

# Pax Press



South Korean Na Hyun Kong and her hosts

## Surpassed My Dream

This exchange program was found for my brother, not me. But my brother, who doesn't like to take risks, denied it. I, who love adventure, was interested. It sounded terrific! I asked my dad if I could apply, but he said no. The reason was simple: I am a young girl. So I kept asking him for six months. I glowed with visions of my life in America. English? I would be able to speak as if I was a residential American. Character? I would grow and not be a mere child anymore.

I now compare my present self to what I had hoped to become. The result is not bad at all. I can express things in English. I have many special memories from here. I learned how to make better choices and logically solve problems.

Even though I worked hard, I am still not the perfect adult that I expected to become. However, I am extremely happy here. I feel loved in this far away country and I am not homesick. I love my host family and friends with my whole soul. This love was the strength that helped me to survive these ten months. It is the main source of my wonderful experience.

Na Hyun Kong (South Korea)  
Hosted by the Foshay family  
Bridport, VT

## A Journey of Self-Discovery and Joy

It's very easy to forget who you are when you are placed in another culture. This year has been a test of my principles and character. I have learned to sift every experience, and to take the good and leave the bad. It has been a journey of self-discovery. Away from what is normal or what I am used to, I have watched myself plough through unfamiliar ground: living with new people, making



Rubicon Photo

## Spring Cleaning at the Habitat ReStore

This spring, Iowa PAX students volunteered at the Cedar Rapids Habitat for Humanity ReStore. Coordinator Jeff Schmitt explains, "The ReStore takes donated used household items that can be resold to others to fix up their homes. Habitat for Humanity then takes the proceeds from those sales and helps build homes for American families that don't own their own home. Our PAX students helped organize donated materials and did some spring cleaning." Pictured are: Ama Owusu-Darko (YES, Ghana), Leyla Madatkhanova, (FLEX, Azerbaijan), Akram Al-Ja'di (YES, Yemen), Ndeye Tall (YES, Senegal), Abdullah Abohaimed (YES, Saudi Arabia), Coordinator Anne Harmony-Spina and Nerea Ugarte (Spain).

friends, being part of the track and field team, and being a radio reporter.

I rejoice because the plough didn't stop and say, "This is too hard", but went on and now a thoroughly tilled land is the wonderful result. I realize how lucky I am to have had this experience. To know that education is not all about memorization and recall. That it could include understanding and appreciating a culture different from your own. I have acquired skills I never had, from attending workshops in Seattle and

Washington, DC, to interviewing both the man on the street and a senator on Capitol Hill, to writing for radio and audio editing.

It's been worthwhile leaving friends and family for ten months because I've found friends and family here, too. I've made everlasting memories, and when I'm ninety and old, I will sit by the fireside with my grandchildren and tell them of my ten month long adventure in the USA.

I'll never forget Mr. Hargraves, who brought laughter to math class. For people like me, it is the only way the equations will stick in the brain! My host mom Tamarah's teaching healed once more the bruises of a dark, brutal history, and demonstrated that we are first *people* before affiliates of a race. I think Thanksgiving should be held everywhere. I will sorely miss it. Everyone has something to be thankful for.

Mawusi Kudu (YES, Ghana)  
Hosted by the Lee family  
Redmond, WA

## Russian Teen Wins Book Cover Contest

Congrats to Yekaterina Bocharova for winning the CSJET Annual Art Design Cover contest. To see her artwork, which will be featured on the 2012-2013 cover of Advisory List for the Council on Standards of International Educational Travel, go to [www.CSIET.org](http://www.CSIET.org). The Reece family hosts the talented FLEX student in Kansas.

## City Boy Brings Home the "Green"

I am from a big city where there are just a few trees, so I didn't have any experience working in gardens or on a farm. When I first arrived, I thought, "How will I spend the whole year around these mountains and trees?" But now I've adjusted to this new lifestyle and I really like it. I planted some flowers and I mow the grass. I take wood from the forest near the house and make bonfires with my host family and friends. We toast marshmallows and have fun. These things are new experiences for me.



I've also gained a lot of leadership abilities in the US, so I'm planning to start a campaign to plant flowers and trees all around my city, Karachi. What I learned in America, I can teach my friends back home. I will first green my neighborhood and ask more people to help, so that we can overcome the pollution and have a fresh and healthy atmosphere in Karachi.

Syed Ali Larosh Zaidi (YES, Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Minch family  
Inwood, WV



Exchange sisters Alexandra "Sasha" Bednenko (FLEX, Kazakhstan) and Busra Cetin (YES, Turkey) are all smiles.

## Double the Fun

After describing the cold winters in this part of the U.S., I was proven wrong when we had a very mild winter and went sun bathing and running into the Atlantic Ocean in mid April. Typically we don't go into the ocean until June. Busra and Sasha bring me loads of joy and keep lots of young energy in the house.

Sue Dawson, host mother for  
Busra Cetin (YES, Turkey) and  
Alexandra Bednenko (FLEX, Kazakhstan)  
Chelmsford, MA

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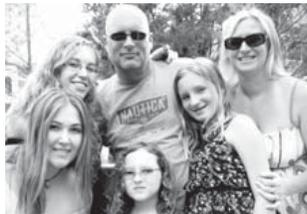


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### In Memoriam: Rayetta Fetter



We are saddened by the news that one of PAX's most treasured coordinators passed away this month. Everyone who met Rayetta was struck by her warmth, creativity and zest for life. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, she founded a beloved cultural tradition: the International Dinner, in which exchange students treat their host families and teachers to an evening of global entertainment and specialty foods. An impressive ninety-seven students from more than 20 countries have called her "mom" over the past nine years. During her travels to 27 countries, she and her husband, Gordon, were able to visit many of these students and their families. She will be deeply missed by the whole PAX family.



### Surf and Sun

Going to Florida for spring break was something that I will never forget. We did a lot of things together like water volleyball, Disney World and a water park. We also went to Daytona and Cocoa Beach. Surfing was so much fun! I turned 18 years there. I am extremely thankful to have had this opportunity.

Carla Santamarina Sanjuan (Spain)  
Hosted by the Knaffle family  
Cheboygan, MI



### Be My Valentine

Janise Kresbach offers one of the cake pops she made with her host mother, Sherill Kennedy. The German teen is spending her year in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.



### Christmas Replay

The Tipton family brought Rino Ishizaki (Japan) to the world's biggest Christmas store in Michigan. Rino says, "When I return home, I will miss big American events like Christmas and my special host family."

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.

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### What a Paradise!

