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A World of Tastes

Mordecai Botchway from Ghana and his fellow eleven exchange students received rave reviews for the mouthwatering dishes they whipped up for the international dinner they hosted in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The YES student is pictured serving a traditional stew and rice to some of the 165 host family members and school officials who attended. To learn more, see *A Gourmet Gala Impresses the Crowd* on page 7.

Mayor Imparts Lessons

Recently, my exchange friends and I had the opportunity to meet and talk with the mayor of Charlotte, Mr. Anthony Foxx.

I went to his office with my local PAX coordinator, Domna Colepaugh, her son Jason, Mervenur Luy from Turkey and Ayeshadira Putri from Indonesia.

The mayor was really nice and charismatic. Although he was busy, he answered our questions seriously and gave us his undivided attention. He shared his experiences, discussed what it is to be a true leader, and told us to be principled, communicative and responsible. He also talked about how we had to see failure as a window to make us develop, and how we should learn from inspiring people. He is both a good speaker and listener.

I also got a chance to sing the American national anthem for him! I was a little bit nervous. Though it was not perfect, it was such a wonderful experience to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" for him.

Azka Bastaman (Indonesia)
Hosted by Dawson family
Gastonia, NC

The Land of the Brave

Indonesian YES student Azka Bastaman performing "The Star-Spangled Banner" for Charlotte, North Carolina Mayor Foxx.

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German Daughter Adds a New Dimension to the Holidays

When my daughter came home one day last spring and said that we should host an exchange student, I thought, "Right. Like we can fit that into our schedule." I brushed off the request until she asked again. But after a conversation with my husband and our son, we decided to look into it. A few short months later, Elisabeth arrived. I speak for us all when I say that I am glad my daughter is persistent. We have had a wonderful experience with Elisabeth.

While we knew that she would learn a lot here, we did not realize how important her culture and family would become to us.

For example, Advent is very important to Elisabeth and her family in Germany. While we also celebrate Advent, it is a central part of Elisabeth's family tradition. She and my son made an Advent wreath and Elisabeth and I searched everywhere for the perfect candles, which we never really found. Her mother sent us Advent gifts, which we opened at dinner the first Sunday of Advent.

We also celebrated St. Nicholas Day with gifts in the three kids' boots. Christmas, however, was the best. Elisabeth cut down the tree herself and had the coveted job of putting the angel on the top.

Hannah Dean, host mother for
Elisabeth Poppinga (Germany)
Glover, VT

Tackling a Challenge

America's so rocking! I love being here. One of the aspects I love the most is the American educational system. We can pick the subjects we are interested in studying. I like the moving class system where teachers have their own rooms and wait for us.

This fall I was on the junior varsity football team. Go LIONS! I played offensive/defensive lineman. I did not do too bad for my first year, especially because I didn't know how to play when I got here.

When we beat the Pasco Bulldogs 50-0, it was an unforgettable experience. I played for five minutes, the longest time I got during the football season. I tackled and fumbled for the first time during that game. My friends and coaches were really surprised that I could finally do that. In the next defense play, I did another three tackles. When we did a huddle together, the coaches and players yelled "MUHAMMAD". They praised me and said "great job" and "that a boy buddy". One of my friends told me that I'm a beast! I was really delighted.

Muhammad Rizki (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Martin family
Kennewick, WA

PAX Abroad student Lyndi Vinson, right.

Ringing in the New Year in France

I arrived at the end of December and right away started my French journey! First up was New Year's Eve. I've never experienced anything like it! We arrived at a friend's house and the party began. Normally in Ohio, my family does finger food and then we watch the ball drop and I invite friends over. But in France, we had four courses for dinner and stayed up until 3 am! We played games, danced, listened to music and threw a lot of confetti! Then before we left, they had another course of coffee. By the end I was so exhausted that I went right to sleep when I got home! The next day we went back for lunch and another mini-party!

Lyndi Vinson (Ohio)
Hosted by the Dutrieux family
Marmande, France

Peace through Learning, Understanding & Sharing

Encouraged by the PAX *PLUS* program to reach out to young Americans, South Korean Sung Eun Park discussed her homeland and read one of her favorite stories to Ohio children. To continue the cycle of learning and sharing, PAX *PLUS* participants receive an American storybook to share with young people upon their return home.

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Indonesian YES student Zainab Athiaturrahman and her host mom.

An Alaskan Bear Tale

This story happened after my first few weeks in Anchorage. My host mom, her friend and I went to her cabin. It was three hours north of Anchorage and then a three-mile hike from the highway.

I was walking behind my host mom when she said to me that the cabin door seemed to not be right. So she made loud noises to make sure whatever made the cabin door open was aware of our presence.

When we went in the cabin, it was a mess. A bear had figured out how to get into the cabin and ate all the food inside and trashed it. It took us more than an hour to clean up and re-hang the door.

After finishing the cleaning, I went to the second story to pray. Afterward, I looked out from the window and saw standing near the outhouse, a huge brown grizzly bear. I told my host mom and her friend downstairs but unfortunately they didn't have a chance to see it.

A few minutes later, the three of us were downstairs preparing the dinner. My host mom's friend said, "There's the bear again." I said, "That's not the bear I saw. The bear I saw was a brown bear," because that bear across the creek was a black bear.

Zainab Athiaturrahman (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Orlansky family
Anchorage, AK

Step One Two Three

Carolin Noth (Germany) and Wenlei Xu (China) practice dancing. The two are spending their exchange year in Alpine, Texas with the Amick and Crenshaw families, respectively.

Crazy about Karaoke

This South Carolina cluster can sing! Pictured before they start karaoke are Tatjana Brestovac (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Emilio Alanis Gutierrez (Mexico), YES Cluster Leader Tracy Bolin, Zeba Mansuri (India) and Omar Al Nabati (Saudi Arabia).

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.

For more information, contact:

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PAX Press is printed on recycled paper with soy based ink.

Player of the Year

Congratulations, Sergio! St. Pius X High School soccer coaches selected Sergio O'Farrill Martinez Cairo (Mexico) as the Defensive Player of the Year. The Denzin family hosts him in Parkville, Missouri.

Indebted with Gratitude

I can't tell you enough how really nice my host family is and how I love them, even if I say it ten billion times or more. My host family is funny, funky and so great! They show me a lot of kindness, from dropping me off and picking me up at school, figuring out new activities that I can try, teaching me to take care of the dog, and introducing me to their nice family and friends.

When they asked me to go ice skating, I thought, "Oh..no..!" I had never tried it before. Everybody helped me keep my balance so I could stand.

