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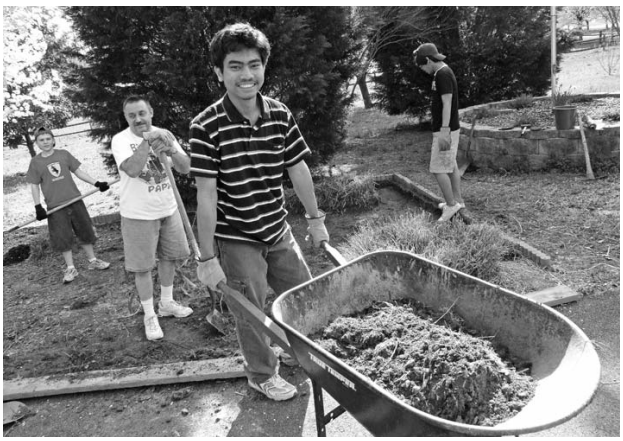

Exchange Student Springs Into Action

"On the first day of spring, my host dad asked me to mulch the yard and fix the plants. I was so excited about the project and I did it gladly," Gamaliel Sangga Buana recalls. Since the YES student lives in a city back home in Indonesia, he relishes outdoor chores with the Hendrickson family at their home in Ruther Glen, Virginia. "It was so much fun to mulch the yard, a simple but family-oriented spring celebration. I'm sure I will miss this moment."

Never Say Can't

When I first came to America, I had a lot of fears. I was scared that people wouldn't accept me. For the first couple days I stayed at my coordinator's home. She made me feel comfortable to talk. She talked about my host family a lot so my fears about staying with a new family started to disappear.

It wasn't that easy to interact with Americans for the first couple days, especially at school. I tried to be myself and be more open. I tried to adapt myself.

I found help, love and appreciation from everybody around me. My host family was very warm. They made my aware of everything and they advised me. Their support changed me a lot. Also helpful was my exchange sister Elza from Armenia. We shared so much together this year.

My mom Jeanne helped me become stronger and more independent. She said, "Never say I can't." After I started to believe in myself, I made more friends than I could ever imagine. Now I feel that I'm in my own country with my own family. You never feel homesick beside people who love you for who you are.

Nobody knows how happy and proud I felt when I got a good grade at school. Before, I didn't think that I could be really successful in my life, but after doing a lot of challenging things, I think, why not?

This has been the most challenging year of my life. The most important thing to happen to me is that I began to love myself. Coming here has not been the end, but a huge start to my new life.

I want to say thanks to everybody who has helped me: my lovely family, my coordinator Fariba Kazemi, Streetsboro High School and my American friends. Thanks YES and PAX for giving me the opportunity to come here and become a better person.

Somaya Ahmed (Egypt)
Hosted by the Sobie family
Streetsboro, OH

Nurturing Young Minds

FLEX student Elza Galstyan (Armenia), on the right, and YES student Somaya Ahmed (Egypt), back, volunteered 40 hours for a children's program. ***For stories on community service, see "Part of the Solution" on page 3.***

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Crowned in Indiana

Mississinewa High School seniors chose Stefan Pajovic as their prom king. The Swiss student is spending his year with the Brown family in Marion, Indiana.

School Launches Aspiring Diplomat

The high school that I am currently attending is Linworth Alternative Program. It is very different from other high schools in the USA because it has a different kind of teaching program. The school provides students with choices, lots of responsibility and a participatory government. The students and faculty vote on school policies. I am very happy that I am in this very nice high school. It has given me the chance to do a lot of things that I never thought to do, never imagined to do.

As I am a junior at Linworth, I did an *Interim Week*, which is a break from the classroom-learning environment. Students get to learn about something that they find interesting in a way that can't be accomplished in a traditional setting.

Interim was the most amazing time of my life. I am interested in government, so I got the chance to go to the State House and the Supreme Court of Ohio. I found out how people work there and I compared it to our own government and court. As I want to be a diplomat for my country, it was a big step forward for me.

I really appreciate my host family, coordinator, friends and school staff. Without them I would not have had this wonderful chance to see the USA as it actually is.

Saidolim Oromzod (Tajikistan)
Hosted by the Canty family
Worthington, OH

The Heath family now includes their German daughter Johanna, third from the right.

She Won Our Hearts

This year has been full of adventure and surprises! The first surprise was Johanna's. Our desert area is very different from her native Germany. She received quite a shock when the temperature hit 43 degrees C!

The next surprise was how Las Vegas is just like in the movies but American high school isn't. Johanna was able to get involved in so many things. She was manager of the volleyball team, on the track team, and she went to almost every dance the school had.

The best surprise was ours. We had no idea how much we would love this girl. When Johanna moved into our home, she moved straight into our hearts. Hosting a student has brought us the daughter and sister we never knew we had, but will now be part of our family forever.

The Heaton family, hosts for
Johanna Meier (Germany)
St. George, Utah

Bon Appetit

Theo Albrecht (France) and his host mom, Ana Gerhardt, teach a French cooking class at their Strafford, Vermont home. Participants made *salade nicoise* and *tarte au citron et pruneaux* (lemon tart with prune preserve). Theo taught the proper French way to eat a baguette and did a PowerPoint show on French cafes, bistros and brasseries.

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The scavenger hunt winners show off their t-shirts. The "second placers" have hats. From the back, Anne-Sophie Tietz (Germany), Yingrak Muansawad (Thailand), Ruoqiong Zhang (China), Sebastian Nicod (France), friend Rodrigo (Peru), Eirik Lerfald (Norway), Denis Alfano (Italy), Robert Salvioli (Mexico), and in front, Elisabeth Miess (Germany) and Chiara Pastorino (Italy).

The Hunt is On

I, along with two other chaperones, took a group of ten exchange students to Redington Shores, Florida for a spring break vacation in February. We all anxiously boarded the plane seeking warm weather. We had rented a condo overlooking the beautiful ocean. All was perfect, except the weather. I think it only reached 60 degrees one day! In spite of the weather, we had a great time and made our own fun! We swam, shopped, ate, sang Karaoke, played mini golf, danced, played charades, cooked, etc.

The highlight of the trip was a scavenger hunt. We gave each group a list of 44 items to find and do. They had to videotape or take a picture of each item such as singing a song with a stranger, teaching a native dance to a stranger, etc. It was awesome. We had a wonderful vacation and the group of students was outstanding.

