May 2011
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Program of Academic Exchange

PaxPress

Indonesian YES student Ayeshadira Putri with her pupils.

Novice Teacher Wins Hearts

I am a person who is passionate about volunteering and I love kids. Fortunately, the local elementary school allows me to be an "Indonesian teacher" for the after school enrichment program students.

Twice a week I go there to teach about Indonesia. I share our musical instruments, read Indonesian folk stories, teach Indonesian crafts, etc. We eat Indonesian food, too! It is a big experience for me.

Being a teacher is not easy but I really enjoy my time doing it. This activity brightens my days. The kids are adorable as well. They are so curious about my "different appearance" and what we do in my country. Another good thing is they like to fix my pronunciation, so I am getting other benefits!

My favorite part of teaching is when their facial expressions show that they learned something different. It is my happiness when the kids say "thank you Ms. Ayeshadira" and hug me every time the class is over.

I never imagined I could actualize my dream to be a teacher, here, in United States.

Ayeshadira Putri (Indonesia)
Hosted by Weezorak family
Charlotte, NC

Unexpected Lessons, Delights and Laughter

She stepped into our lives with an infectious smile and sparkling eyes that seem never to have stopped shining all year. Perhaps this is the very best part of the exchange. Back in August, I wondered when the enthusiasm and glee would wear off. At Christmas break, there was some sadness, perhaps homesickness. Yet despite being separated from her family for so long, Amina has continued to be charming, warm and enthusiastic.

Coming to Ohio from Kazakhstan on a FLEX scholarship, Amina is curious, flexible, generous and confident. She finds something positive in most situations and laughs frequently. She talks to others with ease and asks questions when she doesn't understand. Yet coupled with her sense of confidence is a deeply ingrained respect for her parents and family, her culture, her friends, and for us.

Amina has taught us the value of sharing what we have, what we think, what we like to do, our space and our time. Simply being here and having the normal needs of a teenager involved in various activities, she has taught us that it's not so difficult to change habits, to do something in a new way or try something we've not done before — like to go to cross-country meets or choral events, attend Akron's First Night, or tour Washington, DC. She has taught us that by opening our hearts to a total stranger, unexpected lessons, delights and laughter will surely follow.

Deniese and Alan Newman, host parents for
Amina Sugirova (Kazakhstan)
Akron, Ohio

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Alan and Deniese Newman, FLEX student Amina Sugirova (Kazakhstan) and host sister Carly Newman.

A Storyteller's Message of Peace and Unity

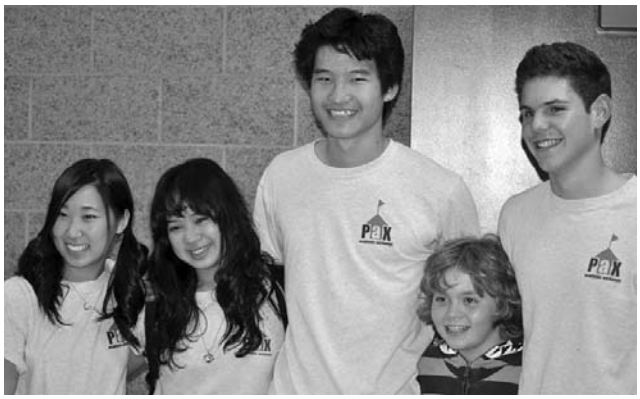
On April 3, Salamatu Mohammed entranced a crowd with a story at *Children of the Well*, a youth storytelling event in Troy, New York. In a discussion with TimesUnion.com reporter Azra Haqqie, Salamatu explained that she learned the art of storytelling from her maternal grandmother in Ghana. "Every time I would ask her a question, instead of answering the question, she would tell me a story."

Her host mother, Siri Allison, who is also a storyteller, encouraged her to perfect her craft by participating in weekly storytelling events. In March, the accomplished Ghanian YES student was chosen as one of six youth storytellers to speak at the Nazareth College Global Citizen Conference.

For this recent April event, Salamatu told a story titled *"If God Doesn't Kill Me, No One Else Can"* about a kind man, a king, money and a ring. "It is a story about how great God is and how He is the master of everything," Salamatu reveals. *"No one can kill me except God* was the message. You've got to have faith."

Imam Abdur-Rahman Yaki, also a native of Ghana, compliments YES student Salamatu Mohammed on her performance.

Salamatu explains her greater hope, "My goal is to promote peace between all the people in the world, uniting them by stories. It is my wish that no one fight in this world."



Encore! Encore!

In California, these Morro Bay High School PAX exchange students received a thundering applause for their dance performance at a mock rock concert. Pictured are Pleng Yimsomboonpat (Thailand), Hikaru Mochizuki (Japan), Natthapat Wongcharoenyong (Thailand), Coordinator Jan Walter's son Isaac and Diego Gladig (Switzerland). After the routine, the group brought attention to the devastation in Japan and asked for prayers. Special commendation goes to Pleng who led the PAX performance and placed third for choreography.

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Once Upon a Time...

Dorothee Nyga reads one of her favorite German stories to elementary school children. The Stewart family hosts her in Washington, Utah.

Generation Tech

Since Tnat Chantrachirathumrong had never swum competitively before he joined his Leavenworth, Kansas high school team, he fired up his computer to glean tips from YouTube videos. With those tips and the support of his hosts, the Van Cise family, and his coach, Tnat got up to speed quickly. When he returns to Thailand, Tnat plans to continue swimming at the pool in his Bangkok suburb.

Indonesian YES student Ditha is the third girl in the front row.

Dance Fever

I'm part of the varsity dance team at my school, Highland Park Senior High. Our dance team is considered a sports activity. The types of dance that we do are jazz dance and kick line, including split, Russian, triple turn and all the hard dance techniques.

I had such a great experience with the dance team. We already performed many times, and even one time as the guest performers at a state competition. The last dance that we did was "Candy Dance" for a pep fest. It turned into a really awesome dance performance. I'm so honored to be a part of this team, giving me such remarkable memories that I will never forget. Thanks to my host family, the Stone's, who fully supported me being on the dance team, and cheering me on all the time. And definitely, thanks to the PAX program!

Ditha Rimadiputri (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Stone family
St. Paul, MN

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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Far from Malaysia

I came for the second semester of school, so it was a little bit hard to get used to American society. As the days passed by, things became better. I'm so lucky to have an awesome host family, Coordinator Natalie Saltmarsh and friends. I am now having fun.

Experience is the best teacher. When I knew that I would be in Florida, I was not as excited as before because there is no snow there. Snow was the first thing on my mind when I applied for this program. After a few weeks in Gainesville, I realized that snow could screw up our activities. I'm so grateful to be here because I can spend more time in outdoor activities.

For me, instead of missing family, I miss Malaysian food! But, American foods are awesome. For example, I really like the American hamburger because it is way bigger than the Malaysian hamburger.

So far, this program has taught me to be more respectful of other people and be aware of what is going on, and to appreciate others and love our planet. It also makes me realize how important it is to get to know other people outside of our community and to create strong camaraderie with them so that we can have world peace as a result.

