with the family and played in the snow for the first time in her life—she built a snowman, made snow angels and snow cones, and threw snowballs at her sisters!

Khardijah has already exceeded her volunteer hours. She has been tutoring elementary school kids in reading and also served at a local soup kitchen over the holidays. In addition, she spent a weekend at a Young Life camp as a volunteer. Her first semester report card just arrived and she received three A's and two B's.

However, with all that she has done, the best part seems to be the laughter that fills our house. We have three daughters, and when everyone is home together, Khardijah is just "one of the girls"—laughing, teasing, playing, and simply being herself and being part of our family.

—Scott and Darcy Holverson (AZ), host parents of Khardijah (YES, Ghana)

Khardijah quickly became an expert in the snow!

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Home Away from Home

On the 4th of September, I left Belgium to come to a totally unknown place with unknown people. Now this place is my second home and the people here are my family. Even the day that I leave, a part of my heart will stay here. These five months have brought me so much. I've experienced more than I ever thought I would. I've learned so much about this country and culture. So many things surprised me.

I'm living my dream, seeing the world in another way, and meeting amazing people. I am so grateful to be here. This year wouldn't have been the same if I didn't have my amazing American family. I am proud to say that now I have two families that I love so much! I am also proud to say I have friends from all over the world! I can't believe I am already at the halfway of this year. Time has gone by so fast! I am going to make every moment a memory until the end.

Leaving for the USA is without a doubt the best decision I've ever made.

—Florence (Belgium), hosted by the Steele family (OH)

Florence in her American glory!

Snow Much Fun!

Even though I've seen snow a couple of times in the northern parts of my country, I never knew it could be this much fun! Here in Chambersburg, PA, we had a lot of snow on a Saturday morning. I went to the house of another friend, who's an exchange student from India. Neither of us had ever built a snow man before; therefore, we didn't know how to, but oh well, I guess exchange year is the time when you experience the stuff you've been missing out on.

We had a lot of snow, so we built snow men, well, actually, a family of snow men! My host sister showed us how to make them.

—Ghanwa (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Shields family (PA)

Neena (YES, India), host sister Aurora, Ghanwa, and Michelle (Mexico) show off their snow family.

Friends from around the world, including Mori (third from right), enjoy good food and company.

Thai Food is the Best!

Everyone I know here either never had Thai food before or really loves it. I decided to cook a Thai dinner for my host family and friends. It was a lot of fun just hanging around the kitchen cooking and singing. We made kanom pang naa moo (bread with pork on top) and panang gai (coconut curry chicken). It turned out really good, and all of them loved it!

—Mori (Thailand), hosted by the Needler family (TX)

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Get Involved!

Eggy and his HOSA club sponsor are both proud of his achievement.

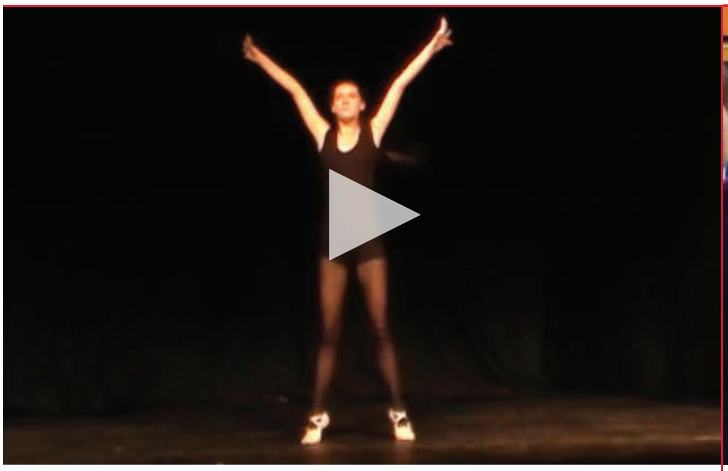
HOSA: Lead!

Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) is one of the clubs that I joined in my school. In late January we had a regional competition, for which I was going to compete in Medical Math. I prepared for this competition for about a month. Even when I had a trip to New York and New Jersey, I read a book on the train to prepare.