Christine Cossalter
Community Coordinator
Burnsville, MN

Big Bend Beauty

Mari Sellias (Norway) and Dag Yeong Kim (South Korea) loved going with the Siglin family to one of America's great nature reserves, Big Bend National Park in Texas. The girls were amazed by the desert park.

PAX Abroad in Spain

Shortly after Julia Radomski arrived in Getxo, Spain in January, the PAX Abroad student was swept up in a whirlwind of Carnival festivities with her new friends and host family. She loved the street parades and parties leading up to Lent, the forty-day period before Easter. Julia is the third lamb in this flock.

The PAX National Meeting

At the PAX conference, Connecticut Coordinator Debbie Evans (center) chats with PAX Regional Directors Carol Craig and Jean Tatroe. Irina Conevska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) was on hand to help celebrate PAX's first year with the YES Balkans program.

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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Thank you for submitting letters to PAX Press. Because of space limitations, however, we are unable to print each letter in its entirety.

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

Opened Our View

We have loved learning about Charlotte as a person, how she views our American life, her life back home in Germany and how she would approach similar situations. Charlotte has challenged some of our perceptions and taught us another way to view the world. Our son Kyle was very lonely as an only child and having Charlotte in his life has given him a friend who, in his own words, he can play with, jump with and go around and around with. Charlotte, for her part, has learned that although children can be disgusting and disruptive, they still might be worth having someday.

We will miss Charlotte very much when she goes home and are very glad we had the opportunity to get to know her.

The Gercken-Imm family, hosts for
Charlotte Niemann (Germany)
Middlefield, OH

River Rat Race

A week ago, the nearby town Athol held a canoe race. It was a new and tremendously fabulous experience for me. Organized by the Athol and Orange Lions Clubs, this annual springtime party began with the River Rat Promenade parade, celebrating the race, area residents and the region. The first challenge for the racers was to get through the crowd under the 30-foot span of the South Main Street Bridge. About a half hour later, the racers arrived at the Orange's River Front Park.

Muhammad Amir Syarifuddin (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Chapman family
Orange, MA

First Easter

Easter is widely celebrated in my country. Nevertheless, I have never experienced it like this since my family and I are Muslims. But, Easter is a big holiday in my host family's life. We did all of the routines: dying eggs and egg hunting. The most fun was looking for the golden egg, which had a money reward in it. We also went to church and had a big party with the entire family and relatives. It was a lot of fun! I love spending time with my family, especially when the whole family comes together for holidays!

Aitolkyn Kazmagambet (Kazakhstan)
Hosted by the von Gersdorff family
Purcellville, VA

FLEX student Aitolkyn Kazmagambet shows off an egg decorated with Kazakhstan's flag.

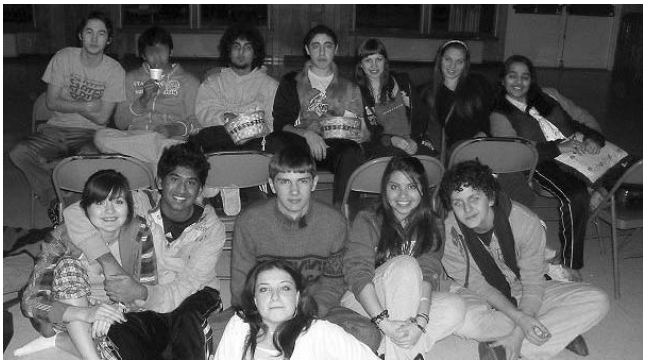
The Best Year of My Life

I've grown so much and I'm better at English now. Besides that, I met a lot of new people and made many friendships. When I'm back in Germany I will miss the American personalities because the people are so open, nice and friendly. I will also miss pancakes, regular cakes and ice cream. All that stuff is just so delicious. The countryside is also very unique and beautiful. I will miss the pretty views out of my window.

I found a really good friend in America and we are very close. Her name is Cadyn. We always have fun together and laugh a lot. We go hiking, to the movies and in the hot tub. We could be sisters.

I can definitely say that my stay in America was the best year in my entire life.

Daria Lohaus (Germany)
Hosted by the Lukich family
Sedona, AZ



Weekend Retreat in Pennsylvania

Coordinator Laura Puckett's FLEX and YES students reconnect with each during their mid year retreat. The Pennsylvania cluster includes Ekaterina Kononova (Tajikistan), Melike Surucu (Turkey), Abhishek Purushotham (India), Orest Franchuk (Ukraine), Hadeel Abdel Aziz (Egypt), Nino Lojpur (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Ruslan Fakhrutdinov (Russia), Michael (Afghanistan), Jaunty Sanmukhani (India), Omar Khedre (Egypt), Iuvilina Raischi (Moldova), Maja Hristovska (Macedonia), Sangini Shah (India), Azamat Sirazhedinov (Kyrgyzstan), Joan Kolvani (Albania), Bahar Orazdurdiyeva (Turkmenistan) and Muhammad Abdul Kader (Malaysia).

YES student Putri and her host sister Rachel Brecht cheer for Iowa at the Orange Bowl.

Orange Bowl Fever

It was -15°F with 8 inches of snow on the ground in Iowa, but I was sitting on a beach in Miami escaping winter. On January first, my host family and I traveled to Florida for the Iowa Hawkeye football team's Orange Bowl. My American brother is a manager for the team. We visited South Beach, downtown Miami and the Everglades. We rode on an airboat, saw alligators and many water birds. We sat on the beach and rode the waves in the ocean. On January 5, we cheered the Hawkeyes to great victory.

It was a great escape and the trip of a lifetime.

Putri Pandora (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Dolan family
Coggon, IA

Made My Day

Soon after I arrived, I met Miss Fang who is also from China. She is my host sister's Mandarin teacher. We have become good friends. It is nice to have someone here who speaks Mandarin.

One of my favorite experiences was visiting my host grandfather's farm in Santa Rosa. He grows grapes for wine there. I got to go in the little farm truck that goes around the vineyard!

Zhao Qianyi (China)
Hosted by the Feingold family
San Luis Obispo, CA

Fond Farewells

Brazilian Rafael Valverde, left, enjoy one last day with German Alicia Busch, friend Hannah and Thai Warunyna Sakolvipas before heading home after his semester in North Carolina.

Capital Getaway

We took our two exchange students to Washington, DC over spring break. It was a great educational experience. We were able to see the Supreme Court, the Arlington National Cemetery, the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Holocaust Museum, the National Art Gallery, the National Museum of Natural History, the National Air and Space Museum and all the memorials. Although they have seen these things on television, they said it was an even greater experience to see it in person.