I want to say thank you so much to my community coordinator who found this family. I feel like I'm staying with my own parents and my own grandma. I'm sure that I'll miss them when I return to my home country. And I'm sure that when I reach my potential in the future, they will be one of the reasons.

Rizqi Hikmah (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Arthur family
Geneva, NY

Feeling Lucky

I have a wonderful family back at home and I love my family, but I'm lucky to have an amazing host dad here in the U.S. I can honestly call this place home. My host dad is the best. He is a parent I would love to have if I couldn't have my own. We have a lot of fun together. He is responsible and always keeps things in order. He also has a good sense of humor. I think people should follow the example of his lifestyle.

Many things have happened during these six months. Together with my host dad, we visited many places and landmarks. A few months ago, we went to see the place where Stephen King lives. It was just awesome. I brought my camera and took a lot of cool pictures.

We are going to go on a road trip to Florida, where my host dad is going to show me Miami Beach and Daytona Beach. We are also going to Disney World and the EPCOT Center. On the way home, we will visit Washington, DC.

If there's something I have to be thankful for, it is to FLEX and PAX, for giving me this opportunity and this awesome year.

Daniil Kargalskov (Russia)
Hosted by Gil Roy
Oakland, ME

Let's Ski

When Missouri Coordinator Sandy Van Cise asked one novice skier if she fell during their outing, the girl replied with a huge smile, "Only about fourteen times and I loved it." The skiers are: Lisa Matschke and Phillip Luetz from Germany, Daniel Cardenas and Andrés Valdez from Mexico, Hongjie Zhang from China, HyeJin Baek from South Korea, and Korbua Thananchai, Tanyaporn Tangcharoentham, Jadetawat Pathsiriyos and Tnat Chantrachirathumrong from Thailand.

Big Apple Blast

These FLEX and YES students met Elmo during their trip to New York City with Pennsylvania Cluster Leader Ann Swift: Alejna Ademi (Macedonia), Shahen Malilyan (Armenia), Artem Solodovnikov (Kazakhstan), Maulida Herradiyanti (Indonesia) and host mom Betty Ann Leiby.

Extreme Cuisine

Nesybel Kozhahmetova (Kazakhstan) and Narawadee Omanee (Thailand) revel in the culinary arts program at Eastside High School in Gainesville, Florida. YES student Narawadee says, "It is the most wonderful program ever! We study cooking and hospitality."

Mississippi Snow Queens

An unusual snow yielded the first white Christmas in Nettleton since 1913, so Christina Malik (India) and Natchaphat Jaiborisut (Thailand) were able to make their first snowman ever. With them is host mother Glenda Jones.

Find us on Facebook

Check out the discussions on the 2010–2011 PAX group page.

We are Family

Living with my family is so much fun. They have two kids, one four years old and one that is two. The four year old says to everyone that I am her sister. Some people get confused that she can have another sister when her mother says that she has two kids. When I arrange my clothes, the child asks if I am going back home. I say no, but sometimes she starts to cry until I stop arranging my clothes. I want thank my host family for everything that they have done for me.

Afghan student living in Ohio

Home of the Two-Pound Burger

On the 18th of October, my hosts and I went to the famous Idaho restaurant that appeared on the show *Man vs. Food*. It's called Big Juds and they make the biggest hamburger I've ever had! These burgers are so big that if you finish one of them, you get your picture taken and they stick it on the wall of the restaurant. The building is located in Archer, Idaho, about an hour and a half from home. We went there for lunch. In the car, I was starving like crazy because I didn't have breakfast to be sure that I would finish the hamburger! So I ordered the two pound one, which is actually three pounds with the buns and vegetables. My host brother and my host sister's husband ordered it too, but only one person finished it. Not me - this burger was way too big! But I'll go there again before leaving the U.S. to give it another try.

Martin Cusse (Belgium)
Hosted by the Reynolds family
Blackfoot, ID

Russian FLEX student Zarina, right.

Tapped as a Tutor

At the moment, I have done 51 volunteer hours, mostly at Whittier Elementary School where my host brother and sister study. I help the math teacher, Mrs. Hetrick, by tutoring almost every day after school.

At first I was so scared because I had absolutely no idea what American eleven and twelve-year old kids are like. I thought they would have trouble understanding my speech and explanations. But after the first lesson I was really surprised! The kids listened very carefully and tried to understand math. Now the kids are used to me and they feel free to ask me for help

Moreover, I realized that Russian math and American math are not so different. Later I met a Russian kid in this class and sometimes I speak to him in Russian.

In October Mrs. Hetrick asked me to individually tutor a girl from the Czech Republic because her mom doesn't have much money to pay tutors. I now I tutor her every Wednesday. It's fun because she repeats words that her mom uses in Czech and it sounds very close to Russian!

I'm also a Key Club member at my high school. We have a meeting every Tuesday. It was the right decision to join this club because now I'm involved in different school activities and celebrations like the Christmas marathon or candy cane sales. Also, this club is a good way to make a lot of friends because we work together and talk about everything.

So volunteering is enjoyable and helpful. You can do something for people and people are grateful. You feel satisfied by your work and you meet a lot of new people.

Zarina Tuybayeva (Russia)
Hosted by the Whittaker family
Westerville, OH

Hats for the Homeless

As I live in Oregon where it is cold in the winter, I decided to organize a project to help the area's homeless people who spend nights outside in the cold weather. My project was a hat and glove drive, which I organized at school. I made announcements, including putting information into the school bulletin, and posted flyers in the main halls.

After a week, my schoolmates had donated a big bag full of hats and gloves. Some people donated blankets, which are necessary for homeless people, too. Everything was donated to Impact NW, a non-profit organization whose mission it is to help people achieve and maintain self-sufficiency and to prevent and alleviate the effects of poverty.

I am very thankful to my host family and friends who helped me to organize the hat and glove drive.

Lela Okromelidze (Georgia)
Hosted by the McDonnell family
Portland, OR

Quick to Lend a Hand

Currently, I enjoy being an ambassador in my host community. In school, I joined the Frontier Future Farmers Association. One of our projects is picking up trash along a highway through the Adopt-a-Highway program. Last month we made a canned food drive. We collected 4200 items that were given to the poor in the area.

I also joined the Frontier Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) even though I'm a Muslim. I want to study other beliefs in order to promote mutual understanding.

Muhammad Haidar Midtimbang (Philippines)
Hosted by the Kriebel family (Brookston, IN)

Afghan YES Student Energizes "Pennies for Peace" Campaign to Establish Schools Abroad

On Tuesday, November 23, my seventh grade students were treated with a visit from a sweet and intelligent young lady from Afghanistan. Although she is from a neighboring school district, she readily agreed to speak to my five geography and world cultures classes about her country.