Host brother Graham Vogel and Hinrich Sackmann (Germany) left the cold Michigan weather behind for a spring break trip to Florida.

### Three PAX Students are Chosen as Semifinalists for US-CAEF Enterprise Scholarships

Congratulations to Anisa Atalova from Kyrgyzstan, and Yerassyl Toleugazinov and Batima Myrzabekova, both from Kazakhstan. PAX wishes the best to the FLEX students as they enter the final selection round for the US funded fellowships at select Central Asian universities.

### Alabama is Awesome

Fortunately, I knew my host family pretty well from Skyping when I arrived. We got along like family from the beginning. On the other hand, I nearly died at first with the 112°F summer weather in Birmingham. Even the highest temp back in Germany never reaches 100°.

A few months later we went indoor-skydiving in Tennessee. When you jump into the center of a net, you hover in the wind blown by a car-sized fan! We also visited an American Oktoberfest. It was amusing to see Americans walking around in *lederhosen* when they cannot speak German nor behave like real Germans. Stereotypical, but very funny to see how Americans think we act and dress.

During football season we went to the home of Alabama football, Tuscaloosa. We camped close to the stadium by a lake. Raccoons came near our tent and campfire, so we decided to watch them and ended up falling asleep outside. The next day we tailgated on campus where I met some nice college girls. The atmosphere was impressive. There is nothing like it in Germany.

To read an interview of Lucian, go online to [www.shelbycountyreporter.com](http://www.shelbycountyreporter.com) and search "exchange student enjoys south's culture".

### Spring Break by the Numbers

11 Teens from 9 Countries visit 5 States

John and Amy Cooper teamed up with Indiana Coordinator Teresa Metz to take this crew on a road trip through Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Florida. Their ultimate destination was the gulf shore for a week of dolphin spotting, alligator hunting, mini golf and lots of time at the beach. Pictured are Pativate Naengnoy (Thailand), Hae Jun Lee (South Korea), Aissa Aburruza (Spain), Max Zimu Zhang (China), Lukas Oberbeck (Germany), Michael and Victoria Metz, Alicia Yager, Tanja Ronnemose (Denmark), Juliette Renard (Belgium) and Mario Diaz (Mexico).



### Zip Line Adventure

The rush of adrenaline while riding such an overwhelming ride is a great experience. I went to Missouri with my host family, and on the way back we visited the tallest tower in Branson known as "The Shepherd of the Hills". We could see the whole city split into different interesting sectors. So when my mom and I saw the zip line, we thought that it must be the craziest thing we could think of trying before we left Missouri. We went for it. At first I was scared and thought my heart would come out of my mouth. It was so full of fun. I had a fabulous time there and I'm blessed to have this family to support me. The saying is true indeed: It is not a year in a life, but a life in a year. Love you, mom and dad.

Moshfeka Akhter (YES, Bangladesh)  
Hosted by the Lyons family  
Shreveport, LA



### Like Nowhere Else

"My sister, Audrey Thomsen, and I went to Door County, Wisconsin to spend some time with our grandparents." Saba Saleem (YES, Pakistan) writes, "Our grandfather took us hiking on the eagle trail through a state park. We went to look at this beautiful scene of Lake Michigan."

One great experience was visiting my little host sister in her elementary school class. I read a German fairytale, answered questions and surprised them by handing out letters from an elementary school in Germany. The two classes still correspond with one another as pen pals and have each others photos posted.

Thanks to everybody who changed my life through this exchange year, especially my host family. Without their willingness to share their home and hearts, I could not have come to America. They showed me parts of American life I would never otherwise have experienced. I also thank my friends and teachers at Pelham High, especially Ms. Harrison, who invited me on a senior field trip to Atlanta even though I am a junior.

America is different in many ways, but also similar. To experience ways you don't know makes the exchange year awesome.

Lucian Grote (Germany)  
Hosted by the Wilson family  
Helena, AL



In front of a NASA aircraft, Pakistani YES student Yasha Ali contemplates her next dream – becoming an astronaut.

### To Infinity and Beyond

This journey started with a small thought that changed into a hope and then into a dream. These eleven months were a life changing experience with many ups and downs, along with some moments when I realized that if I wasn't here, then I would never know that I have the potent strength to go through hitches by myself.

In this challenge we can ascertain a whole new world. Voyaging to a place which is absolutely new is a mammoth confrontation in itself, but this is what we came here for! A cultural experience and great memories with new global allies.

PAX and YES provided me with the chance to understand the world from a totally diverse outlook and with the ability to help others through volunteering and community service. After experiencing almost a year of teenage life in the USA, I am going to live more dreams!

I hope I can implement all the things that I learned here as an exchange student for goodwill, world harmony and peace.

Yasha Ali (YES, Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Whittaker family  
Westerville, OH



### A Mountain of Fun

I am a big fan of snowboarding and it was always my dream to snowboard in America, especially in Colorado. When my host mother told me that we would be going on a ski trip with the family, one of my biggest dreams came true! Here at home, I live with my host parents and their daughter. My two older host brothers do not live at home anymore. I was even more excited when my host mother said that both of my host brothers would come with us. We stayed in a beautiful cabin twenty minutes away from the mountain. The cabin was really nice and big. My host mother cooked food before the trip and froze it so we had a really delicious dinner every evening when we came home from the slopes. One of the nicest things of the trip was going to the natural hot springs. To be honest, the smell of the water was not that great, but the feeling when you were in there was amazing.

Lennard Richter (Germany)  
Hosted by the Majewski family  
Albuquerque, NM



### Travelling Man

With my host family I went to Ruidoso for skiing, Grand Canyon for hiking, to New Mexico and six more cities. It's been really awesome. Because South Korea is not a big country, I have never ridden in a car for ten hours, so that was tough. But after that, I had a lot of fun with my host family.

Wommo Yang (South Korea)  
Hosted by the Harmon family  
El Paso, TX



### Best of State

Karima Kurmanzkhan (FLEX, Kazakhstan) won an award at the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America state conference. The Touchstone family hosts her in Broken Bow, Oklahoma.



Henrik Mueller (Germany), Coordinator Martha Mitchell, Adrien Caputi (Belgium) Jasmin Reimann (Germany), Francois De Baerdemaeker (Belgium), Kajsa Henriksson (Sweden) and Pauline Kerroux (France).