Nancy Nelson, host mother for
Mariami Parekhelashvili (Georgia)
Mert Nizamoglu (Turkey)
Gahanna, OH

Meeting in Thailand

My host parents just returned from a trip to Southeast Asia for their 25th anniversary. They planned this trip before they knew that I would be staying with them. It is totally a coincidence that their cruise started out in Bangkok where I come from. We made a plan for them to meet my parents. They spent the weekend together. My mother and father took them to see things around Bangkok, including my school. My host parents even went to my house and met all of my family (parents, grandparents, aunts and cousins). My mother and grandmother cooked a lot of good Thai food for them. They called me when they were together and told me that it was wonderful for them to meet because they are now sharing the same daughter.

While they were there, the Diamond's daughter Tamara flew to Palm Springs from San Francisco to stay with their dog and me. I think it is just amazing that I was at their place in the U.S. and they were at my place in Thailand at the same time! While they were on their trip, Tamara took me to my school where I received the Principal's Award for a 4.0 GPA at Palm Springs High School.

Meatanun with Principal Wright.

Meatanun Charoonkolaks (Thailand)
Hosted by the Diamond family
Palm Springs, CA

My Coordinator Rocks

Indonesian YES student Aulia Mustamir thanks Coordinator Sherry Andrews and her husband John for bringing her to Pennsylvania where she has had "a wonderful experience with wonderful people".

The Crystal Palace

Our family went on a tour of the Franklin Park Conservatory. It was built by my host dad Pete Nelson. While there, I learned about his job as a project manager and engineer. It was so interesting to see so many plants that I haven't seen before. We also saw an exhibition of Chihuly, the famous glass sculptor. One of my favorite parts of this field trip was when we attended a glass blowing demonstration.

Mari Parekhelashvili (Georgia)
Hosted by the Nelson family
Gahanna, OH

Snow Angels

Host sister Caroline Purdy and Warunya Sakolvipas (Thailand) wasted no time getting out in the snow after a rare snowstorm in Raleigh, North Carolina.

My Other Mom

Do we look alike? My host mom and I are really close. She has almost everything in common with my real mom; they love to walk, talk and take care of me. I learned that I can have fun here, hanging out with my friends and enjoying activities with my hosts. When I get back home, I will never forget that they are also my lovely family.

Arpa Realsatjanon (Thailand)
Hosted by the Kiernan family
Stuyvesant, NY

Part of the Solution

PAX students make an impact near and far.

Help for Haiti

In Indiana, Shuxuan Cao from China pitches in with the Beasley family to put food packages together for the Haitian people affected by January's devastating earthquake.

Selling Shirts, Rebuilding Homes

When I heard about the massive earthquake in Indonesia last year, I felt so sad for my country. I found out that a friend of mine lost his house in Padang, Sumatra Barat. He is hosted in Virginia this year. All of the Indonesian exchange students are trying to help him.

Since I like the computer a lot, I decided to try to make an awesome t-shirt design. I made an announcement at my high school about the earthquake. People showed their sympathy for Indonesia and wanted to buy my t-shirts. The t-shirt is light blue and says '"Recover and Discover Indonesia" on the back. I am so happy that my fundraising project was successful.

Willy Gusti (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Frailey family
Williamsport, PA

Willy's calculus teacher Ms Flint said, "It is a cool t-shirt, Willy! I like it!"

Packing Protein

FLEX and YES students in Coordinator Laura Puckett's cluster volunteer at a meat canning plant in Pennsylvania. The meat they canned was sent to people around the world who are affected by war, oppression and natural disasters.

Hair Color for Hope

At an Iowa shopping mall, Daniel Sadek Dos Santos Moraes (Brazil) colors Cedar Rapids Coordinator Rayetta Fetter's hair pink during a fundraiser for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. Twenty-five PAX students and family members participated in the event, raising $500 for research.

Awake-A-Thon for Kids

Students at Central Columbia School in Pennsylvania raised money for children in need during an overnight at their school. "We did not sleep from 7pm-7am! We danced and did some sports to get donations from people," explained Indonesian YES student Nanda Nidya. "I loved the togetherness of that night."

PAX Alum Starts School in Somalia

During my last day in New Hampshire, Coordinator Dolores Siik encouraged us to do something positive back home. I thought about how I could help my society and came up with the idea to establish an English school in order to help people learn the language. My old classmates welcomed the idea.

We started the English school with 14 students and called it the Waaberi Institute. Seven months later we also started a computer training class.

The school is three years old now, and it contains five English classes, a computer class, an office and a printing room. The total number of students in the school is 684. The students learn for two years. We've had three graduation ceremonies so far.

Mustafe Hori (Somalia)
PAX Alum '07

Stocking Up a Food Pantry

Muhammad Amir Syarifuddin helped move truckloads of canned provisions into a food panty in Orange, Massachusetts. The Chapman family hosts the Indonesian YES student.

Stepping Up to the Plate

It was a good experience being a waitress and helping at a Haiti fundraiser. I waited tables, served rice typical to Haiti and bussed tables. It was really fun. After we were done, we were so weary because people had kept coming and coming. The French students from my school raised $200 for Doctor's Without Borders and $150 for an orphanage in Port-au-Prince. The art auction raised $8000. I was proud of what I did and I have started thinking about volunteering more. I am thankful to Mrs. Larson for getting us to do this. It made a difference in my life.

Yingrak Muansawad (Thailand)
Hosted by the Singh family
Rochester, MN

Indonesian YES student Gamaliel Sangga Buana and his fellow fasters serve breakfast to the homeless.

Hunger Challenge

We have all heard how the earthquake devastated Haiti. The chance to help came when my church had a service project for youth called the Hunger Challenge. We could not eat for 24 hours, although we could drink. The money we raised would rebuild a school in Haiti. Everyone needed to get sponsors for every hour we fasted.

When the day came, there were almost fifty youth from the East Coast. We had lots of activities and lots of fun. I didn't even realize that I was fasting. In the morning, we fed the homeless people in the shelter. I was so sad to see their condition.

I learned a lot from the Hunger Challenge. It was good to know how it feels to be in the victim's position and how to stand up for people instead of doing nothing.

Gamaliel Sangga Buana (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Hendrickson family
Ruther Glen, VA

Try Something New

"I think it is a good experience to do something that you've never done before."

Yulia Lokhtina (Azerbaijan)

Gulem Naz Akcay **learned Spanish** at Goochland High School. The Turkish student already speaks German, Turkish and English. One day she hopes to speak seven languages. She lives with the Bellows family in Connecticut.

