February 2016 Vol. XXI, No. 7

PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Let the Good Times Roll!

It's my first Mardi Gras, and I couldn't wait to live this experience with all my new friends and my American family. I went to my first parade and had an awesome time! First, we went to have breakfast—we ate the best donuts in town!

After that, we met with our friends to head to the parade. After waiting a couple of hours, the parade was ready to start. More than 60 floats in just one parade, playing Mardi Gras music and throwing a bunch of beads. I can't wait to go to the next parade!

— Victoria (Spain), hosted by the Boudreaux family (LA)

Victoria's sign got her an impressive selection of Mardi Gras beads!

Zwei Gewinner aus Deutschland

That's "Two Winners from Germany" in English, but it doesn't tell the whole story. As this was a joint student/host family contest with up to four potential winners, Tom and host sister Anna in addition to Thilo and host sister Abby are all PAX contest #3 winners for their creative video about exchange life in Wisconsin.

This month's contest focused on how exchange students and host families alike are impacted by the exchange experience. Whether funny, difficult, or emotional, each experience has been educational! Thanks to everyone who shared their stories with us.

After watching what has been so special about this year for our Germans and Wisconsinites, check out the complete contest section on page two for some honorable mentions. *Herzliche Glückwünsche* (congratulations) to everyone!

—Thilo and Tom (Germany); Abigail Hanson and Anna Perry (WI)

Inside this Issue

Contest Honorable Mentions 2
Exchange Living 3
Get Involved! 4
On the Home Front 5
PAX PLUS 6
The Adjustment Cycle 7
As Seen in Social Media 8

Contest Honorable Mentions

Setting a Good Example

"It sounded like fate," said the host mom—an exchange student herself as a teen—when she heard that an Indonesian exchange student would be coming to the area. This Oregon-based Indonesian-American couple welcomed Ari into their family, knowing that she would share her Indonesian heritage with them and their young daughter. What they didn't expect was that she would set such a good example for their daughter in many other elements of life!

—Ari (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Myszka family (OR)

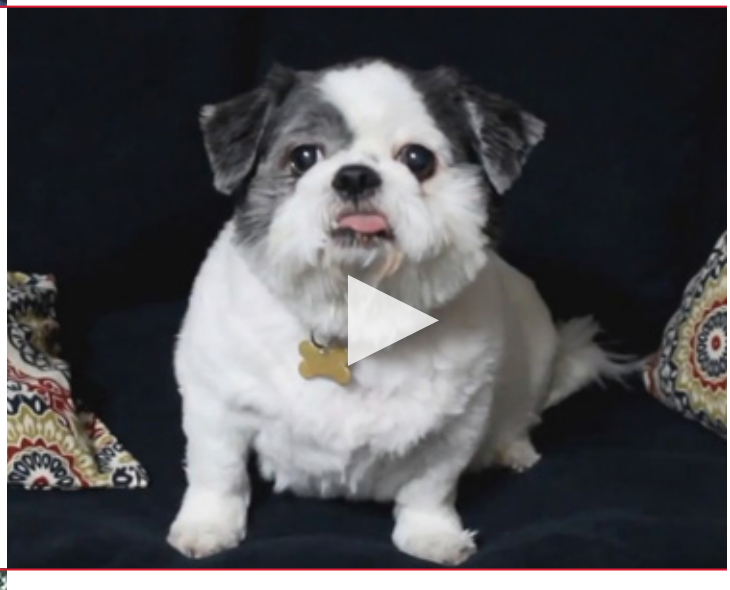
Cooking is just one of many things Ari has taught her young host sister Evelyn.