The Afghan exchange student was greeted by an excited group of students, as her visit enhanced a current project that the students were a part of. As she spoke eloquently about her country, my students were enthralled.

"Pennies for Peace" is a non-profit organization that allows people to collect pennies in order to support schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and ultimately bring the chance of peace to an area of the world that is often in turmoil. My students had been collecting pennies for three weeks by the time our guest gave them a surprise visit.

The Afghan teen spoke about her country to nearly one hundred students, and had a PowerPoint presentation that was not only filled with powerful and lasting images, but it was full of facts and figures about Afghanistan. She also filled my student's minds with personal stories and an historical perspective that could only be given from a native of central Asia.

This exchange student was truly an asset to my students and motivated them all to collect more pennies in order to help unfortunate students. She also brought numerous artifacts from Afghanistan and allowed the students to share them and learn from them.

The impact that she has had on my students is unquestionably remarkable.

Jerome Staniszewski
Middle School Teacher
Pennsylvania

Cheers for Volunteers!

Ukrainian FLEX student Kseniya assists a child with his letter to Santa.

Spreading Smiles

On December 4th, I volunteered at a "Santa Celebration" event. The feast was held to provide kids with disabilities with Christmas joy and a holiday atmosphere. It was wonderfully organized. There were different stations for kids and their parents to visit. For example, one station had to do with coloring Christmas pictures. Another one involved children in games and activities.

However, I think that the station I worked at was the most full of Christmas. I helped kids write letters to Santa. Some kids could write letters by themselves, but they needed help with putting pictures on them. Unfortunately, some kids could not write at all. On the one hand, it was amazing to see kids happy and filled with Christmas spirit. But on the other hand, it was very sad to see so many beautiful young creations being sick and helpless.

The most interesting part of that event was when I met an American family who had just adopted a girl from Ukraine, my lovely home country. Both the family and I were shocked and amazed by how small the world is. We talked a lot and shared emails. It was so unexpected to meet a child from my motherland, thousands of miles away from home.

That volunteer project was a fantastic experience. I got so much joy and satisfaction from doing it. I met many wonderful kids and realized how important and indispensable our help is for those children. I hope that I will have an opportunity to do similar volunteer activities again as they make me think of some life values differently and they help me learn important life lessons.

Kseniya Adamska (Ukraine)
Hosted by the Graf family
Appleton, WI

Operation Christmas Child

FLEX student Zhangylmyrza Alibaeva from Kyrgyzstan and her host mother filled nearly a hundred shoeboxes with gifts for children.

Shoeboxes of Love

There is an excellent tradition in my American family. They call it Shoeboxes. Formally, it is called Operation Christmas Child.

My family has been assembling shoeboxes for ten years. Shoeboxes are about giving simple gifts to children in Africa, Malaysia, Dominican Republic, India and so on. We put combs, shirts, toothpaste, socks and things like that in the boxes. So you can see, it is very simple stuff - very simple but very important in the life of these children who never get a present except at Christmas. From watching videos and reading their letters, I can say for sure that they wait anxiously for these presents.

Every year my lovely family tries to increase the number of shoeboxes they donate. This year they beat their own record by doing 100 shoeboxes. I had a great time learning how to organize the gifts. I'd say my family is an expert at this.

I went to Minneapolis to volunteer at the distribution center. We inspected the boxes and took out inappropriate things like liquids, money and food. I had the job of taping the shoeboxes, which I loved. We volunteered for two days. Even when we were very tired, we were happy.

I think the project is the least we can do for the children who need help, support and love. In the future, I will continue doing Shoeboxes in my country. Thank you very much to my American family for this wonderful opportunity.

Packing Shoeboxes is my American mom's favorite activity. Now it is mine, too.

Zhangylmyrza Alibaeva (Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Zwaska family
Appleton, WI

Elina Khusnullina (Russia), Metehan Doyran (Turkey), FLEX/YES Cluster Leader Clifford Fournier, Elder Pierce (Mormon Missionary), Gaiz Hatta Sahi (Philippines) and Alexey Vlasin (Ukraine).

Enlivened by Work in a Community Kitchen

Service is a big thing for the exchange students in Massachusetts. Every Monday and Thursday, our coordinator and some of the host families and students get together at a church named Bethany Lutheran in the town of Orange. We prepare food for the community supper, which is open to the people of the community.

There are more or less 60 people who come to each supper, but it sometimes can go up to 85 people. It is always successful. There's always enough food for everybody. Sometimes the exchange students make a dish from their own country and serve it.

It is such a great place not only for helping people, but for sharing knowledge about other countries and learning about other cultures and religions. In fact, every Thursday there are two Mormon missionaries who have fun cooking together with the Muslim and Christian exchange students.

Imagine, Muslims, Mormons, Orthodox, Protestants, Catholics and Jewish people all together in a church to help people, no matter who they are. There are also those who come to the supper with different ideas, religions and cultures. It makes the service so interesting and fun.

Gaiz Hatta Sahi (Philippines)
Hosted by Shufelt family
Orange, MA

Less Into Landfills

By converting trash into artwork, Aiperi Iusupova (Kyrgyzstan) helps the environment. The Moriarty family hosts the FLEX student in Round Hill, Virginia.

Black Friday Blitz

The holidays here are different than in the Netherlands, and I think the biggest difference is Black Friday. I had never heard of it, but this year I waited in line for it with my host cousins.

After my first of three Thanksgiving dinners, my host cousins invited me to come along with them to Black Friday. We were in the line at midnight to wait for the tickets Best Buy gives out. We needed the tickets so that we would be sure to get the things we wanted. We brought chairs and sleeping bags. We drank liters of hot chocolate and got free donuts from Quicktrip. After five hours waiting in the freezing cold (literally), we went into Best Buy. And it was *crazy*! There were people everywhere. The line went all over the store and it was impossible to find my cousins! My prize? A $2.99 case for my iPod. Theirs? Lots of games and movies, a camera and two phones.

I definitely had a lot of fun and I vote for a Black Friday in the Netherlands!

Petra Kindts (Netherlands)
Hosted by the Duran family
Wichita, KS

Dashing Through the Snow

Marcella Rocha (Brazil) and Caroline Calomme (Belgium) tobogganed in Ledyard, Connecticut with Coordinator Debbie Evans. The Linn family in nearby Gale's Ferry hosts the two girls.