Luqman Ramli (Malaysia)
Hosted by Robinson family
Gainesville, FL

Pass the Hammer

In Nettleton, Mississippi, Justin Griffith (Germany) built these giant racks to support bird nests. He has loved working in host father Randy Harlow's workshop.

What a Year!

This year has not only made me more independent but has also made me even more mature, active, attentive, confident and interactive. It forced me to realize the importance of interacting with people and respecting other cultures.

I am gratefully thankful to my host family for having me in their house, treating me in the same way as their own sons, and sharing their love and time with me, asking nothing in return. I also thank the other host families for taking students not only into their homes but also into their lives. I thank the U.S. Department of State for giving me such a memorable journey.

The schools here are very different from the schools in India. I liked the fact that my school was very supportive. I also liked the enthusiasm of the students, parents and teachers during athletic events. Homecoming, spirit week and pep rallies were some of the new experiences that I happily enjoyed. These will be some of the many things that I will miss when I go back home.

Almost every day came with something new to learn and share. My first snow, snowboarding and even slipping on black ice. It was an entire year full of amazing experiences.

Khabeeruddin Ghouri (India)
Hosted by the Eblen family
Lovettsville, VA

Mariami Otarashvili (Georgia), Amerhussein Amenodin (Philippines) and Adlinanur Prihandiani (Indonesia) show off their creation.

My First Snowman

It's March and it's snowing! That's what happens where we live in northern Michigan. It's never too late for snow.

Hooray! My host brother and my wish came true and there was no school on March 10. We had woken up early to have our school musical performance, *The Wizard of Oz*, taped by 9&10 news. We were on television! After we went home and I begged Amer for a whole hour, he helped me make the snowman.

Without help from an American kid and with the power of the exchange student excitement, our snowman was finally done after an hour. It was a nice looking snowman. It was my first one!

Adlinanur Febri Prihandiani (Indonesia)
Host by the Workman family
Cheboygan, MI

A Whirlwind Peru Visit With Our Former Student

"It took us 72-hours, three planes, four buses, two taxis, a monorail, a train, and one hour of hiking, but we finally made it to Machu Picchu, Peru!" says the Worrell family of Rochester, Minnesota, who journeyed to Peru for spring break with their current exchange student, Nelson Fernandez-Vieira from Venezuela. Their previous exchange student, Alejandra Vargas-Narvaez from Peru, joined them for the trip. In this picture: Ale Vargas, Greg Worrell, Sam Worrell, Christa Worrell and Nelson Fernandez. The Worrells exclaim, "Peru ROCKS...no pun intended!"

Gained Grandparents, Too

My host mom's mom lives a five minute walk away. For Christmas, the whole big family went there and I was counted as a granddaughter. Every holiday we spend time with relatives. These are wonderful American experiences. The next day after Christmas, I went to Grandma and Grandpa Freund's and I got a bracelet engraved "Granddaughter" on the front and "love" on the back. I love talking to my host grandparents. I think I could travel in the U.S. any time I want, but not every time could I get these beautiful memories. This is one of the things I love about the tiny town, Johnsburg.

Leelanut Jitbantad (Thailand)
Hosted by the Freund family
Johnsburg, MN

Japan: Keeping a Vigil as Disaster Unfolds

On March 11 my host dad told me the news about the earthquake in Japan. All of the news on the TV and Internet was about Japan. We saw the many horrible pictures of what the tsunami did to Japan.

Fortunately, I could contact my family right after I saw the news. When I first contacted my family, my mom and sister were there, and all was fine. But my dad wasn't home yet, and they couldn't contact my grandma. I was so nervous. Some of my friends called. I was happy that I had made such great friends here. When I heard that my father and grandma were fine, I was so relieved. I was very anxious because I'm far away. But, I didn't have to think about it too much because my American family took care of me well.

I'm so glad that I'm staying with the Demberg family for this whole year. I really appreciate their kindness.

Ayumi Baba (Japan)
Hosted by the Demberg family
Westtown, NY

Dressed for Saudi Life

YES student Omar Al Nabati's parents sent these outfits to his hosts in Fort Mill, South Carolina. Host mother Monique Nicoll reports, "The little boys didn't want to take them off!"

Scouts Honor

I used to be a part of the Ukrainian national scouting organization called Plast, so I decided to try scouting here in America. I joined the Girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania, Troop #81250.

I enjoy being part of such a great troop. We learned new things at every meeting, and every night is full of joy and new discoveries. I even took a part in cookie sales and improved my business skills.

I'll use the things I learned to improve scouting in Ukraine. To help others here gain a better understanding, I made a presentation about Plast. The troop learned new facts and my traditions from it. It was really important for me to introduce my country, culture and scouting here in the USA.

Kateryna Petrovska (Ukraine)
Hosted by the Fischer family
Chambersburg, PA

A Wilderness Venture

Indonesian Ade Uktubara used her time in Washington State to develop her outdoor skills. The YES student learned how to rock climb and snow shoe, as well as how to make a fire without a lighter. Her crowning moment came during a survival camping night when she built and slept in a snow cave. To eat, she had to catch a chicken, butcher it and cook it over a fire. She thanks her hosts, the Clay family, for being supportive.

Captured First Place at First Science Fair

It is pretty funny that my first science fair happened to be in America. I mean, even though in my school in Indonesia my major study is science, I've never done a fair.

My project here was to find out the effect of nicotine on the cell. At first, my teammate and I had no idea how to start the project. Then luckily, we found a sponsor, Dr. Yen Thing Shiu from the University of Utah. She helped us a lot with the experiment. But then in the middle of the experiment, we had to change our project because we didn't have enough time. We ended up testing the effect of cytochalasin on the cell. It was so much fun. I could see so many things that I usually just hear from my teacher in the class.

And yes, we made it! We got the first place in our school. And because of that, we did another one for the state competition. Each of us got a $1000 scholarship from Westminster College and a special award from The Society for In Vitro Biology.

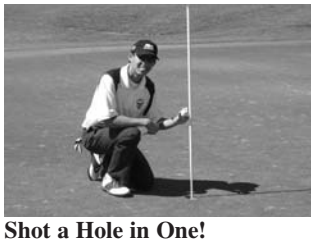
Azka Nafirul Hasna (Indonesia)
Hosted by Halilcevic family
Salt Lake City, UT

Soaring with Song

March 26 was one of the unforgettable days in my life. My host parents' church held a Young Women's General Meeting at the place where the Tabernacle Choir sings. As I entered the hall for rehearsal, I was astonished by the other beautiful girls sitting giving a colorful sight. We had a long rehearsal and after lunch break we sat in the hall, which had the capacity for 21,000 people. I could see the audience increasing – hundreds then thousands. The other 364 girls and I were to sing in front of all of them and the audience who was watching our performance by a worldwide broadcast. I felt powerful, proud and very happy. Somehow, I controlled a tear dropping from my eye. Last but not least, the camera zoomed in on me at the end for few seconds.

I felt honored to be part of the choir.

Pratima Padghan (India)
Hosted by the Smith family
Salt Lake City, UT



Shot a Hole in One!

Defying the odds in golf, Rachata 'Mek' Sakpuaram (Thailand) hit a hole-in-one for the Legacy High School Varsity Golf Team in Las Vegas, Nevada. Host parents Melissa and Bryan Thammavongsa couldn't be prouder!