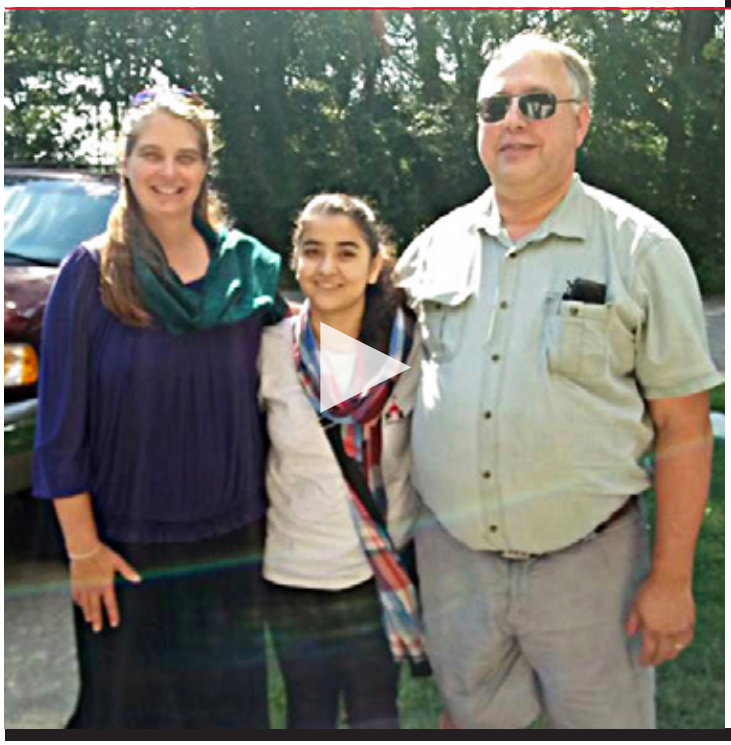
Everything New is Amazing!

Hailing from Ukraine, Diana quickly found her way into the hearts of her entire Iowan host family, each of whom has a different favorite memory of her time with them to date. Her host dad loves the questions Diana asks when she's trying to figure out how to say something in English. Her host mom recalls the exact moment when she knew Diana truly felt at home with them. And her host siblings love her like she has been their sister for their entire lives. As for Diana, she can't possibly name one favorite thing—everything new is amazing to her!

—Diana (FLEX, Ukraine), hosted by the Baker family (IA)

Even Caspian, AKA "Mister Tootles," made time to share a few thoughts.





Her Lovely Global Family

Mehria describes her exchange so far as "an adventure from the first day" and says it has been a great experience to feel like she's home even though she's away from home. One of her favorite activities is sharing information about her native Pakistan with her host family and friends in Illinois—her "lovely global family" that continues to grow.

Her host family thinks the same of her—for them, it's as if Mehria has been with them their whole lives, and while they've learned a lot of new things, they have also discovered many similarities between their cultures.

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

Mehria has always felt right at home with host parents Phyllis and Brian.

Back to Front Page

This video is a celebration of wintertime fun!

Let it SNOW!

The blizzard of 2016 led to lots of fun for exchange students in Virginia and many other places on the East Coast. Swimming isn't just for summertime—check out what this group "dives" into. It's water, just not the liquid kind!

—Alyah (France), hosted by the Cummings family (VA)

Yasmeen and her beautiful birthday cake

Turning 17 in America

February 5 was my 17th birthday. I was invited to my friend Hannah's house after school to bake some treats—we made pineapple cupcakes, which were so delicious! Later that evening, Hannah and I headed back to my house. As soon as I went in the house, a bunch of girls jumped out and said, "Surprise!" Tears of happiness nearly came out, and I had a huge smile on my face. I could not feel anything but happiness with these people who love me.

—Yasmeen (YES, Arab Communities of Israel), hosted by the Hose family (WV)

Blizzard Memories

Despite being in the south, we did get some snow during the Blizzard of 2016, so we made the most of it. Carl and Sebastian both love it here in Nashville. While Carl has certainly experienced snow before, this was only Sebastian's second time seeing it!

—Jimmy James (TN), community coordinator and host dad of Carl (Germany) and Sebastian (Mexico)

Carl and Sebastian enjoy the snow in Tennessee!

Back to Front Page

Get Involved!

What an Honor!

I got invited and accepted in my school's National Honor Society for having good grades and being involved in volunteering activities such as being a library helper in my study hall, visiting nursing homes, and being part of a trick-or-treat food drive.

Also, I did cross country in the fall and had a 12-minute improvement. Right now, I'm starting track and field, and I'm so excited because I love to run. I'm also involved in different clubs like FCCLA and Spanish club.