### DC or Bust

Recently, Wisconsin PAX students went to Washington, DC and stayed with PAX Coordinator Martha Mitchell who showed us around. We went from the Arlington Cemetery, which we had heard so much about in US history class, to the Natural History Museum that we had seen in "Night at the Museum", to the Air and Space Museum. We also did a really cool bike tour that went by the White House, the Capitol, and the Washington Monument. We even had the chance to visit the Hershey factory and had awesome chocolate. Thank you to Martha Mitchell and Central Wisconsin Coordinator Chris Duncan, without whom we wouldn't have been able to go.

Pauleen Kerroux (France)  
Hosted by the Hagen family  
Wisconsin Rapids, WI



### My Girls

Florida Coordinator Karen Rose, center, with Blanca Barajas Vallejo (Spain), Maria Samon Puig (Spain), Elisabetta Fabretti (Italy) and Tabytha Sorger Souza (Brazil).

### Destination Imagination

Since October, I have been involved in Destination Imagination. In competitions, my team had to improv a sketch with two news article titles in six minutes. We came in second locally and then second at the state level! My host sister's team also won and now we are both going to the Global Finals in May. Being in this program has given me new friends, improved my English and helped me developed new problem solving skills. At first I didn't like it because we don't do this activity in France, but now I am having a good time.

Ilaria Pittaluga (France)  
Hosted by the Vinson family  
Centerville, OH



### Super Bowl XLVI

Rodrigo De La Garza couldn't believe it when he got a ticket to the Super Bowl. The Lefters host the Mexican teen in Illinois.

# PAX Goes GREEN

Congratulations to first place winner Fasih Durrani, second place winner Elene Minashvili and all of the PAX Goes GREEN contest participants.

## Compost King

My project was to plant healthy vegetables and fruits by recycling an unused, filthy sandbox in my backyard into a useful garden. I got some compost manure and other compostable waste such as leaves and grass clippings, as well as fruit and vegetable compost from the kitchen. I then added some dirt. After making the base, I planted raspberries, blueberries, tomatoes, lettuce, celery, cabbage, radicchio, and five different kinds of peppers. I also planted three trees in the front yard as part of my Earth Day project. My host family and friends helped me. This project left a good impression on the community and my neighborhood. People stopped by, asked me about it and said they appreciated the effort I'm putting in. Hopefully they will end up doing some good work in their backyards as well.

Fasih Durrani (YES, Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Jones family  
Camp Hill, PA



PAX Goes GREEN first place contest winner Fasih Durrani (YES, Pakistan) with his sandbox-turned-garden.



Second place winner Elene Minashvili (FLEX, Georgia) filmed a video showing how to knit plastic bags like this one, thus removing the bags from the waste stream.

## The Plastic Bag Facts

Did you know? *That the raw material for plastic bags is oil.* Therefore, the more plastic bags we use, the more oil we waste, and oil is a non-renewable energy source. *That the petroleum-based plastic bags take decades to break down,* so if they are not recycled, they become long lasting litter. *That plastic bags endanger wildlife,* particularly sea life such as sea turtles and dolphins that become entangled in them and suffocate or mistakenly assume that these bags are jellyfish and eat them.

Many people think they can't have an impact on environmental problems. Issues like global warming, loss of rain forests, acid rain, the ozone layer and our waste disposal crisis can be huge and out of control. But there's good news. You can change the conditions we're facing right now by doing little things. If each copier in the U.S. made five fewer copies a day, we could save up to 1.4 million trees.

Protecting nature and maintaining a green environment should be our goal. Nature will die without our help. If every single person does something, even a little bit every day, the impact is going to be big.

Elene Minashvili (FLEX, Georgia)  
Hosted by the Ghan family  
Kennewick, WA

## River Rescuers

To commemorate Earth Day and Global Youth Volunteer Day, my exchange group brainstormed community service ideas. We voted in the idea of Piril Eteke (YES, Turkey), which was to clean up the Shenandoah River in Virginia. Armed with two canoes, gloves, boots, and trash bags, we split our group into two. For four hours we collected debris such as plastics, cans, beverages bottles, tires and all kinds of items around the riverbed. Each group returned with a successful haul of debris in their canoe. We learned that volunteering not only benefits societies, but also the environment and ourselves. We had so much fun cleaning the river! It was such a great group activity!

Lidya Sophiani (YES, Indonesia)  
Hosted by the Quintero family  
Round Hill, VA



Jon Artaza (Spain), Farah Khaled (YES, Egypt), Mariah Quintero, Jern Ken (YES, Malaysia), Lidya Sophiani (YES, Indonesia) and Vlad Nersesyan (FLEX, Russia) haul refuse.

**Got Rid of the Car** Alona Shulga (FLEX, Ukraine) and her host mother rely on biking and walking to get around their West Virginia town. She announced a bonus beyond the reduced carbon use, "Less money used for gas meant more money for fun!"

**Draft Dodgers** When Shayan Sikander (YES, Pakistan) learned that rod-shaped sacks filled with sand could block drafts from windows and doors, he reached out to his Massachusetts neighbors with pamphlets about this simple energy saving idea.

**Power Down** Denys Andrushchenko (FLEX, Ukraine) published a story on how his West Virginia school could save \$17,430 a year and nearly 10 million joules on energy. His solution was simply turning off each school computer for ten minutes a day.

**Exchanging Best Practices** Nozanin Amonova (FLEX, Tajikistan) shared ideas from her homeland, including a method to prevent newly planted trees from drying out. One practice Nozanin will take back is recycling. Another is clubs like the Watershed Environmental Team (WET). With WET, she planted 30 trees and painted rain barrels.

**A Better Flush** Silvia Juste (Spain) knows a great way to save water. Just change the water levels on the mechanism inside the toilet tank. She adjusted three of her New Hampshire host family's toilets to the low flow setting, saving thousands of gallons.



## Be the Change

"If we want to change the world, then we should be the change," say Yasha Ali (YES, Pakistan), Ashkhen Arakelyan (FLEX, Armenia), Zhamilia Aitakunova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan), who worked dawn to dusk cleaning parks in Westerville, Ohio.

## Nature's Gifts

My host family works during the springtime on the front and backyard. This year a vacant space was chosen to be a garden for my host mom, sister and me. I had fun shoveling dirt and raking the yard. We laughed until our tummies ached. While resting under a tree, I realized that we don't really see how beautiful nature is until we get it on our feet and explore it. With pictures I took of the garden, I can show people how I see nature. We should ask ourselves, "What if it wasn't there?"