Cheering My Team On at the State Champs

The state tournament was held a month ago. I can remember it clearly, because it was amazing. At the huge dome, I cheered for the basketball team as loud as I could. My throat was sore after cheering three days in a row, but I couldn't stop yelling because we were losing by three points at the third quarter. Then my team started to win.

The game-over bell rang. They won by 14 points. As soon as they could, the entire crowd rushed into the players! They hugged each other without recognizing who they were hugging, screaming and yelling. Appropriately, the song "We Are the Champions" by Queen came on and we started to sing it: *We're the champions; we are the champions, no time for losers 'cause we are the champions of the state!*

It was lucky for me to be a member of the cheerleading team this year because it is unusual for us to go to the state tournament. We've never won the state tournament before. How many people can be a state champion? How many people can be a cheerleader of a never-losing team? I want to say thank you to my school basketball team that gave me this precious memory.

Juhee Kang (South Korea)
Hosted by the Murchie family
Cando, ND

Defining Moments

Running to Raise Funds for Polio Vaccines

On April 9, I did a torch run to raise funds for the "End Polio" campaign. Fifty people participated that day, and every single person had sponsors that would donate money - the amount depending on how many miles were run. It was unforgettable because we ran without really noticing that it was snowing. I was there with the members of my Interact Club. We raised more than $800.

Dian Fahdhila Lestari (Indonesia)
Hosted by Kergaye family
Salt Lake City, UT

An Actress is Born

He's the devil in disguise, Oh! Yes he Is, rang the chorus. For my first musical play in my life, I had to walk with a walker and dress up like an old lady. I decided to join the drama club this year because I wanted to try new things. I've never sung or danced in front of an audience.

This show, *All Shook Up*, presents a story with Elvis Presley's songs. We had rehearsals for two months. I totally had fun during this time because I got to know people who I had never talked with before. I learned how to sing and dance and learned how to work with many people that I barely knew.

We put on the show four times. I was so happy when the audience liked our show and clapped so loud in the theater. This was one of my greatest experiences ever. I want to do this again if I can.

Awasada Binnisoh (Thailand)
Hosted by the Vasquez family
Hoquiam, WA

Rookie Cross-Country Skier Makes His Mark

Cross-country skiing was a new experience for me because I come from a country that doesn't have any snow. I saw real snow for the first time in November.

I learned about skiing and racing with my school team. Everyone on the team was very supportive. I really like the skiing sensation, especially when you go fast.

The thing that really affected me, though, was the end of season banquet that happened on March 1st. The team gave awards for what each person did during the season. I got an award for helping one of the team members by being her singing buddy at a ski race event. It touched me because she really appreciated the small thing that I did for her, even though when I did it, I never really thought of it that way.

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

An Advocate for Health Care

Sheena Seth took to the podium and spoke to the Oregon governor and senators about the lack of funds for public school health centers. Drawing on her own experience, the Indian YES student cited needing a vaccine, which her school health center was able to provide. Moreover, she explained the critical functions school based health centers provide, especially for students who can't afford insurance.

Conference Inspires Teen to Denounce Hate

Walt Disney World is where dreams comes true. That's exactly right. I never considered I'd get to go there, but on February 2, I flew from Washington where

it was the freezing winter to Florida, the Sunshine State. I went there to join the *Better Understanding for a Better World Conference* held by the Civilization Exchange Cooperation Foundation. We visited a mosque, church and synagogue and learned about Islam, Christianity and Judaism. We broke through stereotypes and built better perceptions and understanding of each other.

Because of this conference, I will make presentations about what I learned. I will tell the world, *Stop disputes! Stop wars just because you're different ethnicities, races or religions. Remember we're human beings. Unlike animals and plants, we have intelligence! So, stop hating each other. Let's unite!*

While in the U.S., I have also learned the joy of volunteering. So far, I have done 72 hours of service, mostly preparing food and serving the homeless at the Tri-City Gospel mission. I usually go on the weekend and work in the kitchen as a cook. It makes me thank God that I live in a good house and it inspires me to donate to the needy.

We teenagers are the next leaders of world. Who knows! One of us could become the president of our country. So, let's "Talk Less! Do More!"

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

Host mother Charleen de la Flor and South KoreanYoung Kwon celebrate running a 10K.

Runners Rejoice at the Finish Line

For the past two months every Saturday morning, my host mom and I would drag ourselves out from bed and train for the Monument Avenue 10K. At first, it was tough work, waking up early on the weekends and running. We, however, overcame the barriers and worked our way up to 6.2 miles.

Despite the forecasters' prediction of rain, the weather was actually perfect during the race. It was hard to run 6.2 miles, but the spectators encouraged the runners, handing out water and giving free high-fives. I had an extraordinary experience, which I wouldn't have had an opportunity to do in Korea. I also learned a lot from the race: to postpone immediate pleasure for the long-term values. It wasn't just a race against other runners, but rather, it was a race against me. My host mom and I are planning to continue training every Saturday morning for a half marathon.

Young Kwon (South Korea)
Hosted by the De La Flor family
Quinton, VA

Georgian Folk Dancer Wows Audience

Even though I did not have my dress with me here, I decided to dance in my school's multi-cultural assembly to show an important part of my culture and to let the students know that as small a country as Georgia is, it has a huge, beautiful culture.

So on the 18th of March, I went on stage with the hope to make my country proud. With all my friends there, I was excited and a little nervous. I tried to make the dance interesting by including three different kinds of Georgian folk dance. Because of all the plaudits that followed, I realized that the audience really liked it.

For the following days, a lot of students and teachers asked me about my dance and culture. I was glad to let them know how beautiful Georgia and its culture is. I wrote their names for them in the Georgian and Russian languages as well.

Salome Khmaladze (Georgia)
Hosted by the Schaerrer family
West Valley City, UT

Painting Takes Top Award

Yulia Hobriy's painting of a mountain lion won first place in the Tuscarora Wildlife Education Project art contest. "It was my first time trying expressionism," said Yuliya. The Horst family hosts the Ukrainian FLEX student in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania.

Pure Maple Gold

Vermont is the largest producer of pure maple syrup in the U.S. I was curious about how to make it and I have been waiting since my first month for the maple syrup season.

My friend's family invited me to see how maple syrup is made at her uncle's place in Wilmington. It was so exciting because they are still making it the traditional way. They have about 800 buckets hanging on trees to gather the sap all over the woods. They said that the sugar maple trees should be 10" in diameter and it takes 40 years to reach this size. We rode horses to help us collect the sap buckets.

After we collected the sap, we boiled the sap in the sugarhouse. We needed 40 gallons of sap to make a gallon of maple syrup and it had to be the right temperature. When we see how hard it is to grow the trees for 40 years, collect the sap, and boil it, we can realize why pure maple syrup is so expensive. But when you taste it, you realize that all the work is worth it.

Gianita Puspita Dewi (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Abbott family
Jamaica, VT

Small Town Life

People who once were foreign exchange students all tell you the same. *Enjoy every day because it's going to go by fast!* I look back and see that eight months did go by fast! I met so many wonderful people that'll be a part of my life forever, I got experiences that'll help me get through life, and I had fun every day as never before.