—Paulina (Mexico)
hosted by the Lee family (IN)

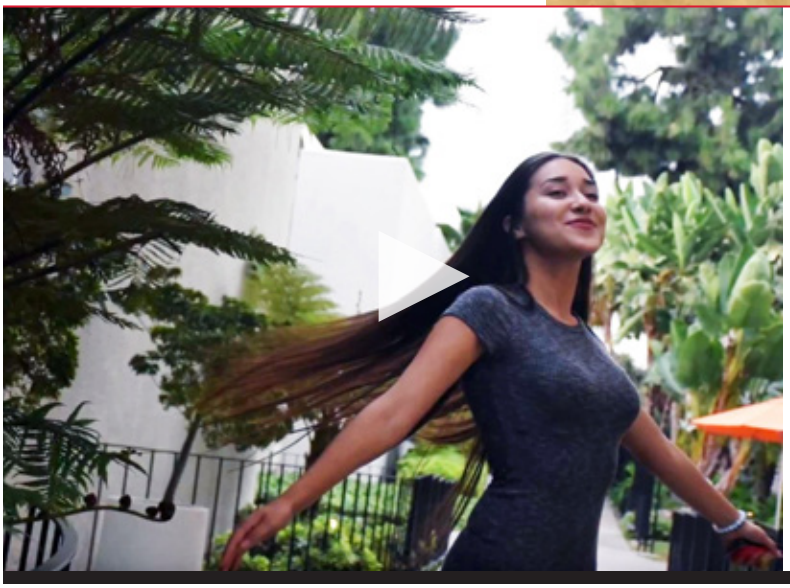
National Honor Society is one of Paulina's many extracurricular activities.

It's a Slam Dunk!

From November until now, the most important thing I've done here is basketball! Tryouts were hard, but eventually I made the varsity team! I was so happy, because this really was my dream. The team is amazing, and I am learning so much every day! We are league champs, and I'm looking forward to the postseason. I can't thank my coaches and teammates enough for this season.

—Liselotte (Belgium),
hosted by the Hall-Cook family (WA)

Kneeling on the left, Liselotte and the Wolves are headed to the championships!



Making the Most of It

Dana, a FLEX student from Kazakhstan, is a very active girl at her school and does a lot of community volunteer work, such as feeding the homeless, visiting the elderly, and working on projects with the local 4-H Club. At school she participates in track and field and has just been cast as the female lead in her school's upcoming spring musical, *Urinetown*. Dana is an outstanding representative of her country—her optimism and maturity are infectious.

—Bruce Haines (CA) community coordinator

Dana certainly is making the most of her year—just check out this highlight video she shared!

Back to Front Page

On the Home Front

Reflections of a Proud Host Mom

Maider continues to do very well in school and has very good grades. She is very active on the girls' JV basketball team and has been asked to play on the varsity team in the finals. Her strong point is defensive actions; her handball experience in Spain as the defensive team leader has proven very valuable in basketball. She will continue as a cheerleader until after the sectionals during February. Then she has decided not to play on any team sports for the rest of her stay in the U.S. She wants to stay at home and ride the horses in her spare time. She deserves a bit of a rest since her basketball/cheerleader schedule has been challenging.

Maider is always a welcome member of any event; her positive outlook gains her many friends. Her help with home chores is somewhat limited by her tight schedule, but she is always willing to help when she is home. Maider is a great joy. Her cheerful outlook and maturity level make me forget she is only 15. She is wise beyond her years, and I shall miss her dreadfully when she leaves in June.

—Deborah Butler (IN), host mom of Maider (Spain)

Maider never seems to lack the energy for anything, especially cheerleading!

Twin FLEXers

Being selected for the prestigious FLEX scholarship is no easy feat, but this year a pair of twin Georgian sisters were both chosen. Imagine the family's surprise when they found out that not just one, but both of their girls would be leaving the Caucausus republic for the year.

The sisters are Diana and Rona. Diana is placed in Louisiana, while Rona is spending the year in Indiana. These sisters did everything together growing up, and yet this incredible opportunity has separated them. The exchange year has been a new experience for them. They communicate regularly, as close sisters do, sharing their experiences, fears, pain, and excitement.