Sang a Gig. Before coming to Wisconsin, Yulia Lokhtina (Azerbaijan) only sang at home. "I thought it might be a good idea to try singing in public because it is something I'm afraid of." After receiving rave reviews when she sang at church, she worked up the courage to sing at the Harmony Café in Appleton. "It was different from when I sing by myself at home. I sang two songs: *Perfect* by Simple Plan and *Wake Me Up When September Ends* by Green Day." The FLEX student is hosted by the Murphy family in Grenville.

Worked as a Special Ed Assistant. In her Salt Lake City, Utah school, Amalia Mulyasani took a class called Peer Tutor Training. "There are 2 or 3 students each period. This class was so much fun. I helped the special education students learn in class. Not just that, I made a lot of friends there with special education students, too. It made me really want to be a special education teacher. I learned a lot from this class about that and it was really useful for my future." The Gordon family hosts the Indonesian YES student.

Yujeong Jang **was the basketball team manager** for the Wheeling Park High School girls' team. "Being a part of the team was my greatest experience here. The girls on the team are really nice and cool. I attended every practice and game. I worked for the team and I learned how to be more responsible. I really enjoyed the basketball season." The Hulderman family hosts the South Korean student in Triadelphia, West Virginia.

Chyntia Ningrum **changed a tire**! On hand to guide her was host father Thomas Kinnard. "It was fun actually: using the jack to lift the car, loosening the nuts, and putting on the new tires," says the Indonesian YES student. Along with some car mechanics, she learned to **shovel snow, make cookies, bowl** and **ice skate** in West Allis, Wisconsin.

Fostering Global Ties

Recounting a presentation on Malaysia, Khaled Amru said, "There was a moment of sheer exhilaration when I invited the school officials to come up and accept my country's flag as a token of appreciation!" The Norton family hosts the YES student in Berryville, Virginia.

Farmer for a Year

My host family has a pig farm where I help out caring for the pigs, giving shots, counting them and doing chores. It was really fun building a shed.

Last October, my host parents went on a trip to Texas for a friend's wedding, leaving me to help do chores at the farm for a week! That alone was a big experience for me. Back in my country, I have never seen such a number of pigs, about 5,000, let alone rear them. As a Muslim I don't eat pork, but I rear pigs! It has been a great experience!

There is one important thing I have learned, that is time management. Americans are time conscious; they do everything according to time.

Inusah Taimako (Ghana)
Hosted by the Bergstrom family
Austin, MN

On the Road with Qianyi

My daughter Lily and I have been the fortunate host family for Qianyi. In addition to our interesting family life at home, we have had several travel adventures. Over winter break, we visited Washington, DC and New York City. Qianyi and I both had friends on the East Coast. Apart from the rare snowstorm and hiking over ice to see the sights, we had a fabulous time. In February, we went to Lake Tahoe to ski. She was a very good sport and we all took turns falling and flying down the mountain. We also visited San Francisco several times, and today we are leaving for Los Angeles to take Qianyi to see the famous band May Day in concert.

Qianyi has been a great gift for our family. She is a wonderful big sister to Lily and has worked very hard all year in pursuit of her educational goals.

Elisa Feingold, host mother for
Qianyi Zhao (China)
San Luis Obispo, CA

In no time, South Koreans Gawon Kim, Hyun Young Kim and Koung Jun Min got the hang of the cross-country skis.

Gliding into Nature

It was January in Vermont and the snow was on the ground. Let's have some fun in the snow. Why not go cross-country skiing? Our three South Korean exchange students had gone downhill skiing but had never tried those strange looking, long and thin Nordic skis before. We went to a state historical site called Hildene. It has many miles of trails. When they got their equipment, skis, boots and poles, we hiked to a large open field and put on our skis. I gave them a short lesson on cross-country skiing basics. They were a bit nervous, especially about falling.

Then, we were off through the fields and into the woods. We stopped at a farm and enjoyed seeing their alpacas and goats. They bravely went down hills and traveled on winding trails. When we returned to the warming hut, they smiled and laughed about how it had been fun and they would try it again. Inside the visitor center, there were samples of goat cheese that tasted good but uncommon in Korea. Everyone agreed to drive to town and sample more American food, that is fast food at McDonald's.

Lin Sternberg
Community Coordinator
Shaftsbury, VT

Trip to a Magical Land

On our spring break trip to Florida, we would wake up every morning and discuss where we would go that day. On the first day we decided to go to Universal Studios. It was a nice place if you like Hollywood movies. The next day was the highlight of the vacation because we went to Disney World. When you are in Disney World, it feels like you are in a magical land where dreams do come true. On the last day we went to the beach. It was cold and windy so we looked for shells instead of playing in the water. It was the best vacation that I have had in my life. I love my family and feel so lucky to be an exchange student.

Moei Wang (Thailand)
Hosted by the Holden family
Saint George, UT

The Gears of Government

FLEX students Yana Raysvikh (Russia), Begench Atajanov (Turkmenistan) and Anna Martynova (Ukraine) take a break in front of the White House during their spring vacation in Washington, DC with Ithaca, New York Coordinator Lori Sonken. Aside from touring Congress and the memorials, they stopped by their home embassies to say hello to their fellow countrymen.

The Sweetest Valentine

Mississippi Coordinator Mary Hairald gathers her students for a Valentine's Day party. Her students include Gordon Warncke (Germany), Geraldine Bricard (Belgium), Gerome Arnold (Belgium), Ines Bourdoux (Belgium), Quentin Moors (Belgium), Ann-Katrin Ellermann (Germany), Thawalkorn Nimcharoen (Thailand), Charlotte Devoluy (France), Jean Russo (Argentina), Pauline Servais (Belgium), Tuangthong Praditporn (Thailand), Alizee Boels (Belgium), Johanna Arenhoevel (Germany), Nathalie Verweij (Netherlands) and Stella Azara (Germany).

Accepting People

One thing that I really like about the American culture is the way people show their great humor and personalities to the people around them. Personally, this is the best type of culture that I can think of. Within the nine months that I have lived and interacted with people here, I never thought of myself as being different. We embrace each other with acceptance. This amazing yet fantastic culture is so strong that whatever you do, it evokes great feelings and emotions.

Al Basher Julhamid (Philippines)
Hosted by the Hendrickson family
Ruther Glen, VA

What I Like About America...

Alizee Boels (Belgium) and her friend Hannah.