My American life is so different from the Swiss one. One thing I really like here is the school system. Sports are so important here. I played softball in the fall, basketball in the winter, and now I'm doing track. That means I'm busy every day after school. That is one of the many things I'm going to miss.

I'm super excited for the time that's still left. There's going to be things like Choir State that are going to make life more exciting, but also the small town life here that I like more and more every day.

Marilen Zosso (Switzerland)
Hosted by the VanWagner family
Seneca, MO

Being Part of the Basketball Team

Yes, basketball! It's the reason why my exchange year was so awesome! Since I played basketball back in my country, I decided to try out for the women's basketball team at my school. The tryouts were hard.

We had to run, dribble and play for two hours every day of the week. I was exhausted! But it was worth it. I was so happy when I saw my name on the list. I couldn't believe it! I made the varsity team!

The girls on the team were nice and friendly, and we had so much fun together. The coaches taught us everything there is to know about basketball. They were strict on the court, but they were our friends and supporters outside the court. We had practice for two hours a day, six day per week. It was really hard and physical, but we had a strong will to become champions!

We had great team chemistry and every practice was fun, no matter how hard it was. But things didn't stop on the court! No, no! We had team dinners, lunches and sleepovers. We were like a family. And that contributed to our success! We made second in our league and went to the state championship. It was sad when we finished our last game, but I was glad I made so many friends who made my exchange year unforgettable.

Emilija Pereska (Macedonia)
Hosted by the Souza-Smith family
Portland, OR

What We'll Miss

Sleepovers with Pizza and Ice Cream

Olena Vyshnevska (Ukraine), Aydana Rakhimbayeva (Kazakhstan) and Rahmadani Cahyaningtyas (Indonesia) say that they'll miss their all night gatherings in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Bowling in My Dress

I'll never forget prom. I had my first prom ever and it was awesome! It was so fun because I went bowling afterwards with my prom dress on. That is not easy! It was my first time at a dance.

I will also miss American culture where we throw out our own trash after we eat, especially at fast food restaurants. Back home, the waiters usually clean up our dishes. I will miss the moving class system since classes in my school system back home just stay in the same room and let the teachers move.

I will miss everything I did here! My family was always wonderful and

irreplaceable. My host mother inspired me a lot and made me understand so much. She made me realize how every parent loves their children no matter what.

Floriana Kukuh (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Ariail family
Ashland, AL

Snow, Snow and More Snow

They will miss snow days, too! Pictured after tubing at Brian Head Ski Resort in Utah are Jakob Traxler (Germany), Haykuhi Harutyunyan (Armenia), Nattaya Tasawat (Thailand), Manuela Flores (Spain), Dorothee Nyga (Germany), Thita Tunlayadechanont (Thailand), Hannah Meckling (Germany), Leire Irastorza (Spain), Elena Lledo (Spain) and Jon Ostolazo (Spain).

My Favorite Things

Always smiling and polite American people,
American birthday parties,
Hamburgers, pizza, chili, cookies & ranch dressing,
Huge holiday sales in stores,
The ice tea "Arizona",
Volunteering and helping people,
Learning Spanish and getting 100%,
School dances (can't wait for prom),
American football and cheerleading,
Yellow school buses,
The American flag and American patriotism,
The International Club in our school where Americans come to try our national foods,
How everybody is so nice to me here,
Watching movies in English without translation,
My lovely family Linda and David Chapman to whom I am grateful for all their love and care,
The exchange students that I met here and will remember forever: Irina Klimova (Russia), Metehan Doyran (Turkey), Alex Vlasin (Ukraine) and Gaiz Hatta Sahi (Philippines).

Elina Khusnullina (Russia)
Hosted by the Chapman family
Orange, MA

YES student Alejna Ademi (Macedonia) with her host mother and sister.

My Host Sister

Making the decision to come to America was really hard, because I was scared to live with people that I had never met. But now I know that this truly is the best thing I have done in my life.

I feel so lucky to be part of my host family. We love and understand each other. They are the people who supported me through my experience. All the holidays have been special this year for them too, because some were the first time for me.

My host sister Leah is the person who I have fun with all the time. We are the same age and we are always doing something fun and crazy together. I love her. She is an amazing sister.

Every day when I get up I know that something new and fun is waiting for me. I am more mature now and I feel more confident and independent.

I will miss a lot of things, especially my host family, but they promised to visit me in Macedonia.

Alejna Ademi (Macedonia)
Hosted by the Bower family
Williamsport, PA

Creature Comforts

Giorgia Mazzanti (Italy) and Francoise Bouffioux (Belgium) don raccoon hats. The two live with the St. John family in San Luis Obispo, California.

Shepherd's Pie and Cheddar Cheese

Some aspects of the American culture that I will miss include the foods, specifically shepherd's pie and cheddar cheese on almost anything! I will also miss playing in the snow, skiing, school dances and going out with friends.

It has been a long and bumpy road, but there were roses on the way. Though I started out on a wrong foot, I am glad I went through that phase because I am stronger and wiser now. I have learned a ton of life skills and values. These include how to handle situations independently with patience and tolerance.

By joining the school dance team and aerobics class, I became physically active and flexible. I have had the best times of my year in these two activities.

The most influential person during my stay was my dance teacher, Mrs. Kim Rowley, who I commonly refer to as "ma". She taught me to believe in positive change and know there's always a way out of every life storm. Along with her two daughters who also teach dance, they have helped me grow both as a dancer and as a teenager. Like she once said, "no one else can pull you down unless you allow it" and "pain is weakness leaving the body." These are just a few lessons I have learned from her.

Lorraine Nguku Mwakiringo (Kenya)
Hosted by the Almgren family
Warner, NH

America Up Close

Massachusetts Madness

Getting crazy are Irina Klimova (Russia), PAX Regional Director Lena Adely, Alex Vlasin (Ukraine), Elina Khusnullina (Russia) and Gaiz Hatta Sahi (Philippines).

Life in the Heartland

The thing I will miss the most is my family, school and friends. I liked my school because I made a lot of good friends and the teachers are really nice. They usually asked me if I needed help in my studying.

I went to Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin. I had a lot of fun. When I went to Arizona with my family, we stopped at the Grand Canyon. They thought it was funny when I told them it was a dangerous trip.

Dolagy Khalil (Egypt)
Hosted by the Russell family
Mount Vernon, IA

Thankful to Many

I feel that I gained a lot of wisdom during this year, and I learned a lot about people. But the most important thing I learned is to be thankful and appreciative of the people who surround me. One year away from my family in Kyrgyzstan showed me how appreciative of them I should be. And now it's time for me to thank my host family once more for letting me experience a real American family life. I know now how happy I should be for everything happening in my life, no matter if it is good or bad, because all of these things teach you a lesson in the end.

Meerim Ibraeva (Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Merrick family
West Richland, WA

A Year of Exchange

The dictionary meaning of exchange "is an act of giving one thing and receiving another." When we say exchange, we think of exchanging a shirt or a book with a friend. However, I have exchanged one year of my life. I have exchanged my country, culture, language and many other things.