Both are doing awesome things during their year—volunteering, being involved in clubs at school, and getting the most out of their experience. They look forward to the day when they are together at home again—but with a tinge of sadness at the thought of leaving their new families and adventures behind.

—Steven Cadwell (LA), community coordinator

Diana and Rona say their goodbyes to one another before launching their exchange year adventures!

Back to Front Page

Hyukbin takes a timeout to join host brother Aron, host mom Diana, host brother Aidan, and host dad Dan.

Panther of the Week!

February started out on a high note for Hyukbin! Our local newspaper named him "Panther of the Week" at Pittsville High School for February 1-5. The article states, "Pittsville High School is captivated by the energy of our foreign exchange students this year. [Hyukbin] is no exception. He has tried several activities: acting for the drama club, shooting hoops for the JV basketball team, learning to play the clarinet for band and pep band, and singing with both the choir and swing choir." Hyukbin is also involved in Future Business Leaders of America and the snowboard club.

—Diana Schooley (WI), host mom of Hyukbin (South Korea)

Insaf (left) plants a kiss on one of the "Strut Your Mutt" event participants.

Where Passion and Compassion Meet

Volunteering with my community's Best Friends Animal Society has definitely improved my exchange year. It combines my passion for animals with my desire to be active in the community. I go to the pet adoption center three days a week to clean dog kennels, do laundry, and wash pet dishes. I also had the opportunity to help build houses for stray cats to keep warm in the winter and to assist in major events like "Strut your Mutt," where I sprayed tattoos on both dogs and kids! As a YES student, I'm an ambassador of my country but also of my religion. Through volunteering with Best Friends Animal Society, I am working to remove the stereotype that Muslims fear or hate dogs. I'm a YES student, and I love dogs!

—Insaf (YES, Tunisia), hosted by Judy Steiger (UT)

Steven (left), Yulia, and Diana (FLEX, Georgia) pose with Bossier City Mayor Lo Walker.

Community Embraces Student's Success

When Yulia, who goes by Julia in the U.S., received the news that she was selected to participate in the Civic Education Workshop (CEW) in Washington D.C., word travelled fast throughout the community, and recognition was front page, headline news in the local newspaper!

Competing and being accepted as a CEW participant was a dream of hers from the beginning of her exchange year. The superstar status within the community was beyond her imagination. Once her school found out about it, they placed the story on their website. This drew the attention of the school board, which invited Julia to their next meeting to provide an overview about the competition and the workshop. The newspaper couldn't let this fabulous story slip away and interviewed Julia and her family.

—Steven Cadwell (LA), community coordinator

Back to Front Page

New, Fun, and Different!

I have done so many fun things in the past six months with my host family and also experienced many new things so far. Some of my experiences are seeing snow, being on an elevator for the first time, and improving my swimming skills.

My host family usually stays home on weekends, but sometimes we go out. One of our trips was to Saint Louis, which is four hours away from where we live. I got the chance to be in the arch, which was awesome because it was also my first time to be up so high.

I am really happy to know a different way of life and meet different people. One thing that makes my American friends and family amazed is our calendar. Ethiopia has its own calendar, different from the rest of the world. We celebrated Ethiopian New Year on September 11, and in Ethiopia it is not 2016, but 2008! Figuring out the date was confusing for me in the first weeks of my exchange year.

During the past months, I have improved my English, become more independent, and made decisions on my own. My host family has played a great role in this. They are always encouraging and helpful.

—Salem (PAX scholarship student, Ethiopia), hosted by the Belt family (MO)

Salem at the quintessential Missouri monument

Braving it Out on the Ice

I tried ice skating for the first time of my life with Qunoot from Bahrain and Chiho from Japan. It wasn't their first time ice skating, so they were better than me. We played for about an hour, and I fell more than 15 times—much more than they did.