A Polar Bear Plunge Into Icy Water

I would like to tell you a story about our winter camping trip to Lake Chelan. We went there on January 16th, a beautiful cold morning. We made our own path up to the trailer by snowshoeing. There was about two feet of snow. That night we went down to the city to watch the Winter Fest Parade. Then I changed my clothes and got ready for my crazy idea, the *Polar Bear Plunge*. Screaming and clenching my teeth, I jumped into the cold water and immediately ran back. It was pretty fun.

The next morning my brother and I built two huge snow castles. It took us about four hours to make them. When we were done, we started throwing snowballs but that didn't last for a long time because we were too tired from building the castles. We had a great time.

Vladimir Bradu (Moldova)
Hosted by the Harrison family
Richland, WA

The Harrisons and FLEX student Vladimir revel in the happy aftermath of Christmas gift giving.

Hanging with My Bro

Life with Vladimir has been a blast. Vlad and I have had many an adventure to many fun and random places. We once went camping with a bunch of teenage boys and a few adults from our church. That night we sat around a campfire with them. We decided that we didn't want to set up a tent like the rest of the people, so Vlad and I just slept in my van.

Trevor Harrison, host brother for
Vladimir Bradu (Moldova)
Richland, WA

Indonesian YES student Brahmani

Woohoo!

It is winter. It is snowing. It is cold. For some people, it's the time to stay in the home, curled up in pajamas, reading a book with a cup of coffee. But not for me! My host family likes to stay out after work and do a lot of cool stuff like sledding, road trips and winter biking. After they encouraged me to sled for the first time, I realized that this stuff is F-U-N!

My first sledding hill was Olbrich Park in Madison. That time I went sledding with my host dad. We parked the car at the top of the hill, sledded down, and then climbed to the top again and again until we were finally exhausted. It's fun to sled down, but it's kind of tiring to climb back up. It's a really good workout and everybody who does it deserves a cup of hot cocoa with chunks of homemade marshmallows.

For now, I don't think that this is cold. If somebody says it is cold, I ask them to bundle up and do activities that make you sweat. It is the only formula to get through the winter. When the season is done, I want to make a shirt with huge print on the back that says "I Survived the Wisconsin Winter".

For those of you who are still curled up on your couch, wake up now, bundle up, and go sledding. Trust me, you'll get through the winter well this way! As for me, I want to go sledding now. Woohoo!

Brahmani Dewa Bajra (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Fenton family
Madison, WI

Traditions Compared

Thanksgiving is as American as apple pie, a tradition that dates back decades. Thanksgiving, unlike Christmas, was entirely new to me. Even though in Ghana we give thanks for everything, there is no such day set aside as Thanksgiving Day. The rich American culture was evident when turkey was eaten in almost all American homes on Thanksgiving Day. The parades all over the country, most especially in New York, were really the icing on the cake. The rich American culture was brought to bear.

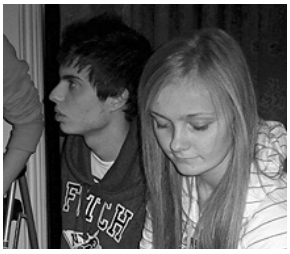
Christmas is celebrated in Ghana, though the euphoria in the United States is unbelievable and thrilling. From dad putting up the Christmas tree to children waking mom and dad up at dawn on Christmas Day, these were entirely new to me. In Ghana, we only have a big family meal with relatives and go to church on Christmas Day. In the United States, the streets are decorated, Christmas trees are put up in nine out of ten homes and there are presents for everyone.

Thanksgiving and Christmas are great American traditions and experiencing both has certainly been a great experience for me.

Mordecai Botchway (Ghana)
Hosted by the Mulnix family
Walker, IA

Fa La La La La

In Parkville, Missouri, the Denzin family welcomed Coordinator Liz Carver's cluster for games and caroling. Pictured above are Sergio O'Farrill Martinez Cairo (Mexico), Anya Shibayeva (Russia) and Roman Kohut (Ukraine). Below, Masha Vorotilina (Ukraine) plays a tune on the piano with Flavio Cabas (Italy).



Rocking Around the Tree

Metehan Doyran (Turkey), FLEX/YES Cluster Leader Cliff Fournier, Aleksey Vlasin (Ukraine), Gaiz Hatta Sahi (Philippines) and host brother Vova Budnichenko gather for a holiday party in Orange, Massachusetts.

Fall Rituals

Indiana exchange students show off their newly acquired pumpkin carving skills: Muhammad Haidar (Philippines), Jae Hyeon Kim (South Korea), Charles Bonnevie (Belgium), Tugberk Kaya (Turkey), Saskia Gehricke (Germany), Ambar Porta (Venezuela) and Micaela Pedriwicz (Spain).

A Capital Christmas

My host family and I went to Washington, DC to see the National Christmas Tree. It was one of the biggest trees I've ever seen at Christmastime.

With my family, I learned so much about Christmas because in Indonesia Christmas Day is not a big holiday like in the United States. My family taught me their traditions, one being that on Christmas Eve we read about Christmas in books and get new Christmas pajamas. In the morning, the other kids and I went into the living room to get our presents. I never experienced anything like that before.

My host family took me to see the White House, one of the places I most wanted to see. I thought seeing the real thing would only be in my dreams. We also saw the Washington Monument and walked toward the Capitol Building on the Washington Mall.

Getting snow is also a new experience for me because we never have snow in Indonesia. It is a lot of fun to play in.

Muhammad Ilyas Saudek (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Perez family
Womelsdorf, PA

More Students, More Fun

Pennsylvania FLEX/YES Cluster Leader Laura Puckett (fourth in the back) is pictured at a pancake breakfast for her cluster. Her group of 22 students from 16 countries is the largest PAX cluster this year: Shona Baatjes (South Africa), Jahongir Nosirov (Tajikistan), Maksim Kalinin (Russia), Zulekhabanu Shaikh (India), Mahter Mohammad Yasser (Philippines), Kasharel Ayra Mayo (Philippines), Sheikha Mae Abubakar (Philippines), Rowan Khalil (Egypt), Anna Kostryakova (Turkmenistan), Kateryna Petrovska (Ukraine), Chenghang Zheng (China), Can Tekimlig (Turkey), Yegor Ruzhin (Russia), Yuliya Hobriy (Ukraine), Hibatul Wafi (Indonesia), Emir Duric (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Amina Secic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Elza Ahmedova (Azerbaijan), Ildar Garifulin (Kyrgyzstan), Elizaveta Limonova (Tajikistan), Lusine Inants (Armenia) and two students from Afghanistan.

Aleksi Tuomi (Finland), Coordinator Frankie Green, Nika Zimmermann and Tim Heine (both from Germany) with Melissa Rodriguez (Mexico) and Taro Nakamura (Japan).