At first, the word "exchange" meant fear to me. Once I figured out I was really going to go to another country, I was scared. I felt like a little baby who didn't want to leave her mother. I cried like one, too.

For the first two months, the fear was all around me. I thought about going back to my country every single day. I didn't blame anyone. It was my choice to be here.

Some say time is the cure for anything. Now I believe that. When I made friends, I started getting over my problems.

I met wonderful people and added great memories by exchanging a little time in my life. For example, the first time it snowed here was my first snow! I ran outside in my pajamas, grabbed handfuls of snow and threw them on my sleeping host sister.

Another memory is when I told my coordinator that I did ballet, and she said she knew of a class. When I got there, many old ladies started coming in. I asked her if she was sure the class was for ballet. She said it was belly dancing! Because of my accent, she thought I had said "belly". For the next six weeks I went to it and it was really fun to watch the ladies belly dance.

I am sure the word "exchange" is going to make me smile whenever I think of it.

Sonmez Guney (Turkey)
Hosted by the Hamilton family
Hanover, IN

Russian FLEX students Anastasiya Gunko and Olga Magneyeva at the Supreme Court.

An Education in Civic Life

One of the most exciting events I've experienced in the U.S. was the Civic Education Workshop in Washington, DC. This weeklong March workshop was organized for the winners of an essay competition.

The event was aimed to educate FLEX students about democracy, politics and international relations. We went to Capitol Hill, had business meetings with the senators of our states, discussed current issues at the Department of State with Assistant Secretary of State Ann Stock, had a seminar about civil rights with Dr. Frank Smith, visited the American Councils office to talk about democracy in the U.S. and Eurasia with Dr. Robert Herman. What's more, we participated in the National TV News program recorded at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where Congresswoman Jane Harman talked to us.

Moreover, we had a chance to attend an NBA basketball game, the Newseum, a number of famous memorials, the Museums of American and Natural History, and the Holocaust Museum.

At the end of our workshop we had a party at a penthouse that had a wall of glass opening onto a breathtaking view of Washington.

Our workshop was so full of different exciting events that it is hard even to list them all. I'm extremely thankful to the American Councils and especially to Tim Hair, who organized such an outstanding event.

Anastasiya Gunko (Russia)
Hosted by the Jones family
Chattanooga, TN

Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin with YES students John Asigbekye (Ghana), Gianita Puspita Dewi (Indonesia), Natasha Arif (Thailand), Hasna Alfitra (Indonesia), Cluster Leader Ann Newsmith and Arjeta Rushiti (Macedonia).

An Open and Accessible Government

On April 5th, YES students from the Brattleboro area went to visit the Vermont State House. It was so exciting for us to see how the government runs the state. Everything is so open, and everyone can come. We went into the senate room and the representatives room where they were discussing proposed laws. I was surprised that we could come in and listen.

It was our pleasure to get a chance to meet Governor Peter Shumlin of Vermont. He is so friendly, down to earth, and so amazing. He was able to spend his time with us. We asked him some questions about the nuclear power plant, health insurance and leadership.

For Governor Shumlin, a leader is one who has courage, honesty and listens to others. He also said that there are two kinds of leaders: the one who wants to be a leader because of his ego, and the one who wants to make a better world.

We are so lucky in Vermont because our government is easily accessible to everyone.

Gianita Puspita Dewi (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Abbott family
Jamaica, VT

Finding Ourselves Amidst the Adventure

Every day is like a small adventure for me. I've seen a lot of beautiful places. For example, my host mom, friend Klara and I went to Washington, DC. I don't have enough words to describe how wonderful that place is! I fell in love with the architecture of the Library of Congress. We were lucky to be in DC when the cherry blossoms were in bloom.

One day my host dad and I went to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum near Cleveland. I saw famous people's costumes, instruments, cars and other personal things. That day my goal was to find Michael Jackson's glove! Eventually I found it. I felt joy, and on the other hand sadness, because he is gone.

This year I'm learning so many things. I've matured, become more responsible and learned to budget my money. I've realized how much my family means to me, and what it's like to be so far away from home.

Thank you for giving us students this amazing opportunity to get to know more about American culture, and also not less important, to find ourselves, to figure out who we really are and what we can do to achieve our goals.

Amina Sugirova (Kazakhstan)
Hosted by the Newman family
Akron, OH

Discovering Colorado

Oh no, not this rock...no, no, please, not this rock....you can make it, yes you can Nika...oh no! Deep sigh. Yeah, I made it! Oops, here goes another rock...

This was the conversation I had with myself while mountain hiking in Moab. Although we chose the "easy" path, it didn't seem that way. But it was so much fun.

This all happened during spring break when my host family took us on a vacation to explore northern Colorado. On the first day we visited the Air Force Academy and the caves. The next day we went to sand dunes, my host relative's house and a soak in the hot springs. We visited Mesa Verde and saw how the Native Americans lived in the mountains. Moreover, we had fun jumping from one state to another at the "Four Corners" site. I was in Arizona, Colorado, Utah and New Mexico at the same time. The following day we reached the Grand Canyon. Well, it's grand indeed! I was afraid to look down.

I want to express great appreciation to my host family. I value all the effort that they put into this trip. I am grateful that I have such wonderful parents and sisters.

Veronika Ponomarenko (Ukraine)
Hosted by the Horton family
Fort Collins, CO

Where the Civil War Began

These students visited Fort Sumter, South Carolina where the first shots of the American Civil War took place. Pictured are: Sonya Hakobyan (Armenia), Felipe da Silva (Brazil), Emilio Alanis Gutierrez (Mexico), Chia Yen Gan (Malaysia), Omar Al Nabati (Saudi Arabia), Zeba Mansuri (India), Tatjana Brestovac (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and FLEX/YES Cluster Leader Tracy Bolin.

The Key to My New Found Confidence

The most important thing that I have gained from this experience is my confidence. I realized that you must have no fear to express yourself and feel confident and free to say, "I'm different and I have my own opinion." In America, the country where everybody is so different and original, people respect your points of view and attitude.

At my school I felt different at first just because I'm from a different country. I was nervous that people wouldn't be interested in my culture and me. When I began to understand and use English better, I felt freer, but still shy.

Then came the day when I made my first homeland presentation in government class. The students listened very carefully. I could hear their reactions: "What?" "Oh my God, really?" "WOW!" "You've got to be kidding me!" "Russia is awesome!" and so on. Then they asked me a lot of questions about Russian schools, teenagers and the many stereotypes that I talked about and their impact on both nations.

After that, I wanted to do more presentations in my classes. It really helped start conversations with many students. Later they would ask me: "What do you like about America the best?" or "Are our countries really so different?"

This spring my local coordinator took me to Columbus International School to talk about stereotypes and Russian culture in front of the whole school in the auditorium. I wasn't afraid at all! I was excited about it and looked forward it.

Now I feel free to ask questions, not only in school, but also in any store, restaurant or to a stranger on the street. Some would think that it's because of my better English. But I say that it's because of my new confidence and realization that you can't wait until your fear disappears. It will never happen. *You must feel scared and keep going on, speak if needed, disagree, think different and be yourself.*

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

FLEX student Zarina with her journalism teacher after she made a presentation.

What I've Gained...