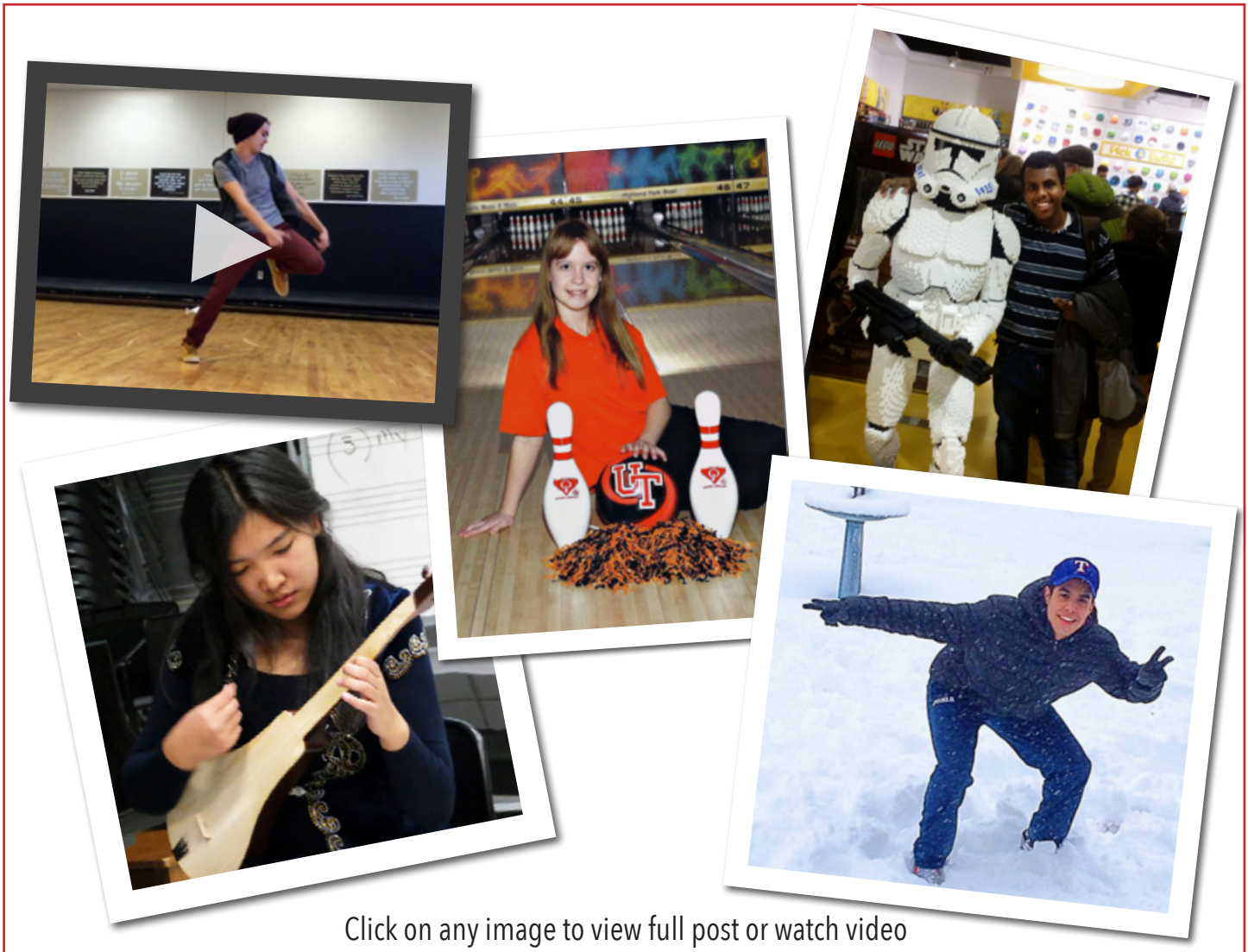
A week after that, I went again with another friend, and I think I started to get better at it. I think I'm starting to love it, and maybe I will miss this when I go back to my country because the nearest ice skating rink is a two-hour plane ride from my home!

—Valentina (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Barrett family (MI)

Valentina (left) and Chiho take a selfie on the ice!

Back to Front Page

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.

PAX Press is published monthly by
PAX – Program of Academic Exchange.
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Back to Front Page