Christmas Near & Far

At our holiday party, we learned about each other's customs. In Mexico we have a party before Christmas called *Posada*. We get together with friends and play games. We break open a nine-pointed star *piñata* with candies inside, and then we have a gift exchange that is like Secret Santa. Posadas are done with friends, so Christmas Eve is with family. Christmas night is more important because it's when Jesus is born, so we have a big dinner like the American Thanksgiving.

Nika told me that one day in December German kids and teenagers put shoes by their doors. When they wake up, the shoes are filled with candies.

Aleki explained that they go naked in the snow after going in the sauna in Finland. He said, "I think my custom is the most amazing." I thought that it was crazy, but then he told us that they believe that doing it is good for your health.

We realized how different traditions are, but at the same time, how similar they are because of our faith.

Melissa Salazar Rodriguez (Mexico)
Hosted by the Foreman family
Augusta, GA

Indonesian YES student Indah is in the driver's seat.

A Modern Twist on the Nativity Story

Since I am Muslim, Christmas is a new event for me, so I joined the Christmas play with other kids from the church that my family goes to. We prepared for the show for three weeks. I was "Mary" in the Oprah Show. We know Mary as "Miriam" in Islam. Also I was a mom in an insurance commercial set in Bethlehem, and I read some lines as the narrator.

We had our performance on the 19th of December at night. All of the actors wore costumes and some make-up. A lot of people came including all of our family members. It was funny in one scene when I was pretending to drive a car and a girl shouted, "Watch out mom! You must really pay attention to the road." She shocked me with how loud she said it. I almost fell from the chair.

My host family was proud of our performance. Everybody in the church really enjoyed it. After the play, we had a potluck dinner. Mariya Proyayeva (Russia) and I were really happy after our long days of practice.

Indah Anandya Mahendra (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Hendrickson family
Ruther Glen, VA

Fresh Powder Calls

These ski buffs were up at the crack of dawn to catch the first chair to the top of a Michigan mountain. On the left is Andrew Marvin with his host brother Marvin Meyer (Germany).

Snow Days & Holidays

Counting Down with Fondue and Friends

New Year 2011 is a New Year I will never forget. My host family and I were invited to a party at Kathy's house. Jiahui "Kathy" He, my best friend, is from China. She lives with the Roberts. We always do fun stuff together and this party was the best time ever.

On December 31st, the two families were all together sitting at a table for a delicious fondue dinner. In fondue cooking you put your food to be cooked in hot oil. I had never done that before. I was so excited and kind of nervous. Trish, Kathy's host mother, taught me how to eat it traditionally. She said that you talk while you wait for the meat to be done. There is nothing better than family talking and sharing what they experience over a big yummy meal.

After dinner, we all went downstairs to have chocolate fondue as a dessert. There were several kinds of fruits we could dip in a pot filled with chocolate. As we were eating, we played Wii games. Bowling was our first round. My host mother, Rhonda, who used to be a bowler but new to the Wii, won a match. Kathy, after a long hard practice, still held the last place for every game. Yet, for "Just Dance", she has never lost. "Just Dance" is one of our favorites because it makes us lose some weight. We

all enjoyed this dancing game except Chuck, Kathy's dad, who prefers adventure games.

Finally, it was time to count down. Five, four, three, two, one, HAPPY NEW YEAR! We hugged and kissed while lots of pretty lights glowed on the television. We shared the best and worst thing we experienced in 2010. The worst thing for me was to be apart from my family. However, the best thing was that I came to Montana and got this precious chance to meet everyone.

Ananya Ongsurakul (Thailand)
Hosted by the Regimbal family
Great Falls, MT

The Georgian Way

In my country, Georgia, December 25th is not celebrated. New Year's is a big deal. We have New Year trees. Christmas, held on January 7th, is just a religious holiday.

Lela Okromelidze (Georgia)
Hosted by the McDonnell family
Portland, OR

Frosty the Snowman

In North Bennington, Vermont, Indonesian YES student Nadia Hardani learns snowman making skills from her two host sisters, Zoe and Katianna Nardone.

Bring On the Cold

Winter is a cold season that tropical countries such as Philippines never experience. It feels great to some who first experience it. But, for some who are used to it, it's bad weather. I love it. I don't understand why some people hate it, but I realize that people are different. If those people go to my country and say they love the hot weather, I might also have the same reaction.

Gaiz Hatta Sahi (Philippines)
Hosted by Shufelt family
Orange, MA

The Greatest Gift

One of our favorite traditions is putting up the Christmas tree while listening to Christmas music. Seongjae thought the tree was very beautiful and felt this was a very nice tradition. He told us that back home in South Korea, people would probably feel this was too much trouble. He was so impressed with the Christmas tree that while studying the Japanese form of poetry known as haiku in his World Literature class, he wrote the following poem:

Christmas Tree
I am so shiny.
But no nice present for me.
A bright but sad tree.

Sharing this holiday season with Seongjae made it more joyous of an occasion. Having him here has been the greatest "gift" of all.

The Candalino family, hosts for
Seongjae Hong (South Korea)
Las Vegas, NV

YES student Aswin Zaradini from Indonesia.

My Next Goal: An Indonesian Ski Team

I never thought that I could be on my school Nordic ski team because I am Indonesian, and we don't have snow sports. So when winter came, I decided to join it on a whim. The first day of practice was horrible but unforgettable because I fell down more than thirty times. I always laugh when I conjure up that moment because it is 180 degrees different for me now. I can ski truly fast. That sounds impressive when you know that I'm from Indonesia, which never gets snow and doesn't have ski activities and races. This shows "there is nothing you cannot do if you have a determination and willingness".

My first race was the Service High Snowball Race. I was in the boys open skate ski race. I felt so nervous, but I did well. 22.33 minutes was good enough. At the Lynx Lappet Ski Race, I did better with the classic ski category. My third race was the best race I've had. At the Bartlett Ski Race, I achieved 19.22 minutes. In Skiathlon, I was on the Boys C team. That race was the coldest race I ever did because the temperature was -13 F and windy. You can imagine, a kid from Indonesia, getting a very good time. Now I have a dream to make an Indonesian Nordic Ski Team. Let's do it.

Aswin Hindami Zaradini (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Okland family
Anchorage, AK

The Family that Surfs Together

Here's one way to warm up Michigan's long winter nights. Pictured are host mother Candy Crick, Carolina Leite (Brazil) and Eleonora Visentin (Italy).