Filipino YES student Muhammad, Principal Dave Reif and Russian Yuliya Puptseva.

Long Lasting Friendships

In school, we learn things and then take a test. But in life, we go through a trial and learn things from it. During my year, I have learned many things that are not easy to learn at school. These skills are so important for the rest of my life.

I have learned to be independent, which means I can decide things on my own. When I was in the Philippines, I always consulted my parents and asked for their approval.

And one of the most important things I've gained is long lasting friendships with people with unlike backgrounds. Good friends are of no cost in terms of money, but it takes time to develop strong bonding.

Muhammad Haidar Midtimbang
Hosted by the Kriebel family
Brookston, IN

Big Dreams Realized

Since I was a baby, I dreamed to see New York City with my own eyes. I did so on a BeloUsa trip. I felt like I was in a movie when I was in Times Square at night. Big lights, crowded streets, yellow taxis. I met many friends from all over the world, whom I love and am going to miss very much. Then we went to Washington, DC, a wonderful, charming place where you are surrounded with the history of this great country. I was lucky to be there during the cherry blossom time and fell in love with the Capital City.

This year gave me more than all my previous years have given. I've lived a U.S. teenager's life, become more independent, and met life friends. I now have the sister I always wanted. PAX taught me to be the change I want to see in the world! It gave me a clear image of community, and how important our actions are to it. I experienced democracy in the U.S., and I want my country to reach the same level one day.

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

Pure Glee in Idaho

This year, Nele Disselkamp (Germany) performed with the Trouveres Show Choir and even went on tour to Las Vegas and Los Angeles. "We are a big singing family! I've been able to get better at what I love most, singing, and meet amazing, talented people with the same interests." She sends her thanks to her hosts, the Dunn family.

Home Away from Home

From all around the globe
with determination and fervent hope
we seek to see
how sweet Uncle Sam can be.

As we arrived ashore
nameless of what's in store
you know what's always been our goal?
To have fun and enlighten our soul.

Surely, though obstacles come our way
life tries to keep us laid away
man determines his fate
as surely as a key unlocks a gate.

Leaving our friends and family behind
our lives get more and more refined
no matter how far we roam
we are always home away from home.

John Asigbekye (Ghana)
Hosted by the Payne-Meyer family
Putney, VT

FLEX students Anastasiya Okuneva (Russia) and Roman Kohut (Ukraine).

Preparation to Be a Future Leader

Students of all backgrounds gathered in Orlando, Florida on February 2-6 for the *Better Understanding for a Better World Conference*. There were 70 participants from 32 different countries. At first, it seemed like we all were so different, but after we got to know each other, everyone realized how many things we have in common!

The next day we went to the Disney Epcot Park. It has pavilions where you can find shops and restaurants representing eleven countries. The workers in each pavilion are natives of that country. In Epcot we learned that sharing our culture makes our friendships stronger.

Later we tasted Coca-Cola from all over the world. In different countries it tastes different because the company makes it taste similar to the food in that country.

This conference, an attempt to unite all of us, gave us hope for a better tomorrow. Someone said, "Exchange students can do something politicians can't do. We can share our country with people and help them understand us."

My friend Ahmed from Egypt described our conference as *great times with great people*, and added, "If you ever go to Egypt, know that you have a family there." Othman from Saudi Arabia said, "I wouldn't call you friends, I would call you family."

My biggest dream is to initiate changes for the better. I think it's possible because today's youth are the leaders of tomorrow.

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

Independence in Big Ways and Small

I have learned so many things from this experience and my host family. Some are simple things like laundry, chopping vegetables and fixing lunch for school. When I was in India, my mom used to do these things for me, but now I feel a sense of independence and confidence from doing my own work. My English speaking skills have definitely improved. It feels good that I can share all my thoughts with my host family and that they trust me. The one thing that I will miss the most when I return to India is American food. When I first came, I hated bland food. Then, I started tasting new foods. Now I love cheese.

Sheena Seth (India)
Hosted by Uttke family
Portland, OR

Grownup Now

Being in the United States helped me a lot with the experience of being separated from my parents. It has also helped me to feel grownup. There were a lot of funny moments, especially with my host family. School is super cool, and I have a lot of friends. I've also had hard times here, but nothing is perfect so don't give up. You just have to face those problems and defeat them.

Kamilla Iltabaeva (Tajikistan)
Hosted by the Crouch family
Lebanon, MO

A World of Family

Utah Cluster Leader Jamie Paskins's kids love hanging out with Gertrude Barfi (Ghana), Dian Lestari (Indonesia), Azka Nafirul Hasna (Indonesia), Salome Khmaladze (Georgia) and Pratima Padghan (India).

Lessons Beyond 2+2

Teachers teach you how the human body works, what is 2+2, when a country invaded another, but your exchange teaches you about yourself, people and how to solve problems. If it were not for PAX, I wouldn't know those things and these:

- The two magic words essential to everyday life: *thank you* and *please*.
- Cereal is for breakfast, lunch and night.
- Flip flops with socks, people in jammies walking in public, burping loud (but saying excuse me if you are polite)
- People not honking while driving here. Drivers *communicate* via horns in Turkey.
- EVERYTHING being just $1 in *Dollar Tree*. We have the same kind of stores in Turkey but almost everything costs more.

Ozge Demirci (Turkey)
Hosted by the Servin family
Portland, OR

Ways to Delete the Wall Between People with Disabilities and Society

Recently I went to a birthday party that was celebrated at "Morgan's Wonderland", a fun park designed specifically for children and adults with special needs, as well as the larger community. They had a lot of cool stuff to do: a train trip through the park, playgrounds, rides, interactive exhibits, gardens, an amphitheatre and a fishing lake. I enjoyed every minute there, seeing kids and parents so happy! By sharing my experience here at this park with my country, I hope I too can help delete the "wall of difference" that stands between people with disabilities and society.

Elena Ionita (Moldova)
Hosted by the Grant family
San Antonio, TX

A New Attitude

How did I change? First, the U.S. gave me more determination. Having met lots of extraordinary people, I have a huge desire to achieve my goals. One of them is to create a volunteer club at my school. My first project back home will be to help orphanages.

Secondly, I am confident, optimistic and flexible. I have changed mostly because of the Americans I've met, like my host mom who is a very successful communicator.

My high school gave me the feeling of the diverse American "melting pot". New friends helped me see that pluralism is the American key to success.

When I was in Washington, DC as a participant at the FLEX Civic Education Workshop, our motto was "Out of Many-ONE!" I would like to apply this concept to our world. We may come from different backgrounds, but we want common things: the desire to be happy, to live our lives and be successful.

This exchange year gave me a priceless opportunity to see the world from another perspective. As a result, the "new me" is more aware of life in different countries and more concerned about world events.

Olga Magneyeva (Russia)
Hosted by the Green-Storm family
Portland, OR

A Hundred Friends

Check out Arisa Chaisiri's slide show (www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkiwGkbjTD). It is clear that laughter and good times reigned during the Thai student's year with the Stockwell family in Provo, Utah.