Janica Katricia Diamalon  
(YES, Philippines)  
Hosted by the Eastes family  
Francesville, IN



## Tomorrow's Stewards

On Earth Day, Missouri Coordinator Liz Carver, right, brought her students to the St. Louis Earth Day Festival, Science Center, zoo, planetarium and Meramec Caverns. With her are Anna Khoperia (FLEX, Georgia), Heinrich Dettman (Germany) and Lado Sirdadze (FLEX, Georgia).



Poster by Maaz Islam  
(YES, Pakistan)  
Anchorage, AK

## Chop Chop

Mariam Teme, left, demonstrates cooking techniques during family night at school. The YES student from Mali says she will miss the American holidays and special events like this one. She sends a big thank you to the Turner family for hosting her in Cosmopolis, Washington.



## Lost? Not Me!

I went on an orienteering field trip with a class at school. We were divided into sixteen groups and were told to go into the woods and find different checkpoints by only using a map and compass within three hours. It was really fun and exciting as I had never done anything like that before. My team was awarded the Orienteering Ribbon by the class instructor. It was a great experience.

Nabeel Malik (YES, Pakistan)  
Hosted by the Drakeford family  
Ruther Glen, VA



National Honor Society inductees Syed Ali Larosh Zaidi (YES, Pakistan), Denys Andrushchenko (FLEX, Ukraine) and Radovan Svridonog (Czech Republic)

## Finish Line Victories

My biggest experiences here have been in sports. After swimming in a regional tournament with the varsity team, I immediately joined the varsity track team. I was so excited to try pole vaulting and hurdles, but I ended up staying with my best events—distance and long jump. I've been placing or winning at every meet in the 4 x 800 relay, and I keep improving my one and two mile running times. Also, I have tried many other sports like tennis, baseball, golf and football. My host mother's little cousin taught me how to play lacrosse and my Pakistani exchange brother, Ali Larosh, showed me his national game, cricket.

At the same time, I continue to study with responsibility. I became a member of the National Honor Society. It was a strange feeling to put on a gown before my graduation in May.

Denys Andrushchenko (FLEX, Ukraine)  
Hosted by the Minch family  
Inwood, WV

## A Letterman Scores

When Joao Pedro Colnaghi returns to Brazil, he'll be proudly packing his letterman jacket. During the fall, he scored 29 points as a football team kicker. Not bad for a guy who had never played the sport before! The Gilchrist family hosts Joao in Cadiz, Ohio.



## Grease is the Word

Budding actress Elizaveta Gaponova showed everyone that she has what it takes on stage during her school musical *Grease*. The Shireman family hosts the Russian FLEX student in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

## Top Scholar

Yujie Wang (China) was selected as a senior Rotary Scholar. She, along with the others who won the award, was honored this week with a Rotary Club luncheon. She selected her host mom, Teresa Reeder, and myself to be her guests. Throughout the years, I have had many students who attended Tupelo High School, yet Yujie Wang is the first exchange student I have supervised who won this honor. The winners were selected from the very top students who took advanced placement courses. Yujie did this and won!

Mary Payne Hairald  
Community Coordinator  
Nettleton, MS



## The Artist Within

The most unpredictable event of my year was receiving "The Principal's Art Award" at Penfield High School! My school is a great place, although I still get lost sometimes because it's such a huge school.

This whole year has been the most interesting page of my life story. America became a part of me as well as I became a part of America. I've got the FLEX and PAX programs to thank for that.

Aigerim Artykbaeva (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan)  
Hosted by the Mulvehill family  
Penfield, NY



## Checkmate!

One of Alina Zyevakova's favorite volunteer activities is teaching chess at an elementary school. Along with showing the children her favorite game moves, the FLEX student likes to give a primer on her homeland, Ukraine. Focused and engaged, this hardworking student has been formally recognized by her school for academic achievement and by her peers for her great sense of humor. During a recent skit spoofing American Idol, she played Paula Abdul. "Not Abdul. Not 'American Idol'. It's Idle," Alina clarified. "It was quite funny. Everyone liked the show!" The Masseran family hosts her in Fowlerville, Michigan.

## A Star is Born

My school's spring play was a parody of *Sherlock Holmes: The Hound of the Baskervilles*. I got a part as the annoying and

wannabe-star maid named Laura Lyons. She is the murder suspect. It's pretty amazing because exchange students usually are an extra or do crew. I'm really grateful to get a main part. I love being part of the drama activities in school, and it made me get more involved in my passion for fine arts. I'm so happy, too, because my PAX friends and coordinator, Jeff Schmatt, came to watch me in the role on the final night.

Gladhys Syahutari (YES, Indonesia)  
Hosted by Mihm family  
Norway, IA



## Way to Go, Jon!

What could be more affirming than scoring a goal at your first game? Congrats to Jon Ales Artaza. The Barton family hosts the Spanish teen in Berryville, Virginia.

## Sweet Success

When Shomy Chowdhury (YES, Bangladesh) arrived in Michigan to live with the Reinhout family, she had no idea what an impact she would make. She dove right into school life, winning the senior class "Hawaiian Day" costume award, singing a solo in a choir concert and making the honor roll. During International Education Week, she gave 17 presentations about her homeland to Cheboygan area elementary, middle and high school classes. To teach her classmates about the Bengali language on International Mother Language Day, she dressed in a black and white Bengali outfit.

This winter, Shomy was in the news headlines when she won first place and \$150 for her Bengali dance at the "Northern Michigan Has Talent" show sponsored by the Cheboygan Area Arts Council and Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. She also won \$30 and the first place award at her school talent show.



YES student Shomy Chowdhury proudly displays the Bangladesh flag.

Whenever she has time, Shomy dedicates it to volunteer work. She says, "I love serving my community." By the end of April, Shomy had put in over 400 hours of service, doing everything from community clean ups to working with children with handicaps to helping out at a day care center. She is well on her way to earning the President's Volunteer Service Award! Keep up the good work, Shomy!

## Student of the Month: The Rewards of Optimism

Five days before school began, I went with my host mum to tour the high school, so



I would have an idea of where my classes would be. Mathematics and social studies on the first floor, science and English on the second floor, student services next to the cafeteria and between them is a big wall where the student of the month pictures are posted. When we saw the pictures of these students, we stopped and my host mum told me that she would love to see my picture there. I promised her that she would, but obviously I

thought it would be impossible. How could an exchange student become student of the month if no one knows him or her, especially the teachers?

Sometimes you have to be optimistic and do the best you can without thinking about the recompense. That's when they will value your work.

After Christmas break we received an invitation for the student of the month meeting. My English teacher had nominated me. After we read the invitation, I said to my host mum, "I told you that you would see my picture on the wall!" It just goes to show that nothing is impossible when you believe.