PAXabroad

PAX is now accepting applications for the 2011-2012 PAX Abroad programs. American students can choose from an academic year long or semester program to France, Germany or Spain, or a summer program to Australia, France, or Spain. The deadlines to apply are April 1st for the academic year or fall semester, September 15th for spring semester, and April 15th for summer programs. Info and applications can be found at www.pax.org/paxabroad.html. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Vicky at victoriac@pax.org.

NEW YORK: A Fairytale Trip

On the last weekend of October, my host family took me to New York City. We spent three fabulous days on Manhattan Island. I could see all of the city from the 86th floor of the Empire State Building. I had an opportunity not only to see the Statue of Liberty, but also to visit a museum inside of it. We went to Ellis Island with a museum about immigrants and I enjoyed watching all of the lights and visiting the shops in Times Square.

We had a delicious meal at a Chinese restaurant where I tried food I had never eaten before. We visited a big toyshop, Toys 'R Us. It was amazing! A two-story Barbie house, the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State building made of Legos, and a huge moving dinosaur made an impression on me. Another wonderful shop was American Girl Doll. It sells beautiful dolls and clothing for them. I even found a doll that looks exactly like me!

On the last day, we went to Central Park on Manhattan Island. It was so unusual to be surrounded by the trees, water and silence in the center of a noisy concrete megaplex.

I am so grateful to my wonderful host family for this unforgettable trip!

Irina Klimova (Russia)
Hosted by the Eklund family
Orange, MA

MISSISSIPPI: Sweet on Potatoes

At the Vardaman Sweet Potato Festival, there was much to do from tractor judging to pie eating contests to tater tastings. Pictured are Christina Malik (India), Junyeong Park (South Korea) and Natchaphat Jaiborisut (Thailand).

NORTH CAROLINA: A Renaissance Girl

Renaissance is one of the most popular clubs in my school. Students with good grades get a Renaissance card. There are three different kinds of cards, depending on how good the grades are: gold, silver, and bronze. Thankfully I got straight As so I got a gold card. Students with Renaissance cards may leave class early for lunch and sometimes we get free breakfast.

Last month the club had a trip to the Biltmore, which is America's biggest house. It was really fun! I met a lot of students I didn't know before and I learned about the Biltmore's history. It was up in the mountains so it got a lot of snow. Snow is a new thing for me because I come from Indonesia, a tropical country that never gets snow. We have the other trip next month and I cannot wait for it!

Azka Bastaman (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Dawson family
Gastonia, NC

OREGON: Inspired by Lawmakers

Thank you to my coordinator, Maranee Sanders, for giving me the opportunity to visit Oregon Congressman David Wu and the Multnomah County Court. I learned a lot of things, especially about the American government and courts. I most liked talking with Field Representatives Ramona Perrault and Brian Plinoki in David Wu's office. I think everybody was very excited to know more about the issues that are connected with government: corruption, the Dream Act, the role of government in schools, etc. And also the dinner was awesome. It's the first time I had Lebanese food.

Irvan Fathurohman (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Foster family
Hillsboro, OR

COLORADO: Delighted in Denver

Coordinator Barry Carroll's Fort Collins FLEX and YES cluster road tripped to Denver to see the major sights. In front are Kali Carroll, Rahmadani Cahyaningtyas (Indonesia), Muhammad Jalalkhan (Kenya) and Abiba Mumuni (Ghana). In the back are Leart-Saranchini (Macedonia), Fady Atteya (Egypt), Olena Vyshnevska (Ukraine), Olesya Prodobyed (Ukraine), Veronika Ponomarenko (Ukraine), Aydana Rakimbayeva (Kazhakstan) and Asma Cheaaubong (Thailand).

THE OLD SOUTH

FLEX/YES Cluster Leader Tracy Bolin and her cluster journeyed back to the pre-Civil War South at a former plantation in North Carolina. Pictured are Tatjana Brestovac (Bosnia), Zeba Mansuri (India), Sonya Hakobyan (Armenia), Felipe da Silva (Brazil) and Emilio Alanis Gutierrez (Mexico).

Seeing America Through Student Eyes

CALIFORNIA: Striking It Rich

Nattaya Tasawat, left, and her host siblings panned for gold during their vacation. Other trip highlights were seeing the polar bear at Sea World and going on the rides at Disneyland. The Houston family hosts the Thai student in Hurricane, Utah.

WISCONSIN: A Packerette is Born

Prior to Julia's arrival, we had purchased tickets for the December 5th Green Bay Packer game at Lambeau Field. Having only purchased enough tickets for the size of the family at that time, we were one short! Julia's host sister, Lydia, decided it was more important for her "sister" from Brazil to attend the game and gave up her seat.

With temperatures slightly above freezing the "girl from Brazil" headed to the "frozen tundra", and became a "Packer Fan", if only for the day.

Julia has been a joy to share our lives with and has completely stolen our hearts. In conclusion, we are so very thankful to have had the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful young woman's life. Our heartfelt thanks to the PAX program and to Julia's mother and father.

The Burgus/Groom family
Hosts for Julia Coutinho (Brazil)
Wauzeka, WI

A New Generation Takes the Lead

PAX congratulates the winning FLEX and YES delegates.

Better Understanding For a Better World

Orlando, Florida

This year's four-day conference in February brought together American high school students of diverse faiths and cultural backgrounds with international exchange students to foster mutual understanding and tackle problems resulting from prejudice and intolerance.

Olga Magneyeva (Russia), Elena Ionita (Moldova), Yekaterina Vlasova (Russia), Viktoriya Kobzistaya (Russia), Zhanylmyrza Alibaeva (Kyrgyzstan), Roman Kohut (Ukraine), Lela Okromelidze (Georgia), Aiperi Iusupova (Kyrgyzstan), Anastasiya Gunko (Russia), Artur Pak (Kazakhstan), Oleksiy Vlasin (Ukraine), Anastasiya Okuneva (Russia), Dinara Dauletbayeva (Kazakhstan), Zarina Tuybayeva (Russia), Anna Shibayeva (Russia), Jose Humberto Ernesto (Mozambique), Mahter Mohammad Yasser (Philippines), Dian Lestari (Indonesia), Metehan Doyran (Turkey), Amira Asiri (Philippines), Hristina Petkova (Bulgaria), Selma Lacic (Bosnia & Herzegovina), Gaiz Hatta Sahi (Philippines), Muhammad Rizki (Indonesia), Gabriela Veleva (Bulgaria), Arjeta Rushiti (Macedonia), Leelanut Jitbantad (Thailand), Ahmed El Serougui (Egypt), John Asigbekye (Ghana) and one student from Afghanistan

Civic Education Workshop

Washington, DC

The one-week February workshop enabled participants to gain a greater understanding of democratic concepts such as civic responsibility, citizen empowerment, volunteerism and community action. In addition to participating in seminars and visiting the capitol's monuments and museums, the delegates spoke with State Department officials and spent a day on Capitol Hill, where they met with the members of Congress from their respective host states and districts.