Congrats to PAX Goes GREEN Winner Raquel Pujadas Rach (Spain) and Second Place Winner Ade Uktubara (Indonesia)

Spearheaded Recycling

After realizing that her high school created mountains of trash every day, PAX Goes GREEN first place winner Raquel Pujadas Rach (Spain) and a friend went to their principal with a plan to institute a recycling program in the school cafeteria. With his support, they spoke to the faculty, staff and student body to build momentum for their plan. Then, the team taught students how to recycle by going table to table with moveable bins in tow, explaining how to separate lunch refuse into paper, plastic and organic receptacles. "Changes are hard," Raquel, on the right, explained. With dogged determination, the pair turned around student objections. By Earth Day, their dream was a reality. Not only had they reduced the amount of trash produced at Mount Vernon High School, they inspired students to start recycling at home. PAX is proud to award Raquel with a $100 gift card. The Straus family hosts her in Mount Vernon, Washington.

Green Can Be Glamorous

Ade Uktubara found a new use for old bottle caps and plastic bags: a party dress! At a fashion show, the crowd loved it. So does PAX who awarded the young designer the PAX Goes GREEN contest second place prize, a $75 gift card. The Clay family hosts the Indonesian YES student in Lynden, Washington.

PAX STUDENTS WORK TO PROTECT OUR PLANET

Should we wait for Superman to rescue the environment? This year's PAX students say "no". Like the PAX Goes Green contest winners above, these young people stepped up to the plate to influence their communities to be trustees of the Earth we share.

Changing Attitudes

This winter Artur Pak (Kazakhstan) put together a persuasive video full of climate change facts for his Wisconsin classmates. Then he challenged them, **"What are you doing today to live better tomorrow?"** The video outlines solutions that have been already developed such as electric plants powered by the Earth's heat and technology that harnesses the energy of ocean waves. However, the FLEX student says, "to live better tomorrow, people must be motivated to implement these solutions now."

South Korean Seongjae Hong, host father John Candalino and friends.

Giving Nature a Hand

During spring break in Hawaii, Seongjae Hong spent a day digging out invasive weeds that were threatening an organic farm. The South Korean teen said, "Our volunteer efforts on behalf of Maui's fragile natural environment made a difference for a place we love!"

Ade Uktubara also used her muscles for Mother Earth. The Indonesian YES student joined a group from Western Washington University to help preserve Sucia Island in Washington State. "We did volunteer projects such as planting Garry oak trees, pulling out ivy, painting the restrooms and cleaning the trails. I realized how important it is to take care of nature."

It's in the Bag in South Dakota

To do her share to take care of the planet, Lela Merabishvili (Georgia) crocheted a reusable tote bag out of plastic bags. "People I knew brought me plastic bags so that the bag would be more colorful and diverse," she said. The FLEX student learned to crochet the bags from a YouTube video.

Art with Conscience

Aiperi Iusupova (Kyrgyzstan) became interested in creating art after her Virginia hosts, the Moriarty family, encouraged her to do something with some sticks they had collected together. After she made a table, the FLEX student moved on to using manmade materials as a way of recycling. Her creations include a lamp made out of wine bottles and a frame using wine corks.

From Junk to Jewelry

Like Aiperi, Indah Mahendra likes to rescue items from going into the trash. She enameled soda can tabs and then wove them together into gorgeous bracelets for her friends in Virginia and her homeland, Indonesia.

Composting is Easy

What's to be done with fallen leaves, weeds, grass clippings, kitchen waste and horse manure? In Oregon, Irvan Fathurohman (Indonesia) made a step-by-step video of how organic materials like these can be turned into dirt with a composting unit.

Go on a Carbon Fast

Meanwhile in Missouri, Roman Kohut (Ukraine) prompted his fellow students to go on a "carbon fast" with a list a changes they can make in their every day lives. One example is walking to get to places. Alina Zestrea (Moldova) thought of this lifestyle change, too. When she realized she could reduce her daily carbon output with this simple act, Alina started walking home from her California school instead of getting rides. The FLEX student went on to organize her fellow biology class students and teacher to do a beach clean up one weekend.

FLEX student Nurzat Rakhmanberdieva (Kyrgyzstan) with elementary students.

Be an Earth Warrior

On St. Patrick's Day in Central Wisconsin, Pussakon Phuthongdee (Thailand), Nurzat Rakhmanberdieva (Kyrgyzstan) and Sofia Furlan (Italy) made the color green mean more with their poster campaign and presentations. They urged people not to be passive environmentalists, but to be "Earth Warriors".

Earth Day activists: Danijel Buzov (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Luqman Ramli (Malaysia), Turki Alghamdi (Saudi Arabia), Evelina Ibrayimova (Ukraine) and Narawadee Rose Omanee (Thailand).

Making the Most of Earth Day

On April 22 the alarm clocks went off at 4 a.m. for Coordinator Natalie Saltmarsh's students in Gainesville, Florida. By 5 o'clock the students were baking bread and cooking eggs for day laborers. After they served a sunrise breakfast, the cluster went for a nature walk before starting their other big project for the day: moving truckloads of organic soil for the installation of a garden at the Reichert House Youth Academy.

Dig This Tradition

Since its inception over forty years ago, Earth Day participants have planted seedlings to mark the day. This year Roman Kohut (Ukraine) planted Colorado spruce and red bud trees on his host family's property in Missouri. Pratima Padghan (India) chose sunflowers for her Salt Lake City, Utah garden. Perhaps they will do the same next year, but in their homelands!

PAX congratulates all of the students who went green this year. Keep up the great work!

PAX Students Recognized

Members of the Williamsport School Board commend Alejna Ademi (Macedonia), Katrine Hansen (Denmark), Maulida Herradiyanti (Indonsesia), Muhammetgeldi Kurtgeldiyev (Turkmenistan), Shahen Mailyan (Armenia) and Artyom Solodovnikov (Kazakhstan). Pennsylvania Coordinator Ann Swift also reports that Shahen was selected as the March student of the month.

Science Scholar

Congratulations to Jon Ostolaza from Spain who has been awarded an Energy Solutions Scholarship. This scholarship is given to students who display an interest in and aptitude for math and science. In order to apply, Jon had to submit his current and past grades, obtain letters of recommendation from two teachers and write an essay. The scholarship provides $2000 toward tuition at the university of his choice. Six schools, including the University of Utah and Brigham Young University agreed to provide matching funds. Jon plans to attain a degree in chemical engineering. His host family, Paul and Janet Doxey of Saint George, Utah are extremely proud of his accomplishment.

Riding High in Nevada

Bohan Wang (China), Seongjae Hong (South Korea), Annabell Waldmann (Germany), Coordinator Margaret Hoppe and Yuri Ichinose (Japan) saddled up with host family members for a trail ride. For some, it was the first time on a horse.

Dancing with the Stars

At home I enjoyed dancing, but I couldn't find anything similar in Searcy, so I decided to start a dancing class. As my own little community service project, I taught teachers and students basic steps three times a week. The most important part was that we had a lot of fun and I got the opportunity to do something I really love - dance.

Ajla Omerbasic (Bosnia-Herzegovina)
Hosted by Reaper family
Searcy, AR

SHARE YOUR AMERICA

GAIN THE WORLD

With over 20 years of experience, PAX works exclusively with high school exchange. PAX students speak English, and have personal spending money and insurance.