Paula Frago Espinosa (Spain)  
Hosted by the Doty family  
Westerville, OH



Moldovan FLEX student Mihail is #78.

## Most Improved Player

A couple of hours after arriving in Wisconsin, I met my football coach, Mr. Trost, and I started to learn the basics of football. It was pretty hard in the beginning. I started as a kicker, then I played on kick off and kick return plays, and then I was moved to the defense line. To learn the game faster, I played on both the JV and varsity teams. It was an awesome time! The team was a big family.

At the football banquet I got the MVP reward for the "most improved player". I was so excited. The coaches did a great job creating a team and a positive attitude at every practice and at every game.

By playing football, I became a more purposeful and hard working person. I found a new way of setting goals and achieving them!

Mihail Filipenco (FLEX, Moldova)  
Hosted by the Streblov family  
Horicon, WI

## Walking a Day in My Brother's Shoes

We are the Hajek family from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. We have been hosting Usman Ghani, a 16-year-old boy from Pakistan. Throughout this experience we have learned so much about his religion (Islam) and his culture. Some things are very different from our practices here in the US, while other things are pretty much universal.



YES students Muhammad Usman Ghani from Pakistan and Abdullah Abohaimed from Saudi Arabia

One of the things that fascinated me the most as Usman's host mom has been the customs and practices of his Muslim religion. We have had many hours of discussion on this topic, of which I previously had very little knowledge. On a recent spring break trip to St. Louis, we decided to take it one step further. My 10-year-old daughter Kelly and I decided to wear traditional Muslim women's clothing and hijab for one day to see and feel how people respond to openly Muslim people. Another exchange student, Abdullah Abohaimed from Saudi Arabia, came on the trip with us. He and Usman wore their country's traditional dress on this day also.

I felt people's interactions with me that day were not at all what I expected them to be. If anything, I felt that I was treated with more respect by strangers and the service people we encountered. I think the reason for this is because here in America most people



Kelly and Jaean Hajek appreciated the respect they received when they spent the day donned in the traditional clothing of their student's country, Pakistan.

don't physically wear clothing that represents their religion in such an open, outward way. The modest dress of Muslim women is meant to portray them as equals in intellect, while distracting outsiders from seeing or viewing the females as "objects". I

definitely experienced this. If there were any negative comments or looks given to any of us, I didn't notice it at all. This tells me that most Americans are becoming much more tolerant of diverse cultures in their presence. My hope is that people are educating themselves as to what these cultures are really like. Just as in any "group", there will always be the radical segment, but the majority usually are common peace loving people, just as most of us here in America are.

I can say that my family and I have learned more from these exchange "kids" than I could have ever learned on my own. This has been such a positive, eye opening experience for all of us and one that we will cherish for the rest of our lives! And maybe there will be a trip to Pakistan in our future.

The Hajek family, hosts for Muhammad Usman Ghani (YES, Pakistan) Cedar Rapids, IA



## Ready, Set, Bag

Recognizing that some families in their Florida community don't have enough money to buy food, Coordinator Danyel White's group bagged groceries and delivered them to a local food pantry. Pictured are Atikarn Suantawee (Thailand), Alejandra Azcona Puig (Spain), Emely Scheel (Germany), Sophia Launert (Germany), Ana Prada Herrero (Spain), host mother Lue Sender, Abubakarr Conteh (YES, Sierra Leone), Sophie Kruijff (Netherlands) and Rachele Leibrandt (Germany).



## We CAN!

Keegan Manuel (YES, South Africa) and Johnny Elias (YES, West Bank) spent months gathering aluminum cans for recycling. With the can refund money, they bought non perishable food to donate to the Key Club food-a-thon benefiting six food pantries in the Orange, Massachusetts area.

## Helping Children in Need

Louise Bertelsen (Denmark) promoted the silent auction at the fundraising dinner that she and the other Great Falls, Montana PAX students put together to benefit a home for neglected and abused children.



## Enlivened by Service

Nothing makes me as happy as the realization that I have helped somebody—that I made a person smile. Only few hours a week is not a big deal to me, but it is for them. It always feels good when you know that somebody is happy, but the feeling you have when you are the reason for his or her happiness is unexplainable. This year I've been volunteering for newborns in need by making quilts and clothes packages for them. In March, I went on a mission trip to help at the Hope Children's Home in Florida.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton said, "The happiest people I have known have been those who gave themselves no concern about their own souls, but did their uttermost to mitigate the miseries of others." Now I know what that means and I want to say thank you to PAX for giving me the opportunity to see life and real happiness. My soul had never been this rich before.

Syuzeta Martirosyan, (FLEX, Armenia) Hosted by the Lopez family Springfield, MO



## 30-Hour Famine: Teens Go Hungry so Others Don't Have to

To fight hunger around the world, four YES students in Massachusetts fasted for 30 straight hours with the Athol Orange Baptist Church youth group. Through this effort, Johnny Elias (West Bank), Keegan Manuel (South Africa), Maryam Ibad (Pakistan) and Jowahdi Salik (Philippines) raised \$3000 for World Vision. Pictured is Keegan alerting drivers to the devastating effects of hunger.

# Cheers for Volunteers

## Tornado Recovery

My youth group organized a three-day mission trip to Kentucky to help people affected by the tornado that happened on March 2nd. We first headed to an older man's house. He lost a lot of his property so we helped clean the mess the tornado left. The next morning we talked to a man who lost his wife in the tornado. It was really sad what happened. We cut up downed trees and picked up loose wood on his property. Later in the afternoon, we drove around with the town's sheriff to find more places to help. In conclusion, the mission trip was a very good experience for all of us, and it made us thank God for what we have. Helping people is one of the best feelings in the world. I believe that we should be there for one another during the difficult times.

Akram Al-Ja'di (YES, Yemen) Hosted by the Arp family Walker, IA



## Wisconsin Students Take Up Curling

Each year we plan a monthly event for our exchange students and their host families in Northwest Wisconsin. One very popular sport that is played here is curling. For those of you who do not know anything about the sport, it originated in Scotland where it was played entirely outdoors. We now have



heated curling ice arenas so the season can start in early fall and last until late spring. As a result, the Midwest has curling teams that are now highly competitive at the international level. This fact was made even more apparent with the US team's success in the last winter Olympics. Pictured are the exchange students who learned the rules and techniques of the game in less than a half hour. We were able to play at a state of the art facility located in Rice Lake. The facility displays flags from the many nations and states that have been actively involved in the sport of curling here in Wisconsin.