Finally the competition day came. We got our nametags and waited for our competition category; Medical Math was at 10:30, and when it came, I was so nervous. I entered the room, signed in, and looked at my paper. I said to myself, "Hey, It's not that hard. I can do it!" Only a few questions made me confused, but for the rest of it, I found the answers and I'm sure they were correct.

The results were announced in Lakewood Ranch High School's auditorium. I kept waiting until they announced Medical Math category, and finally they announced it. I got second place! I went to the stage and got the silver medallion given by the Region 5 HOSA Officer. It was another unforgettable moment for me. Proud to be Indonesian!

—Eggy (YES, Indonesia), hosted by Lawrence Cornell (FL)



Watch Viki's grand finale performance!

Showstopper!

In Slovakia, Viki competed through the junior division in beautiful rhythmic gymnastics routines, earning many medals and trophies. When her host sister Tansy began preparing her own talent for Shine! (an annual student talent show), she convinced Viki to demonstrate some of her rhythmic gymnastics as well. Viki had not come to the States with any of her props, so instead created a gymnastic dance routine. She was the grand finale, the featured showstopper—see for yourself in this video. It was exciting to see a small taste of all she can do.

—Tina Pocernich (WI), host mom of Viki (Slovakia)

Host sister Baylee and Hend are congratulated by their Speech and Drama teachers.

To Be or Not To Be…

I decided to join the Speech and Drama team at the end of September because it was something new for me. Every weekend we go to different schools to compete. There are three rounds and then finals. My partner, who is my host sister Baylee, and I reached the finals two times and we got sixth place in Classical Duo. Our team made it to the state level, where we reached the semi-finals. I had so much fun!

—Hend (YES, Egypt), hosted by the Jones family (MT)

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The Adjustment Cycle

You Chose You

You chose the harder way to go
To be the strongest one and show
You can endure, in spite of wind
You see, the world just grinned
Don't cut yourself with shard of fear
If you believe – the world will cheer
It's coming time you're being so weak
No sense to stay, you are homesick
It seems like people all are distant
But you'll go through, you are resistant
Go out more, explore and dance!
It is your dream, you've got this chance!
It's not a secret, time can fly
It does, my friend, so don't be shy
It's up to you which path to take
Be not afraid to make mistakes
Of course it changes you, no doubts here
You're more mature, you're fighting fear
More self-respect, respect to others
You understand you have your armors
And even if it feels alone
Go gather friends and eat some scones!

—Daryna (FLEX, Ukraine), hosted by the Goekjian family (NH)

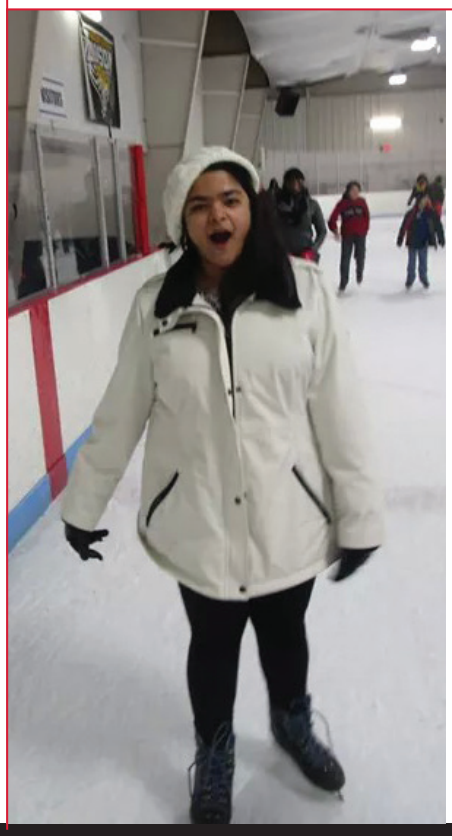
No Longer Isolated!

"In a school of less than one hundred people, one might think it is a pretty easy task to make friends. Unfortunately for me, the kids have known each other for so long that I had a hard time fitting in with this closed set of people."

So begins Ita's tale in this video of how she isolated herself at a small school. She finally connected with the dean of students, who knew from the minute she met Ita that she was a special person, but also sensed her loneliness. After some time of encouraging Ita to come talk to her, the dean helped Ita to learn ways to find her place in this close-knit community.