Southern Warmth

The first thing I realized when I arrived in Mississippi was the friendliness and the simplicity of the people. They will always say "Hello, how are you doing?" even if you don't know them. They don't care if they are well-dressed or not. Students come to school in shorts and t-shirts and nobody cares. That's one of the things that I won't forget from the South.

I also learned to have fun and make unforgettable memories out of nothing. One evening, a friend invited me to her house. We made homemade pizza, played games and gossiped all night long. We had a great time.

I gained a lot from this experience. I don't think my personality changed but I certainly grew up. I'm more open-minded. I realize how people can live differently than I do. Without spending a year here, I wouldn't have learned that.

There is no "You're welcome" quite as believable as the one you get from the South, just as is said on the *Stephen Fry in America* series. It's totally true!

Alizee Boels (Belgium)
Hosted by the Saxton family
Aberdeen, MS

A Friendly Nation

This is the experience of a lifetime because I feel very comfortable with every member of my host family. They care for me as if I am their own daughter, though they have five kids of their own. I've met wonderful people who opened my eyes and showed me what the real America is. I've started to understand what American values are about. I know that in Russia I am going to miss people always being so friendly and helpful.

I am very grateful to PAX and the Department of State for this wonderful opportunity, my host-family for taking me into their home and hearts, and my coordinator, Kharran Cattell, for taking perfect care of me.

Faina Driganets (Russia)
Hosted by the Weinstein family
Newtown, PA

Sports and Snow Days

Living here, I've seen many differences that I have never seen before, such as weather changes, intense sport competitions and so forth.

At home, my school doesn't have sport teams for students. Being on the Creston swimming team meant that I had to get up at 5.00 a.m. for a one hour morning practice before school. Then we had a three-hour practice after school. I proudly got a varsity letter from the swimming coach at the end of season.

I was so excited when I first saw snow because I haven't seen snow before. On the first day it snowed, I happily walked to school at 6.30 a.m. I finally got to school and realized that no one was there! I thought of what my host mother said the day before. She said, "Don't forget to listen to the radio for the news about a snow day." I felt a little mad at myself that I didn't listen to the radio, but I did enjoy my first snow! I'll really miss snow and snow days when I go back to Thailand.

Nutthakit Wong-onta (Thailand)
Hosted by Keana Kubiszewski
Grand Rapids, MI

A White Winter

This is my first time I have seen snow. Wisconsin is one of states where you will definitely have snow every year. I feel so lucky to be placed here. The first time I saw it, I went crazy running around outside in the snow. We made snowmen and had snow ball fights. I helped my family shovel the snow. Even though I love the beauty of snow, shoveling it after a storm makes me sore for the next few days. I am thankful that we don't have to shovel snow in my tropical country, Indonesia. But, it still was a very good winter season with my family and I am hoping I can enjoy snow again someday.

Chyntia Ningrum (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Kinnard family
West Allis, WI

Super Sizes

German Katharina Roth gets the giggles from seeing the "very American" jumbo-sized cereal boxes at Sam's Club in Dayton, Ohio, where she is spending her exchange year with the Olfky family.

PAX goes green

It's Easy to Be Green

Indonesian YES student Reksa Alviona wrote a moving essay about things we can all do at home to improve the environment: turning off computers, using as little detergent as possible, recycling plastic and unplugging chargers. She calculated that her New Hampshire house would produce 93 tons of carbon dioxide instead of 120 tons with just these changes.

At school, Reksa joined the Green Keene Teen, a club of students that take care of the environment by doing projects such as collecting recyclable materials. They sponsored Green Keene Up Day to get the attention of their fellow teens and worked on a campaign to convince the school to use natural light sources.

PAX Goes GREEN participant Reska Alviona describes her project, "I made a poster about saving energy from light bulbs by instead using the light from the sky. My school has a lot of skylights that are sometimes not in use. I made some leaflets and stuck them on the walls around the school. We persuaded all the people at school to use more light from the sky, reducing their carbon use. Our project will be published in the school year book." The Harman family hosts her in Keene, New Hampshire.

Hosts Lead the Way

I am so proud of my host family because they realize that we need to do anything we can to save our world. My dad won't allow more than two lights on in a room if we don't really need it. He always reminds us to unplug cables to save the energy. Also he wants us to save water by only doing laundry if the load is full. My mom collects bottles, cans, and newspapers to take to the recycling center every week. Besides that, we separate regular garbage and organic materials to make compost. Their actions motivate me to also do something to save the world.

Nanda Nidya (Indonesia)
Hosted by Weaver-Harvey family
Nescopeck, PA

Trees for a Better Future

In Pennsylvania, Indonesian YES student Nanda Nidya and her fellow Central Silver Service club members planted 100 trees. "It was a lot of fun to dig in the ground. I loved doing it because it is not only us who gets to benefit, but also the next generation."

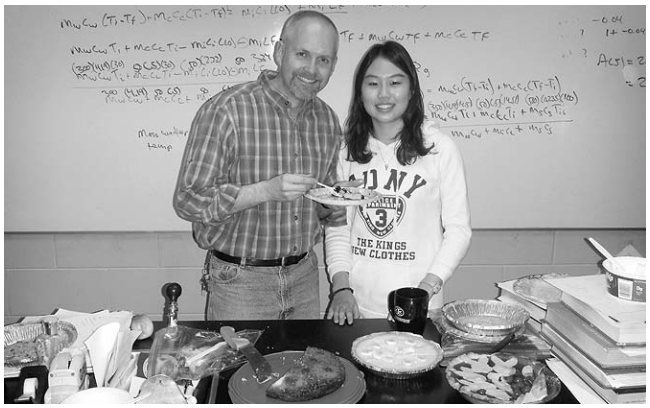
Artists in Residence

Vermont YES students Bolkiah Mamadsual (Philippines) and Montakarn Khotchasawad (Thailand) created these beautiful book covers for CSIET (Council on Standards for International Educational Travel).

Injured Runner Turns Manager

I should have been running and jumping for the track and field team this spring. But early this season I got injured and since then I couldn't sprint. I thought that would be the end of the season for me since I couldn't compete. Luckily, my coach knew how sad I was and she didn't want me to leave the team. She found me something to do for the team, so now I'm the manager. I put the scores from the meets in the computer, take times, take care of the medicine and help out in different ways. So I am still be a part of the team, just in a different way.

Josephine Benndorf (Germany)
Hosted by theVelasquez family
Lafayette, IN



Have Some Pi with Your Pie

South Korean Ji Yeon Park and her math teacher sample pies on Pi Day, a new holiday gaining hold in the United States. It is marked on March 14, which corresponds with the mathematical constant "pi" rounded to 3.14. Ji Yeon tells us, "My teacher, Mr. Koenig, is a really amazing person. He knows how to speak Korean and he learned Korea's national sport, Taekwondo." The Richards-Haugan family hosts her in Wright, Minnesota.