Steve Eichman Community Coordinator Turtle Lake, WI



## Hello from Big Sky Country

"Wide open spaces and small towns, this is what American life is really, truly about," Montana Coordinator Melody McLaughlin says. Pictured are Aparajita Naik (India), Lalisa Trirattanajarasorn (Thailand), Ana Cecilia Carnevali Padilla (Mexico), Thanaporn Puttittun (Thailand) and Alison Van Pouke (Belgium).

## A Sizzling Time in the Great State of Texas

When I got to Texas in August, it was 110 degrees, which is completely different from my freezing Siberian city. Everything was strange and odd. But here I found good friends and even a best friend. I joined many school clubs: dancing team, theatre society, Key Club, UIL math, debate team and school plays. Clubs made my life interesting and helped me achieve some success. I won second place in the District Math UIL contest. My math teacher nominated me for the National Math Award and my theatre class was honored at the State Theatre Festival. It was great to volunteer with Key Club, especially helping disabled students at my school. Every time I had a problem, my host family helped me. They became my second mom and dad. They care about me as their own daughter. I really appreciate it.

Maria Gladysheva (FLEX, Russia)  
Hosted by the Weekes family  
Cibolo, TX



Yingrui Huang (China) shows off the peanut butter blossom cookies she made.

## Cookie Anyone?

My family and I have done a lot of interesting stuff together and we've really had fun. They tease me a lot. At first I didn't really get them. Then I started to understand and react. Now I can tease them back! Thanks so much for making me a member of this family. I learned more than a lot here, both in knowledge and behavior, plus how to make myself happy in life and enjoy time.

Yingrui Huang (China)  
Hosted by the Spearie family  
Springfield, IL

## My Metamorphosis

My first days in the US were funny and at the same time sad. I missed my family. I passed through a hard time making friends at school. But what I needed was time and patience. My amazing host family taught me how to smile, have fun and enjoy my time. Day by day I made more friends at school. One was my host sister, Taylor, and another was a Pakistani friend.

This year I started to become an adult and think like adults do. I spent my 18th birthday in the USA. Isn't that amazing!

I also shared my culture by wearing my clothes and cooking my food. I met some people from my country and I also met people with the same religion as me. I tried a lot of things for the first time. I felt like a baby learning to walk.

Munisa Quvatova (FLEX, Tajikistan)  
Hosted by the Antle family  
Gahanna, OH



## Happy Birthday to You

Adham Alfanan (YES, Egypt) will never forget his birthday in Iowa. He is pictured with Muhammad Usman Ghani (YES, Pakistan), Coordinator Anne Spina and Gunay Kerimova (FLEX, Azerbaijan).



## What a Wonderland!

"Before I came, I never imagined this year would be so great! I love my host family, my school and my new friends!" exclaims Silvia Elguero Tejera, who is pictured between her Nordic team ski friends gliding across a frozen lake. The Williamson family hosts the Spanish student in Charlotte, Vermont.

# Thank You for Being My Friend

Excerpts from student letters about the people who made their exchange experience.

**Coordinator Teresa Lambert:** She's always there to explain something to us. **Mathew Mahon:** my video production teacher. He likes to hang out before school and teaches me a lot of things. **Aristenio Caluamba (YES, Mozambique),** Hosted by the Martinez family, Aberdeen, WA

I love my hosts, **the Hajek family.** They did whatever they could to make my exchange experience the best experience of my life. Last week I almost cried when I thought about leaving this family on June 21. **Muhammad Usman Ghani (YES, Pakistan),** Cedar Rapids, IA

This exchange year made me more mature and confident. I would love to thank **the Reinhout family** who are the best hosts ever, my awesome **coordinator, Linda Workman,** my wonderful school **principal, Michele Ackerman,** and all my **loving teachers and friends,** and of course, **YES and PAX.** **Shomy Chowdhury (YES, Bangladesh),** Cheboygan, MI

I LOVE my host family! **The Strebblows** are the people who I'm going to miss the most! I like **this small town of friendly people and awesome classmates.** **Mihail Filipenco (FLEX, Moldova),** Horicon, WI

## In the Heart of It All

Being an exchange student at Olentangy High School brought amazing experiences into my life. I joined the Service Club, German Club and forensics. Everything that I was involved in not only gave me valuable lessons, but also brought wonderful times and friends. Moreover, I devoted this year to music. I played hand bells at church with my friend, got involved in two choirs at my school and got a part in the *Peter Pan* musical.

I am grateful to my host parents, Dennis and Heather, who shared their time and love, and my little siblings, CJ and Ashlee, who like to play with me when I come back from school. And, I thank my coordinator, Fariba Kazemi, who always responds to my never ending questions and organizes unforgettable parties. I am grateful, of course, to my friends who made my life more colorful.



Jamila Aitakunova (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan) with her hosts, the Koon family

I could write a book about my experiences and the things I am thankful for: a year that changed me, a year that made me independent, more responsible and more purposeful.

Jamila Aitakunova, (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan)  
Hosted by the Koon family  
Lewis Center, OH



## Monkeying Around

During a cruise stop in Honduras, Hana Hassanin (YES, Egypt) and her host brother, Bryce Wigfall, fell in love with this little guy. "Feeding the spider monkey was awesome!" Hana exclaimed.



## Hip Hoppin' Easter

South Korean Eun Ji Shin got a kick out of painting eggs and later hunting for them, telling us, "Easter was a big event for Americans, especially Christians." The Sharpe family hosts her in Niles, Ohio.

## Peak Experience

I know that I am going to miss my wonderful host family who took me all over the North American continent (Florida, New York, Washington, DC, Canada, California) and integrated me as a family member into their lives. I will never forget the time they taught me how to ski. I started skiing on one of the smallest mountains in Virginia and ended up skiing Whistler, the biggest mountain in North America! I was able to try new sports like track and crew, which I really enjoyed and helped me to get to know people at my high school. I will never forget what a wonderful time I had here, and how thankful I am to know so many nice people who supported me.

Dorothea von Gablenz (Germany)  
Hosted by the Hotaling family  
Arlington, VA



## The Great American Pastime

It's time for baseball! Host father Mel Blunt brought Georgian FLEX student Lado Sirdadze to the opening events for the Kansas City Royals.