—Ita (YES, Cameroon), hosted by the Bigelow family (MA)

Now, I have American friends!



Ice Skating: A Lesson for Life

"It's January, do you know what it means? I'm halfway through my exchange," I said to myself. I have to make the best of this time, so I went ice skating for the first time with my host mom and a friend.

As anyone would expect, I fell. But I didn't hurt myself much, rather I came to know what I have to avoid in order to maintain my balance. Then I fell a couple of times, but every time I fell, I stood up with more confidence, strength, and determination.

Life is like an ice skating rink. You have to take risks, you have to try skating and then fall, but every time you fall, you have to get up and face the next challenge with more courage. You have to fall in order to learn because LIFE means "Learning Is For Ever." To live is to learn.

—Mubashra (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Romano family (MD)

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Host Family Babies

Clockwise from top left: Nadeth (Spain) with the youngest member of the Wells family, Vivian (China) and Emma (Germany) with the Graff family and their newest family addition, Cooper family with Vici (YES, Indonesia), and Nina (France) with the Murdock's first baby girl

Bundles of Joy

This year, I have four host families with newborn babies.

A new baby was born suddenly to the Cooper family in St. George. Vici from Indonesia was there for the excitement.

The Wells family of Hurricane had a new son just before Nadeth arrived from Spain.

The Murdock family of Washington welcomed their third child—their first daughter—while Nina from France was living with them.

The biggest surprise of all was when the Graff family of Washington, who are double hosting Vivian from China and Emma from Germany, were able to adopt a new baby boy in addition to their own son and daughter.

And how are the students doing being big sisters to a new baby? Terrific! They are all loving the experience of a baby in the home. Young families make great host families, and PAX students make great big sisters.

—Laurel Paul, community coordinator (UT)

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On the Home Front

A Day to Remember

We spent the first day of 2015 in downtown Chicago. We went to many different places, like the Chicago Bean, which was amazing and we had so much fun taking pictures of the reflection of the city in it. From there we walked through Millennium Park and went to the Art Institute. After that we went to the John Hancock building: the view from the top floor was breathtaking, and I loved taking pictures of the city. Last but not least, we went to the Field Museum and the Shedd Aquarium. It was exhausting but beautiful!

I think Chicago is a really beautiful city with so much to offer. It's completely different world from my world of mountains and trees, but I'm so glad I had the opportunity to see all of this.

—Anna (Italy),
hosted by the Antoniolli family (IL)

Anna and her host mom in front of the beautiful Chicago skyline

Double the Fun at Any Age!

This year, although I'm 76 years old and have been confined to a power wheelchair for more than 32 years, is the second year I have hosted two exchange students, and I have been so busy with them that I have not had time to write about them.

Both Felix from Germany and Renaud from Belgium volunteered at the high school where they helped to serve over 1,000 free Thanksgiving dinners. Felix has been snowboarding at Sugarloaf USA and Renaud joined him on a long school weekend to downhill ski. I love having two boys just like last year. They enjoyed my family Christmas as you can see on my Christmas card photo (below).

My wonderful coordinator, Gil Roy, has a Russian exchange student, Ilya, who was so impressed that he did a video interview of me. Check it out!

—Eunice Spooner (ME),
host mom of Felix (Germany) and Renaud (Belgium)

Renaud (front left) and Felix (front right) are lucky to have a host mom like Eunice—as Ilya (FLEX, Russia) shows in this fabulously-produced video interview.

Just finding his ski legs with help from host brother Aidan

Time to Ski!

I had a great break with a lot of snow everywhere outside the house. I haven't seen snow before I came to the United States from Kenya. Snow is awesome, but the temperature is "worsening!" I haven't experienced such low temperatures as the ones I am experiencing now.

One day I went out "skiing" with my host brother. I call it "skiing" since it's not downhill but just out in the backyard of our house. Some of my dreams came true finally, learning how to ski. I didn't completely learn, but I made a big improvement. I know how to apply breaks and turn. Skiing is one of my most interesting things that I found out in Vermont. I hope I'll get much better as time goes.