Face Off on the Ice

Italian Francesco Cergna and German Sven Weisser played on opposing hockey teams for the last game of the season in the Dayton, Ohio area. Francesco lives with the Nichols family and Sven lives with the Studzinski family.

Prom Night, 2010

Anna Konovalova, left, says, "The people in this picture made my life the USA a lot easier. Connor, Mary and Eric are really good friends that I can count on." The Mosby family hosts the Ukrainian FLEX student in Lee's Summit, Missouri.

Team Hoopla

When Eline Willemen returns to Belgium, she'll be bringing this poster that her teammates made for her! She attends Tri-County High School and lives with the Richards family in Lafayette, Indiana.

High School Highlights

Do-Re-Mi

I am so grateful to be at Bloomsburg High School. I found wonderful friends and teachers. I joined the Drama Club and we did *The Sound of Music* for the spring play. It was awesome to get involved in that production. I got a role as one of the singing nuns. The funny thing is, I am Muslim. Being one of the nuns taught me a lot about another religion because we had to really get into our role. I was a waltz dancer, too, so now I can waltz. It was such a wonderful time!

Aulia Mustamir (Indonesia)
Hosted by Deutsch family
Bloomsburg, PA

High School Musical

Jeahan Haron cites being in her Indiana school musical as one of her best experiences. "The cast didn't treat us different and I am happy about that," said the Filipino YES student. Swiss student Ellen Sjolander also performed in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Jeahan is hosted by the Flora family and Ellen is hosted by the Baker family.

Singing with Success

This experience, including the challenges, changed my life and is one of my most important turning points. In school, I got a 99.5 average in my last semester and I started learning my third language, Spanish. I joined the high school chorus. Our group, the Mooreville High School choir, won first prize in the district chorus competition. We went to Jackson to participate in the state competition and made second. Also, I am a member of the drama group. Our play, *The Magic Lamp of Aladdin*, was tremendously popular not only in high school, but also everywhere in the city of Mooreville.

Xin Wei Li (China)
Hosted by the Whitfield family
Mooreville, MS

YES student Rukia Muhaj (Kenya) is second from the right in the front row.

Making Waves in New Hampshire

During the winter, I joined the swim team. I hadn't swum competitively before. I improved so much as the season went by, and I learned so many swimming skills that I never knew.

I also joined the track team and decided to be a distance runner, something I haven't tried before. Our coaches are always encouraging, so it's impossible to give up.

During the school day, it has been busy. We have many field trips. I have fun projects to do in my calculus class and speeches to do for American Studies. This has helped me a lot in terms of public speaking. I never thought history could be that interesting! I am going to miss all this when I return home.

Now spring is here already. I usually get excited when it's so nice outside. I had so much fun on Easter. I decorated eggs with my host sister and we also went egg hunting, which was my first time.

And, I wouldn't be having this much fun without the support of my host family. They have made my experience so fabulous! I love being an exchange student. It has helped me to be more confident and appreciate different cultures.

Rukia Muhaj (Kenya)
Hosted by the Hotchkiss family
Weare, NH

Head of the Class

On my first day assisting a second grade class at DuPont Elementary School, I had to teach how to measure in yards and inches. I had no clue how because in Malaysia we were taught meters and centimeters. As embarrassed as I was, I had to ask Mrs. Newberry to teach me before I could help the kids.

The children were absolutely adorable! It's strange how much you can learn from kids of a different culture. I asked a lot of questions about the school system. It is fascinating and really very systematic.

Sue Anne Chee (Malaysia)
Hosted by the George family
Chattanooga, TN

The A Squad

Alicia Busch, right, and her friends Allison and Ali are dolled up the winter dance. The German teen is hosted by the Hope family in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Days of Glory

Geraldine Wintgens, third player in the back, had an outstanding winter playing for the Tri County Cavaliers. The Dixon family hosts the Belgian student in Wolcott, Indiana.

Teachers are Friends

When I came to America it was hard for me in the school. There are so many differences from schools in Armenia. We can't have the same relationships with teachers. In America, teachers are friends.

The second difference is that Armenian students have all their classes together with the same group of people, so we are really good friends. We can't choose our own classes. In Armenia when teachers enter the class, you have to stand up and greet the teacher. I am happy to know the differences. It made me understand the teenager's life here.

I was a kid when I came, but now I feel a like a grown girl. I make my decisions by myself. I am so happy to be here and have so many experiences. And, I am thankful to those people who helped me. My coordinator Fariba Kazemi was the first one who worked on my English. And then when I was scared in the school, my host mom Jeanne told me what to do. She taught me a lot. I have many friends and teachers who helped me. My host sister is only five years old, but she worked on my English with me. She explained to me the meanings of words from her little world.

Elza Galstyan (Armenia)
Hosted by the Sobie family
Streetsboro, OH

Glee in New Hampshire

Valeriya Serheyeva (Ukraine) gives her friend Claire a lift to their musical practice. The FLEX student is living with the Szpindor family.

In the Footlights

The best moment of the school year for me is when I was included in the school musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*. It seems like I got another new family there. The cast, the crew and the teacher are all so nice. I loved it and I'll miss it.

Nanda Nidya (Indonesia)
Hosted by Harvey-Weaver family
Nescopeck, PA

Alaskan Family Wins Video Contest

Congratulations to Ujang Purnama (Indonesia) and the Barnes-Johnson family for winning the YES Host Family Contest with their video, "An Accidental Global Family". PAX applauds all the families who put together creative videos. To see the video, go to www.pax.org/whatsnew.html to see the Barnes-Johnson family story and the other PAX YES finalists, the Wason family who hosts Emmanuel Azusong (Ghana) in Utah and the Mino family who hosts Pauline Banaaleh (Ghana) in Massachusetts.

Our "Forever Thai" Daughter

It has been wonderful to watch May with all the "firsts" she has experienced: Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Each holiday has meant that much more to us, watching May's eyes filled with excitement.

We were very fortunate to have hosted her older sister before her and meet May in her own country last summer. Our family plans on going back to Thailand to visit both girls in a year or two.

We felt the minute we picked her up from the airport that she immediately became a natural part of our family. May adjusted to our local high school with ease, playing on the basketball and softball teams while maintaining high honors. She has bonded with so many people and is loved by many.