Ukrainian FLEX student Iryna, center, with her host family

## Life Lessons

Through this year I gained a lot, mainly a better knowledge of life. It was a year of breaking stereotypes and seeing real American life like it is – with happiness and sadness, with problems and solutions. I've got a better understanding of humanity now. I learned how to solve my problems, how to be completely responsible for what I do and say, and generally, I learned how to organize my life. It was a great opportunity to see from a young adult's point of view, not a child's. It helped me to concentrate on my life goals. For all this, I want to thank my host family. They helped me learn those important life lessons.

Iryna Kovtoniuk (FLEX, Ukraine)  
Hosted by the Cruse family  
Batesville, AR



## The Wild West

At the Clark County Fair in Nevada, Franceska Bellesso (Italy) went back in time with host parents Michele and Dave Walker and their grandsons. They remarked, "My how fashions have changed!"



## Introducing East Asia to Our Youngest

Kindergarteners at Shaftsbury School in Vermont were excited to meet their special visitor, Alia Adilla Norharmi, a YES student from Malaysia. They loved her beautiful long blue dress and blue head scarf. Adilla was thrilled to visit them and brought many things to share, including books, postcards, jewelry and souvenirs. She read an exciting story in English and Malay. They especially liked hearing her speak Malay. Adilla had so much fun that she wants to visit more schools and classes with young children.

Lin Sternberg, Community Coordinator  
Shaftsbury, VT

## Citizen Diplomacy Gains Traction in Michigan

Coordinator Linda Workman's YES and FLEX students have been joining in on the community discussion groups held at the Cheboygan Library. A recent one was attended by Shahida Fatima Ismail (YES, India), Brian Musyoki (YES, Kenya), Abdalla Al-Masri (YES, Jordan), Shomy Chowdhury (YES, Bangladesh) and Olga Redenko (FLEX, Ukraine). Afterward, the students received a warm note from Karen Martin, the founder of the Straits Area Concerned Citizens for Peace and Justice, who wrote, "If others could just meet with those from other countries, face to face, and talk to them... how could we still war?" She closed, saying, "You are all fantastic ambassadors for your countries. Your parents must be very proud of each of you."

## The Next Generation of Leaders



## The Gears of Government

Utah Governor Gary Herbert, center, and Representative Brad Last, far right, met with St. George students during their full day visit to the Utah Capitol. With the officials are Coordinator Laurel Paul, Alexandra Shalimova (FLEX, Kazakhstan), Natalia Cojuhari (FLEX, Moldova) and Madyar Dartae (FLEX, Kazakhstan). They also visited the attorney general's office and met with lobbyists and NGOs like the Humanitarian Center.

## Spotlight on the Civic Education Workshop

At this year's Civic Education Workshop, FLEX and YES students impressed Washington officials with their thoughtful and engaging questions on leadership, US foreign relations, freedom of the press, and women's rights and roles. "This week is something I will never forget. We all explored Washington, DC with the help of American Councils, met with congressmen and senators, and took part in alumni activities that will help us better apply our experiences back in our countries," recounts Evangeline Safeh, a YES student from Cameroon placed in Louisiana.



## Seeing with My Own Eyes

"I attended three meetings with Utah Representative Jim Matheson, Senators Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee," said Natalia Cojuhari, who is pictured with Senator Lee. "It was a great opportunity to see with my own eyes how everything works." The Mendenhall family hosts the FLEX student from Moldova in St. George, Utah.



## The Importance of Citizen Engagement

The Civic Education Workshop changed my life. I learned much more about the US government, the people, their values and the first amendment. I improved my leadership and communication skills, made lots of friends, explored monuments and saw places I had dreamed about. One of the best things was hearing from alumni about sharing the experience after returning home. The Civic Education Workshop taught me how to become a good citizen and successful leader. I will use this knowledge to improve my country and community. I am also going to make presentations about my experience in Washington, DC to my classes and clubs at my school. Thank you for your support and this fabulous workshop.

Lado Sirdadze (FLEX, Georgia)  
Hosted by the Blunt family  
Lee's Summit, MO



Rubicon Photo

In front of the Iowa Capitol are Adham Alfanan (YES, Egypt), Nursofia Sideh (YES, Thailand), Yuliya Vavryshchuk (FLEX, Ukraine) and Ama Owusu-Darko (YES, Ghana).

## Teens Tackle International Problems

A hundred exchange students from about forty countries came together this February in Des Moines for the Iowa Student Leadership Conference. It was a valuable experience to take part in this workshop with people from all over the world. During the conference we discussed global problems and tried to find possible solutions. We shared our views and ideas. We broadened our outlook and gained new leadership skills that will definitely help us in our future. We also had a special guest, Talia Leman, whose speech was very inspirational for all of us and proved the words of an American social scientist

Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world". In addition to the workshop, we had fun playing a trade simulation game, making a video project and meeting interesting people.

Two days at the Iowa Student Global Leadership Conference were not only educational but also enjoyable. Thank you to the Iowa International Center and The Stanley Foundation for organizing such a great conference.

Yuliya Vavryshchuk (FLEX, Ukraine)  
Hosted by the Wycoff family  
Mount Vernon, IA

## Our Dream: A Better World for All

It was great to participate in the Better Understanding for a Better World Conference held in Orlando, Florida by the Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation. I was so proud to share my beliefs, culture and love! I was also proud to be a representative of Tajikistan, my host community and my PAX family. There were more than eighty students from thirty-one different countries. Thank you to the US Department of State, the creator of this conference, and Imam Bashar, Kimberly King, Hamza Khan and a lot of others who made it successful. We had great experiences going to a Jewish temple, a Christian church, a Muslim mosque and parks, etc.

During the conference, we all were like brothers and sisters. We shared our stories. This conference gave us hope that if all nations started working together and understanding each other more, then we can make the world a better place for everyone. Having different religions on the earth is like having different classes you learn in school. If you study and respect them, then you will be more educated and open-minded.

We found a lot of similarities in the church and mosque. That means that we are all inter-connected to each other. It does not matter which religion you are or what color of skin you have. It matters what is in your heart.



Tajik FLEX student Nozanin Amonova is second from the left.

We are not bad; we are not perfect; we are just different in our own ways.

During the conference, we learned that inside of everything, there is a beauty. That beauty is in our hearts. If we find that beauty, we will know how to choose and treat people.

We can all make a difference. We never should stop believing in ourselves! Now I have a saying in my heart: *I will never allow my fear to block my dreams.* All of our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them!

Nozanin Amonova (FLEX, Tajikistan)  
Hosted by Barrick family  
Martinsburg, WV



State Department Representative Alva Hamilton (left) presented an award to Williamsport High School Guidance Counselor Susan Hunsinger, Principal Tim Fausnaught and PAX Coordinator Ann Swift.