—Frederick (YES, Kenya),
hosted by the Ronan family (VT)

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Edina at the Library of Congress

Cultural Diplomat

Since arriving in the U.S., Edina has been very active in her school and community. She wants to experience any opportunity to educate others about her country and her religion. Edina has given presentations about Kosovo to three of her classes, the Lions Club, and to local middle school students in their World Cultures classes.

Edina's goal is to volunteer at least 100 hours during the year, and she is on track to meet that goal. She volunteers extensively at our church in a variety of ways, including watching children in the nursery, volunteering with the youth group at a soup kitchen, creating comfort kits for homeless youth, and hosting a fundraiser for a food bank.

She has helped to bridge misunderstandings within the church community about Islam by speaking to the high school youth in September and the men's class in February. Edina defended her faith very respectfully and maturely under difficult circumstances. The pastor describes her as "an engaged young woman interested in learning from the experiences of others while finding practical ways to share her own gifts and story."

—Stephen and Courtney McCalley (VA), host parents of Edina (YES, Kosovo)

Volunteering Feels Good

I have been making breakfast for the homeless on Saturdays since I first came to Appleton. The idea of waking up at 6:00 on a Saturday morning when it is freezing outside doesn't seem a bad idea at all after I get those smiling faces and thank yous from all the people at the homeless shelter. I love to volunteer now because it feels so fulfilling and great to know that my service is making a change in someone's life.

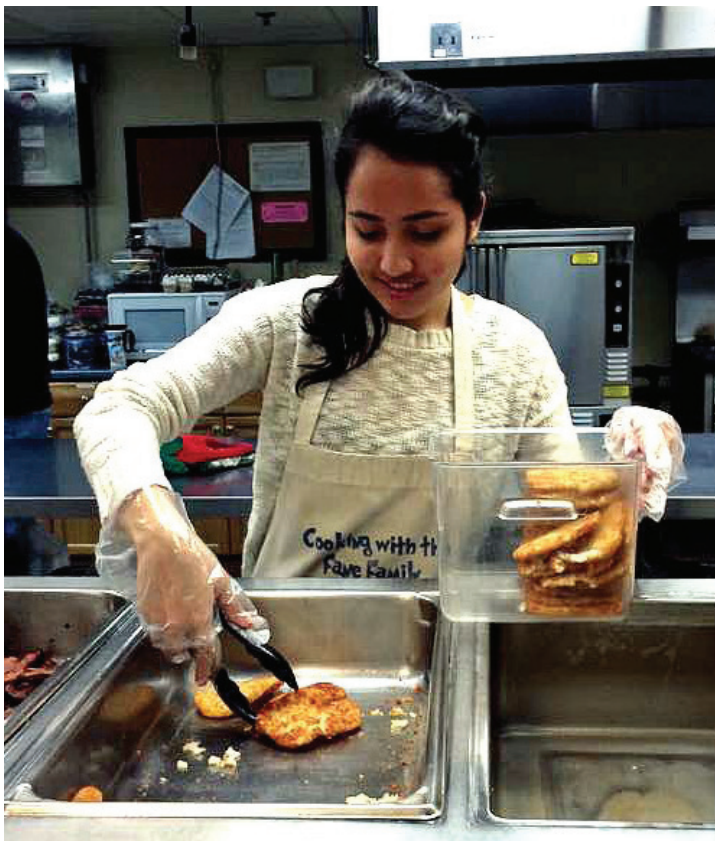
—Anosha (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Campana family (WI)

Japanese, Germans, Spaniards, and Italians love them Chiefs.

Spokane Chiefs Fever!

In early January, two host parents and I carpooled with all 10 of my PAX students and two host sisters to enjoy an evening of fun. First stop was an all-you-can eat buffet restaurant, in which everyone delighted. Then to our destination of a fun-filled evening to enjoy a hockey game, where the crowd can't help but get into the spirit of things, clapping and chanting, "Go Chiefs Go!" whenever a goal was scored by the Chiefs.

—Kathleen Cassidy, community coordinator (ID)



Who wants more hash browns?

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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.) for next month's issue at paxpress@pax.org. **Click here for full details**.

PAX Press is published monthly by
PAX – Program of Academic Exchange.
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www.pax.org

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