May snow-shoed, ice skated and snow-tubed for the first time this past winter. She visited New York City, Boston, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Canada, fulfilling a lifelong dream to see Niagara Falls.

Little did we know how much May would mean to us and how much she has added to our lives. Our hearts are full of love for her and she will surely be missed. We feel we will always stay connected to her and her family because she is our "forever Thai" daughter.

The Lefave family, hosts for
Sarochinee Krerkachana (Thailand)
North Adams, MA

Engaged in the Global Economy

Coordinator Jeanne Monte's fifth grade daughter Alexandra, on the right, recruited her high school friends to help with her business, Aly's Asian Gifts. Thanata Saenghiranwatana (Thailand), Yue Li (China) and Yunseo Jeon (South Korea) wrote personalized bookmarks in their native languages. Their project was part of "Business Day" at St. Joseph's Episcopal School in Boynton Beach, Florida. The PAX students spent the day visiting classes and answering questions about their respective countries.

An Envoy for Korea

When I received a letter from PAX asking me to share my culture, I decided to give a presentation to the fourth grade class at my school, Cambridge Central. There are about 70 kids in the fourth grade, so I gave two separate presentations.

I started by reading a Korean folktale, *Hungboo and Nolboo*. Afterward, I showed a map of the Korean peninsula and lots of pictures of food, traditional dress and tourist attractions. I explained that Korea shouldn't be confused with other East Asian nations, and that it is important to remember that every country has its own cultural heritage distinct from its neighbors. After talking about culture, I told them that despite the differences, modern life in South Korea isn't as different from the one in the States as they may think.

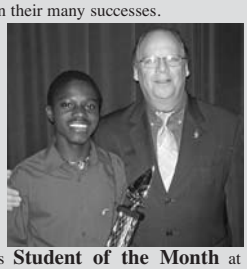
When I finished, I gave out Korean candy to the children who could say something that they learned about Korea. Also, since it was written in English, I donated *Hungboo and Nolboo* to the elementary library.

I felt truly like an ambassador after teaching children who hardly knew anything about my country before.

Gawon Kim (South Korea)
Hosted by the Anderson family
Cambridge, NY

Congratulations to all the PAX students on their many successes.

Take a Bow



Inusah Taimako (Ghana). Active in **debate**, the YES student participated in seven tournaments and **won first place** in the Okoboji, Iowa debate tournament on December 5. On the right, he is pictured with the tournament president. The Bergstrom family hosts him in Austin, Minnesota.

In February, **Gerome Arnold (Belgium)** was **Student of the Month** at Booneville High School. Cheryl Prather is his host mother in Mississippi.

Karishma Vahora (India) won **third place** and a **$100 prize** in the Bennington area 4-Way Rotary speech competition. The Putney family hosts the YES student in Bennington, Vermont.

Swara Fadnis (India) and her friend Laurie were selected to **perform a song** at the Family, Career and Community Leaders State Convention in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Indian YES student explains, "We mixed a Hindi and an English song, which is called ethnomusicology, as a symbol of cultural bonding and friendship through the universal tongue of music. I taught her the Hindi lyrics and told her the meaning of it. We chose songs that talk about friendship, and coincidentally the rhythms matched. Now she sings a Hindi song and my heart just beams to hear her sing it. We became really close friends during this process." The Zimmer family hosts Swara in Pierce, Nebraska.

Jamie Riego Inclan (Spain) was **accepted** to the **National Young Leaders Conference**, which will take place in Washington, DC after the school year ends. Florida Coordinator Susan James says, "It is a real honor and privilege to attend. You get to go where the public does not as you tour Washington, DC." The Hard family hosts Jamie in St. Augustine, Florida.

Kyung Ryun Cho (South Korea) won **second place at an art show** held at the McSwain Theater in Ada, Oklahoma. "Since I have always been interested in art, I was so happy when I found out that Vanoss High School had a good art program. I displayed two paintings and one sculpture. Although I've done some watercolor paintings and was pretty confident about them, acrylic painting was difficult. Thanks to my art teacher, I was able to learn techniques and do them well. It was a big night for me. I felt that I "became a real artist". The Clark family hosts her in Stratford, Oklahoma.

David Tuntiya (Russia) was **elected president** in his American Government class mock election. The FLEX student recounts, "The teacher asked us to run a mini campaign for the presidency. We divided into groups and each one had it's own name and party leader. At first, I didn't want to be a party leader, but then I said to myself, why not?" He called his party "The Future". His campaign included posters, a press conference, speeches and a debate on nation, state and school issues. The Blunt family hosts David in Lee's Summit, Missouri.

King Yaw Soon (Malaysia) won the CSIET Book Cover Contest and $500. The Lamp family hosts the YES student in York, South Carolina. Check the PAX website later this month to see his artwork.

Better Understanding for a Better World

Sixteen FLEX and YES students were selected to go to the 2010 Better Understanding for a Better World Conference in Orlando, Florida. The four-day February event brought together teens of diverse faiths to foster mutual understanding and tackle problems resulting from prejudice and intolerance.

Montakarn Khotchasawad (Thailand), Nanda Nidya (Indonesia), Sartika Hasirman (Indonesia), Emmanuel Azusong (Ghana), Mohamed ElBetity (Egypt), Maja Hristovska (Macedonia), Ibrahim Kombo (Kenya), Reksa Alviona (Indonesia), Nigora Kholova (Tajikistan), Kha Fam (Ukraine), Ani Makaryan (Armenia), Mariami Khocholava (Georgia), Elena Popova (Kyrgyzstan), Aitolkyn Kazmamgambet (Kazakhstan), Valeria Dubravina (Russia) and Beksultan Ibraimov (Kyrgyzstan)

Emmanuel Azusong (Ghana) and Ani Makaryan (Armenia).

Maja Hristovska (Macedonia) gave a talk to Pennsylvania students about the seminars.

NO PASSPORT REQUIRED

When you host a bright and curious international student, you broaden your family's horizons and develop deep connections across the globe. To learn more, call PAX at 800-555-6211 or visit www.pax.org.

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

Haruka from Japan
Her friends say that she makes them laugh every day. Her parents agree and add that Haruka is always smiling, honest and positive thinking. Her interests are soccer and ballet, which she has trained in for 11 years.

Jordi from Belgium
This motivated teen teamed up with friends to form a circus that performs at events and parties. Jordi's warm personality and sense of humor is appreciated on the job and at school. He also is a competitive tennis player.