Zhanylmyrza Alibaeva (Kyrgyzstan), Tatiana Caraus (Moldova), Aleksey Filippov (Russia), Javidan Gasimov (Azerbaijan), Anastasiya Gunko (Russia), Elena Ionita (Moldova), Olga Magneyeva (Russia), Regina Malykh (Russia), Salome Mindiashvili (Georgia), Anastasiya Nevmerzhytska (Ukraine), Olesya Podobyed (Ukraine), Rada-Yekaterina Shakirova (Russia), Vitaliy Sharandin (Ukraine), Dmitriy Zinchenko (Russia), Lazarela Antonijevic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Emir Duric (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Selma Lacic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Hristina Petkova (Bulgaria), Hana Sarvan (Macedonia), Jovana Stojanova (Macedonia), Gabriela Veleva (Bulgaria) and two students from Afghanistan

INDIANA: Riding High

Gina Brings gets a great view of the countryside from her saddle. The Walker-Stewart family hosts the Belgian teen in Lafayette.

GLOBAL LITERACY

This page highlights some of the ways that PAX students are working to educate Americans about their homelands and to increase mutual respect among all people.

Pandas, Chopsticks & More

Jiaxin Yu gave a Vernon Elementary School class a lesson on China. The Amidon family hosts the teen in Vermont.

Try Some Spätzle

In Ohio, Germans Nils Bichler and Alex Schenk taught their school cooking class how to make *spätzle*, a homemade pasta that is mixed with cheese, bacon and onions. Nils is hosted by the Greene family, and Alex is hosted by the Slagle family.

Representing South Korea

Dory Kang answered many questions about her country during her talk at the Nettleton Primary School in Mississippi. An added bonus to the visit was seeing her host parents' granddaughter who attends the school.

Once Upon a Time...

"After reading *Cinderella* in Dutch, I asked the class if they knew which story I read. They all did!" Eveline Van Loock, left, recounts. She is thinking of being a teacher after this experience. The Booher family hosts the Belgian girl in Evart, Michigan.

Fostering an Understanding of Thailand

Sarinya Danvanichkul enchanted elementary students with her stories and depiction of life in her home country. The Qualls family hosts her in Konawa, Oklahoma.

Diplomat-in-Training

Being an exchange student is amusing, challenging, sometimes emotional, instructive and hilarious. The questions about my home country especially astonished me in the beginning but became fun very soon: "Do you have cows in your home country?" "Yeah. But they're usually purple and give chocolate milk." Or, "Why don't you guys speak English in Germany?

I thought it was a very new and exciting experience to tell people, usually in a more serious way, about the country overseas where I live. The interests and requests soon encouraged me to give a brief picture presentation about my little hometown in one of my classes. After that success, bigger ones followed. I presented PowerPoints about Germany in my school language club, in my business class and even for a local organization to share the experience of life in a different country.

Being an exchange student gives the exciting possibility to represent your home country and to show people that there are other great places, different ways to think and different, but also working, solutions. In my opinion, it is an opportunity every exchange student should use.

Whatever way you are going to represent your home country this year, do it well. And have fun!

Christoph Schubert (Germany)
Hosted by the Kabala family
Wheeling, WV

Christoph whipped up a German cheesecake for his family.

Talk of Nations

Students in Coordinator Teresa Metz's cluster spoke to 250 elementary school children at an event in Greensburg, Indiana. Pictured are Christina Meisel (Germany), Javier Adame Morales (Mexico), Iiris Kolunsarka (Finland), Alessandra Waskow (Germany), Sara Heinemann (Germany), Ken Kurebayaski (Japan) and Chayanit Ngamtin (Thailand).

Mason Elementary students learned about Ukraine from FLEX student Roman Kohut.

The Power of Words

At the Poetry Coffeehouse at my high school, I read the poem of one of my favorite Ukrainian authors, Ivan Franko. The audience liked it! Then, the librarian asked me to read the poem in Ukrainian. After I read it, I took a deep breath in and heard the clapping and supportive exclamations of my friends! It's amazing that Americans are so tolerant toward other languages and cultures!

Roman Kohut (Ukraine)
Hosted by the Blunt family
Lee's Summit, MO

A Grateful Audience

In Vermont, Brattleboro Union High School Principal Jim Day presented a certificate of appreciation to Arjeta Rushiti for her presentations on Macedonia during International Education Week. The YES student is spending the year with the Martin family.

Rubicon-Photo.com

YES student Amira Asiri poses with her host family next to her exquisite table setting.

A Slice of the Philippines

On November 8th, we had our International Dinner at Jefferson High School. We went there right after school until 9:30 p.m. We brought the food and immediately began arranging the table settings. The tables looked so pretty. It would not have gone so well without my host mom's help. After that, I served food to each table and entertained the 165 guests. This was my first time handling such a formal dinner. It was so special because my host grandparents came. In fact, my host mom had tears in her eyes seeing her parents walk to our table. They took a flight from the state of Washington to Iowa for the dinner.

Amira Asiri (Philippines)
Hosted by the Skinner family
Cedar Rapids, IA

Rubicon-Photo.com

A Gourmet Gala Impresses the Crowd

This Cedar Rapids, Iowa group is aglow after hosting a tremendously successful dinner for their school officials and host families. Starting in the back are Gabriella Velev (Bulgaria), Ahmed El Serougi (Egypt), Mohamed Kassem (Egypt), Nina Fischnaller (Germany) and Alexandre Keller (Brazil). In the front row are Mohamed Al-Jabr (Saudi Arabia), Mordecai Botchway (Ghana), Dolagy Khalil (Egypt), Cluster Leader Rayetta Fetter, Johnson Badawi (Philippines), Amira Asiri (Philippines) and Sayaka Matsumoto (Japan). In the center on one knee is Aitor Rodriguez (Spain).

Rubicon-Photo.com

Garnished with Humor

Ahmed El Serougi describes his dish from Egypt. Later in the evening, the YES student had the crowd rolling with laughter during his stand-up act about the dumb questions and comments exchange students hear.

Rubicon-Photo.com

Big Sister, Little Brother

I've been a little sister for eighteen years. My brother Daniel is 22. Now it's my time to be a big sister! Some people think little children can't influence your life, or they think they're so quiet that you don't even notice them. That's what I thought before! Well, I think those people should try to be more around children.