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

Host mom Arabella Awad and FLEX student Rima Beridze (Georgia).

Reveling in Family Life

I have an amazing host family! I have four beautiful host sisters: Amira (20), Ariana (18), Alayna (7) and Amaya (1) and our little dog Roxy. Our culture is really mixed. My host mom, Arabella, is from Peru and my host dad, Samir, is from Brazil.

Arabella is an awesome person. She is like my natural mom. We talk about everything, and thanks to her, I never felt homesick, ever. She cooks the most delicious and healthy foods. Samir, too. He is the funniest person I've ever met. With them I'm never bored, especially with Amaya and Alayna around. I play hide and seek with them all the time. I love them.

Each day I look forward to hanging out with my host family and spending some time together, watching TV, talking about our day or having dinner. They are the best.

Rima Beridze (Georgia)
Hosted by the Awad family
Powell, OH

Not in Our Wildest Dreams...

We had high hopes that hosting a student would be a wonderful experience, but we never imagined in our wildest dreams that it would be life changing. If there is such a thing as a "perfect" match, Seongjae Hong is it. This journey together has been so amazing. We couldn't be happier. Thanks to the PAX family, our coordinator Margaret Hoppe, and Seongjae's parents, for this rare opportunity. In the photo, we are wearing custom-made traditional hanbok, a gift from Seongjae's parents.

John and Lori Candalino, host parents for
Seongjae Hong (South Korea)
Las Vegas, NV

Cute as a Button

Host mother Suzette Lopez of Sandpoint, Idaho writes, "Our bond with Gyulee Kim will always leave a lasting impression on our family." She says little ones Zella and Jens particularly love playing with the buttons on the South Korean student's cell phone and ipod.

Found Balance and Love

This exchange year is the best year I've had in my eighteen years of life.

As the only child in my family in China, the most important thing for me to do was to study hard. However, in America, I learned how to find the balance between studying and playing. In other words, I learned how to be a human instead of a studying machine.

My American parents are so amazingly perfect for me that I feel I am their child who has been lost in other places for several years. I enjoyed being a kid to them and learned that I don't need to be perfect as long as I try my best.

I learned even more from my elder sister Jess. She is a girl who looks on the positive side of life, who loves to give to others, listen and makes me warm all the time. Additionally, I learned from her how to find healthy food in America!

My little brother Harrison is a boy who loves to kiss others to show his love. At first I couldn't get used to him, but now I've become "addicted" to his kisses. My big brother Ben taught me to take everything easy and enjoy life's adventures. My little sister Ken is the cutest little child with the sweetest smiles. I learned how to be a good elder sister and a good future mother from her. When she hugs me, I can feel a strong love from her.

I found true happiness in America. I had great experiences as a carpenter, gardener, "shepherdess", cook and so on. I learned how to show love and warmth. I learned to laugh and keep a positive attitude. The most important thing I gained is an American family who loves me and whom I love.

Suqi Liu (China)
Hosted by the Fuller family
Highland, UT

Brought Us Smiles

Natthapat has taken every opportunity he has had to experience American life this year. He has traveled with us to places like Death Valley, enjoyed extended family gatherings, has been involved with sports and extracurricular activities at school, and has experienced many firsts. His usual response is, "I want to do that!" Seeing a young man experience his first snow, his first Christmas, his first camping, and much more has been a gift to us. He manages to embrace every moment in life and has brought us all many smiles. In this picture, Natthapat is giving a speech about Thailand to the Morro Bay Women's Club. We love having Natthapat as part of our family and are looking forward to a life long friendship with him!

The Jones family, hosts for
Natthapat Wongcharoenyong (Thailand)
Morro Bay, CA

A Lily Among Poppies

Never having hosted a foreign exchange student before, we were full of anticipation. From her native Japan, Kaho arrived beautiful, quiet, helpful and kind. We, on the other hand, were fast moving, dramatic, expressive and just plain loud! She was like a white lily in a bed of bright red poppies. However, it was love at first sight. We felt so lucky! We worked at being more like her, and she could not help becoming more like us, Italians. We eat pasta at least once a week, and she can eat with the best of us.

She is bright and academically talented. She is a good friend and wonderful sister to my children. She enjoys horseback riding, animals and all sports.

My being the coach of a FIRST robotics team was a big draw for Kaho. She quickly signed up to become a "Livonia Warrior". This past season, Kaho enjoyed building and programming the robot, the competitions, as well as being part of marketing and public relations. She helped take our robot, Armed and Dangerous, to the Michigan state competition.

Kaho's contributions as a team member, family member and a student have been exemplary. We are so very proud of her!

Isolina Carlini, host mother for
Kaho Hasabe (Japan)
Livonia, MI

Young Ambssadors

YES students Eunice Martinho Amisse (Mozambique) and Salamatu Mohammed (Ghana) are all smiles after an event where they represented their homelands. The Bowles family hosts Eunice in Shaftsbury, Vermont, and the Allison family hosts Salamatu in Salem, New York.

Maine was Magical

The thing I will miss is the friendliness of small town people and the diverse ethnic groups of America. My teachers and friends were willing to help me. The people who have been most influential are my host family members. I think they are my real second family. Furthermore, I have four best friends. We've had a great time at parties, Christmas, Halloween and school.

Mananchaya Punsiri (Thailand)
Hosted by the Dow family
Sangerville, ME

What's Cooking?

In Ohio, host sister Adele Hardwick, Paula Fagundes (Brazil) and Morlin Steffens (Germany) prepared a feast to raise money for the Ethiopia Kids Culture Camp.

Our Indonesian Son

Muhammad Rizki came to live with us this last August and is going to Kennewick High School. He has enjoyed football, drama class and has brought home straight "A's" in his classes. After writing an essay for PAX, he won a trip to Disney World. His mother in Indonesia must be so proud of her son. I know I am proud of his accomplishments here in America.

Rizki is trying to earn a hundred hours of community service. He is eager to learn all that America has to offer and takes pictures of everything, so that he will not forget even ONE of his experiences!

Rizki loves to make rice and I enjoy it every time. Our family has never eaten so much rice in all our lives as we have since last August. We now call it "Rizki Rice". If I ever open a restaurant, I will put it on my menu!

Snow was a new experience for Rizki and he enjoyed a week of it in Montana. It was a thrill to experience his first sight of snow, as we take it for granted.

We cannot accommodate a lot of Rizki's efforts to experience all he wants to do while he's here, but his PAX leader, Renee Kerr, has helped out tremendously and we appreciate her.

This has been quite an experience for all, and it's not over yet! We still have a lot of things to do and a lot of memories to be made before the day my "Indonesian son" returns to his own country.

Rhonda Martin, host mother for
Muhammad Rizki (Indonesia)
Kennewick, WA

Jumping for Joy

Coordinator Chris Duncan's Wisconsin students were soaring during a trip to Washington, DC: Amy Filonenko (Russia), Julia Moshkovska (Ukraine), Julia Fuchs (Germany), Merle Tucholka (Germany), Bella Fernandez Lopez (Spain), Sofia Furlan (Italy), Daniel Antonio Rodriguez (Mexico) and Tanapat Laoh (Thailand).