Noelia from Spain
Friendly, enthusiastic and talkative, she enjoys meeting new people. Noelia is a whiz at languages; she speaks five! After school she helps teach karate at a karate club. She also likes dance, cycling and drama.

Johann from Germany
A working actor, he has had parts on German TV and in films. However, Johann says his most important accomplishment is his friends. This down-to earth teen plays the drums, skates, skiis and is passionate about tennis.

Fidan from Azerbaijan
This A+ student is loved and respected for her engaging, responsible nature, leadership skills and intellect. She loves exploring new ideas and being part of debate club, youth club and conversation groups.

FLEX student Natia with her hosts.

Flourishing Together

Natia was a perfect match for our family. I could not have asked for a better student for my first time being a host parent.

Natia taught me to have a more patience than what I had before. I had to reflect a lot on my teenage years to remember what it was like and it helped me come to terms with past feelings and regrets. I feel more complete as a person since she has been here. It also helped me with the decisions I had to make for Natia's well-being.

My advice to other host parents *is to enjoy the time, learn from your student and keep an open mind. Treat them as they are your own and communicate. Your student may not always get it the first 30 times, but midway through the year, you will see they have learned so much from you.*

Every single aspect of this experience has been wonderful. We did have moments that were tough but we got through it, just like any other family would. We laughed a lot, cried some and enjoyed family dinners. Some of the funniest moments happened at the dinner table, just like I remember when I was growing up. I got to teach her traditions from my family and hope she will share them with her natural family when she gets home.

Angela Kazmer-Schaffer, host mother for
Natia Dundua (Georgia)
Lebanon, MO

Fits Like a Glove

We decided to have an exchange student because we've always had an interest in other cultures. We wanted our kids to experience another culture as well.

In deciding upon which student to pick, we just knew August was the one. He has fit in great with our family. In Norway, he has an 8-year-old brother and a teenage sister. Our family has an 8-year-old boy and a teenage girl.

He's very easy going and thankful for anything we do for him. With Skype and email, he keeps in touch with his family and friends. He's never been homesick. We exchange emails with his parents and they are very appreciative that he is in a good home. From early on, it's been like he's one of the family.

He has some chores and has been very helpful with all the shoveling we've done this winter. Coming from Norway, he's used to the cold.

This experience has been wonderful. I know we'll always have a bond with him. We highly recommend this experience. PAX has been a great company to work with. I've been impressed with how PAX has prepared the students for life in their host country.

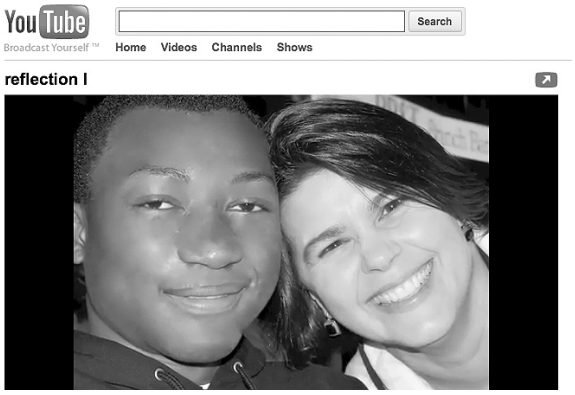
Jan Pasteka, host mother for
August Skara (Norway)
Bellevue, NE

Gabriel Lopez (Brazil) with host sisters Aubrey and Ali.

Our Crazy Brazilian Son

Gabriel Garcia Lopez has been a wonderful addition to our family. We hosted his brother Filipe two years ago, also through the PAX program. We have enjoyed Gabriel and his positive attitude, especially the warm way he greets us as we enter our home, saying, "Hi sister!" or "Hi Mom!" He is a great cook and has shared many delicious BBQs and recipes with us. Gabriel has also improved so much in his English language. We are so proud of him. He has made many American friends and is even thinking about coming back for college. He calls us his crazy American family. We love you Gabriel.

Cary Hellenbrand, host mother for
Gabriel Garcia Lopez (Brazil)
Madison, WI



A Tribute to My Family (www.pax.org/yes.html)

Go to this web page to see the YouTube video Nazeer Abdul-Salaam made to describe his life with the Jonson family in Georgia. "I'm seventeen and I feel on top of the world," says the YES student from Ghana. "What is of major interest to me is to make a difference in people's lives. And the Jonsons have really made a major impact on my life, which I am grateful to them for."

Rookie of the Year

We have had so much fun introducing Adbu to our friends and new activities that he might not experience in Ethiopia.

Getting to play on the junior varsity baseball team has been one of the most unique experiences Abdu has had. He has had to learn how to throw a baseball, catch a ball with a glove, and hit the ball. He is doing quite well for an Ethiopian rookie.

This past weekend's beautiful spring weather allowed us to take Abdu to a farm. We thought riding a horse would be a new experience for him, but we were pleasantly surprised to learn that he was quite comfortable on a horse, as he had ridden one at his grandparent's home in Ethiopia.

We are looking forward to Abdu going to his first prom. His tuxedo fitting promises that he will cut quite a dashing figure among his high school friends.

Daisy Rearick, host mother for
Abduleazez Mohammad (Ethiopia)
Kirksville, MO

It Takes Two

The Risser family had two "daughters" this year at their home in Greencastle, Pennsylvania: FLEX student Ekaterina Kononova (Tajikistan) and YES student Sangini Shah (India).

Saluting Sabine

Wow! We have had a fabulous year! My husband and I were so nervous about receiving our exchange student from Germany. We did not know what to expect our first time hosting. We had no idea it could be so rewarding. Sabine was only supposed to stay until January, but she decided to stay until June and we are so blessed to have her. We have learned so much about the culture in Germany. She cooked us a meal that was wonderful. We have a great bond with her.

She has had some great experiences here. Sabine had the opportunity to travel to Key West Florida, and her best friend from Germany surprised her just before Christmas and stayed with us for two weeks.

The hard part is going to be when she leaves. Sabine and my daughter Abree have become very close. We forget that she is an exchange student. We have accepted her in our family.

I think the best advice to give *is to be firm in the beginning. It's easier to give a little than to take. Treat your student like your own. The expectations have to be the same as for your own children. Most of all, love them as your own and make the best of your time as it goes way too fast.*

My husband and I feel so blessed to have had this opportunity with Sabine. I believe the relationship will continue for a lifetime.

Tracey Beard, host mother for
Sabine Petter (Germany)
Bay City, MI

Sabine, on the left, with family members Kyle, Tracey, Terry, Abree, Samantha and Colton.