Every little thing in this house talks about love and makes me feel so good. The first new word I learned was *binky*. This is a keyword to get on with baby A!

When we met at the airport, the baby smiled at me. But I'm not sure he liked me very much. It took a couple of days for him to get used to me and to go outside and play together without his mama. That was the beginning of our friendship!

We have a lot of things in common. First, we both love basketballs. As a consequence, we are very active! We found out we love taking long walks around the neighborhood so that mama can take a nap or cook dinner and I can take some awesome pictures of baby A. He's the most photogenic person I've ever met. Being with baby A is never boring. It gets a little bit harder when he's tired, but he's always very cute!

Cristina Maia Buzuleciu (Italy)
Hosted by the Markan family
Wheeling, WV

Our Master Debater

Nicolas, with the nudging of host mother, signed up for the debate team at Mauldin High School. He dove right into debating BOTH sides of a topic and doing so in his third language (French being the other). Nicolas took fourth at one event and second at a couple of competitions as a novice debater. Then he came home with the first place trophy from a competition with a nationally seated opponent on the varsity team! Now he wants to take his successes back to Germany and possibly start a debate club there! We are all so proud of Nicolas and will miss his enthusiasm for debate.

Dan and Karen Graham, hosts for
Nicolas Paulus (Germany)
Greenville, SC

SHARE YOUR AMERICA

To learn about hosting, call PAX at 800-555-6211 or visit www.pax.org.

"The best surprise was ours. We had no idea how much we would love this girl."
The Heaton family in Utah, hosted Johanna (Germany)

"We have learned that there is unseen beauty in our own backyard."
The Metz family in Indiana, hosted Crystabel (Malaysia)

"Learning about Reksa's culture, religion and food was a uniquely educational experience for our family."
The Hammond family in New Hampshire, hosted Reska (Indonesia)

"We highly recommend this experience. I've been impressed with how PAX has prepared the students for life in their host country." The Pateska family in Nebraska, hosted August (Norway)

GAIN THE WORLD

PAX students speak English, have personal spending money and are fully insured.

Hello from the White House

Shouting out a greeting are McKenzie, Dakoda, Ali, Cassidy, Muhammad Ilyas Saudek, Jazmine and Amber. The Indonesian YES student says he treasures being part of the Perez-Umberger family in Womelsdorf, Pennsylvania. "They are fun!"

Lions, Tigers and Bears

Indonesian Rahmadani Cahyaningtyas introduces Kali Carroll to the animals at the Denver Zoo. The Wilson family hosts the YES student in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Bravo Brattleboro

This year, Brattleboro Union High School in Vermont hosted eleven PAX students and three YES students, their highest number of exchange students ever. Principal Jim Day told Coordinator Ann Newsmith, "Feel free to continue to get us numbers like this. We are a better school because of it."

Wrapped & Delivered

Magic lights, quiet snowy nights, exciting wrapped boxes under the Christmas tree on a mysterious eve – the American Christmas was one of my main dreams. I was very excited for it. My host aunt's family came over, so we celebrated with a big family in a big house. We went to church on Christmas Eve and lit our candles, listening to carols. We unwrapped mysterious boxes from under the tree so the whole floor in the living room was covered with paper and presents! I'm so glad that I could feel this atmosphere of love and Christmas mystery. My wish came true!

Aleksey Filippov (Russia)
Hosted by the Carter family
Lenox, MA

The Making of a Packer Fan

This past August, our first-ever exchange student, Brahmani, arrived. Over the next few weeks, my husband and I (it's just the two of us at home - our two children are grown) set about helping him adjust to life in America, and specifically, life in Wisconsin.

One key part of this process was introducing Brahmani to football – the American kind – and to the legendary Green Bay Packers. He seemed interested and was willing to watch some of the games while we explained the fundamentals of the sport.

In October, we took our annual vacation to Door County, and of course Brahmani came along. While staying overnight in Green Bay the first evening, we decided to tour Lambeau Field. The tour guide did a tremendous job of relating the history of this unique team, and the tour took us all over the beautiful, spacious stadium. It included a visit to a luxury suite and a run through the players' tunnel to the recorded sound of the crowd cheering.

This experience changed Brahmani from a mildly-interested game watcher into a devoted Packer fan who, I'm convinced, will open the first Packers-wear shop in Indonesia. He's now the very proud owner of not one, but two Aaron Rodgers jerseys, and is deliriously happy that his team is doing so well in the playoffs. We're all hoping for a Super Bowl appearance and we're saving our Packers M&Ms for the occasion.

Susan Fenton, host mother for
Brahmani Dewa Bajra (Indonesia)
Madison, WI

Sister Act

In South Korea, Woojeon Jeon is an only child, so she loves being with her new younger sisters, Faith and Autumn. The Shimers host her in Portland, Michigan.

Egyptian YES student Rowan is in the center.

Blessed to Be Her Mom

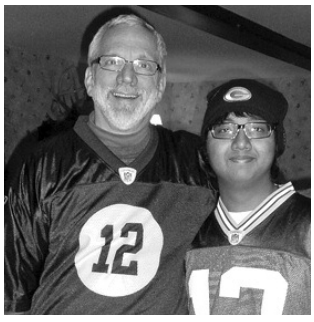
Rowan from Egypt is the fifth exchange student we've hosted. Hosting has been a wonderful experience for our family. Our family has been blessed beyond words! Rowan is a very sweet girl that quickly fit into our family and we are so blessed to have her as our "daughter." We took Rowan ice-skating and I will never forget what she told me as I was teaching her how to skate. She said, "Mom, don't hold on to me, but if I fall you catch me." I said, "Rowan we are on ice, who do you think I am." And she said, "That's what Mom's do when their kids fall – they catch them." I'm so blessed to be her mom!

Robin Murray, host mother for
Rowan Khalil (Egypt)
Saint Thomas, PA

My Russian Son

Daniil is a great student and friend. My wife passed away in April 2010, so I didn't know if I wanted to have another exchange student this year, but I thought I'd give it another try. It is working out great. He's great company and loves to travel. Daniil received high honors in school, played soccer and did swimming. He is also performing community service for the Waterville Public Library. He will probably reach over a hundred hours before he departs in May.

Gil Roy, host father for
Daniil Kargalskov (Russia)
Oakland, ME



Indonesian YES student Brahmani, right.

Team PAX: At Home in the World

In Los Osos, California, Hikaru Mochizuki (Japan), Natthapat Wongcharoenyong (Thailand), Diego Gladig (Switzerland), Petchnamnueng Yimsomboonpat (Thailand) sport their PAX t-shirts.