## Global Classrooms

In February, a representative from the US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, visited several Pennsylvania high schools, including Williamsport High School, a model school recognizing exchange students as a valuable resource for preparing American students for their future roles in an increasingly global society. This year, Williamsport has six exchange students, bringing their seven-year total to 29 PAX students!



Darby Mest and Lamiaa Hadi (YES, Morocco)

### Real Sisters Now

Darby Mest is my host sister. She is smart, gorgeous, talented, funny and nice. I love the way she treats her parents and friends and the way she treats me. It is no wonder, because everyone in this family is amazing. I feel like she is my REAL sister. She is my role model. "I will miss you, Darby. I will miss every moment we spent together. Thanks for being an amazing sister."

Lamiaa Hadi (YES, Morocco)  
Hosted by Duffin family  
Salt Lake City, UT



### Those Crazy Americans

In Charlotte, North Carolina, Chui Yee Lee (YES, Malaysia) cheered on her hosts, the McCarley family, at an obstacle race that included crawling through the mud! Her 8-year-old host sister, Grayce, finished in the top five!

### Seeing Life Anew

Our time with Wonmo has flown by so quickly. We as a family have thoroughly enjoyed him. He is happy, friendly and willing to participate in our family activities. We've learned to adapt in several ways. We've learned that several of the things we take for granted such as prayer at the table and going to church have not been part of his life. Traveling to the Grand Canyon was old hat for my boys, but Wonmo so enjoyed the camping, hiking and sights that the newness came back. Our first exchange student has been just right for our family. We have been truly blessed.

Kathleen Harmon, host mother for  
Wonmo Yang (South Korea)  
El Paso, TX



### From Italy with Love

This has been a wonderful experience, and if I had to turn back time, I would do it all over again. I was in a musical, took part in volunteer projects, played soccer and was on the Honor Roll for two semesters. I really like Spring Hill High School because it offers many activities.

The people who influenced me the most are my host parents. Thinking that I have to leave them brings tears to my eyes. They have been incredibly supportive. They helped me discover things I didn't know. The U.S. is now my second home and I have the best of both worlds.

My parents from Italy are coming here to see me graduate and my two families are going to meet! Next year my host parents will come to Italy to visit me. I hope that they will like Italy as much as I liked America.

Arianna Barbieri (Italy)  
Hosted by the Thomsen family  
Olathe, KS

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### Hosting Yields Song, Faith and a Daughter

What has Evangeline taught me? A couple of things come to mind. First, we have never raised a girl. We raised six boys and they turned out great. Raising a girl is a little different. I was in some uncharted waters. But as time went by, I learned a few things, like notifying her at least an hour or two prior to going somewhere, and to be very patient when she is getting ready. With girls there is a lot of drama, tears, and SINGING. The SINGING. She sings all of the time...but I love it. Last, she is the reason we returned to church.

Her faith is so strong that when she picked out a church to go to, she brought us along. She joined the church choir, and of course, we had to watch her sing. Soon she will be gone, but we will continue to go every Sunday. Evangeline, you could say, renewed our faith.

I'm glad that we were so blessed to have her and I am proud to say that she is my daughter, if it was only for a year.

Rick Gohl, host father for  
Evangeline Safeh (YES, Cameroon)  
Bossier City, LA

### The Exchange Continues: Host Father to Accompany Student Home to Russia

My host student, Vasily has taught me that it takes two people to make good friends. Vasily is like the son we never had. We have had a wonderful year together. I did learn from my student that it is very difficult to take a road trip in Russia because the roads are terrible. When I told my student that we were going to drive to Florida for Christmas, he couldn't believe it. I also learned that Russian people are very friendly. My student's father has invited me to Russia for three weeks with all expenses paid, so I will be going to Russia with my student when he leaves on May 15th. This will be a trip of a lifetime. I will miss him very much when I return back to the US.

Gil Roy, host father for  
Vasily Chernov (FLEX, Russia)  
Oakland, ME



### Don't La-Cross Us

In Tampa, Florida, Tabitha Sorger (Brazil) and her host sister, Taylor Lynn, are having a blast playing lacrosse together on the Alonzo High School Ravens team.



Blanca (top) and host sister, Esther.

### Heck If I Know

This year my family and I have been hosting Blanca Barajas from Madrid, Spain. My host sister has taught me so much. She taught me how to be more mature; she's been here for me when times were rough; she taught me Spanish and she's also taught me how to do math. This has been the best experience I've ever had and I'm glad I got to experience it. One of the funniest times was at Christmas when she asked, "May I have some paper to rape the presents." We laughed so hard and told her it was *wrap*. Also, she can't stop saying "heck if I know" when she doesn't know something! And she likes to say *hugemongous*. She is my best friend and my sister forever. I love you, Blanca!

Esther Rennhack, host sister for  
Blanca Barajas (Spain)  
Parrish, FL



### It Takes Two

"This is the first year that we have done a double placement, and we have thoroughly enjoyed it. These two wonderful students have added to our family once again," host mother Tracy Smith of Adams, Minnesota writes. In the front is McKinzie Smith with Ksenia Kuryanova (FLEX, Russia) and in the back row is Syazani Sani (YES, Malaysia) with Jonah and Derick Smith.

### Retirees Profit from a Friend in China

Although my wife has been a PAX coordinator for several years, this is the first time we actually hosted a student ourselves. We are a retired couple and our own children have been gone for many years. We have grandchildren older than Sen Yu, our exchange student from China.

After many years with just the two of us and our active life style, we were not sure how it would work out having another person in our home. Our experience with Sen has been a blessing for us; we appreciate the opportunity to be a part of his life, even if it is only for a short time.

Sen adjusted very well to our lifestyle. He doesn't just stand back but wants to be involved in whatever we are doing. I believe he won my wife Marty over the very first meal we shared together when he got up from the table and began to do the dishes.

The people in our congregation at church look forward to seeing him on Sundays because they enjoy his smiling face and his willingness to be with them. He has made friends wherever we have taken him.



He has shared a lot with us about his country, China. It has given us a new perspective on a way of life we knew little of. We now can say we have a friend who lives in China.

The Burgeson family, hosts for  
Sen Yu (China)  
Bay City, MI

### Attention American High School Students: You Can Be a Kennedy-Lugar YES Abroad Scholar!

YES Abroad finalists will receive full scholarships from the US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. For more information on 2013-14 study abroad opportunities, go to [www.yesprograms.org/yesabroad](http://www.yesprograms.org/yesabroad).