

Community

TOO COLD FOR CANINES - Do you know how to provide proper pet care in the chilly winter months? See page 25.

Rotary Youth Exchange program breaks down borders

STACIE SNOW
Rocky View Publishing

Sixteen-year-old Tahseen Jannagarwala has been in Airdrie for just over three months and she said the most important thing she has learned is how to deal with the cold.

The Mumbai, India, resident and Grade 11 student is in Airdrie for a year as part of the Rotary Youth Exchange program.

"I wanted to see the culture and live like you do," said Jannagarwala.

"I learned to deal with the cold and live through it. I have learned a lot about myself. I've learned to do more things on my own and not rely on other people."

Jannagarwala's family has been involved with the exchange program before and she said although her parents were a little apprehensive about her being away for a year, they know it will be beneficial for her.

"They knew I would want to do it at some point," she said.

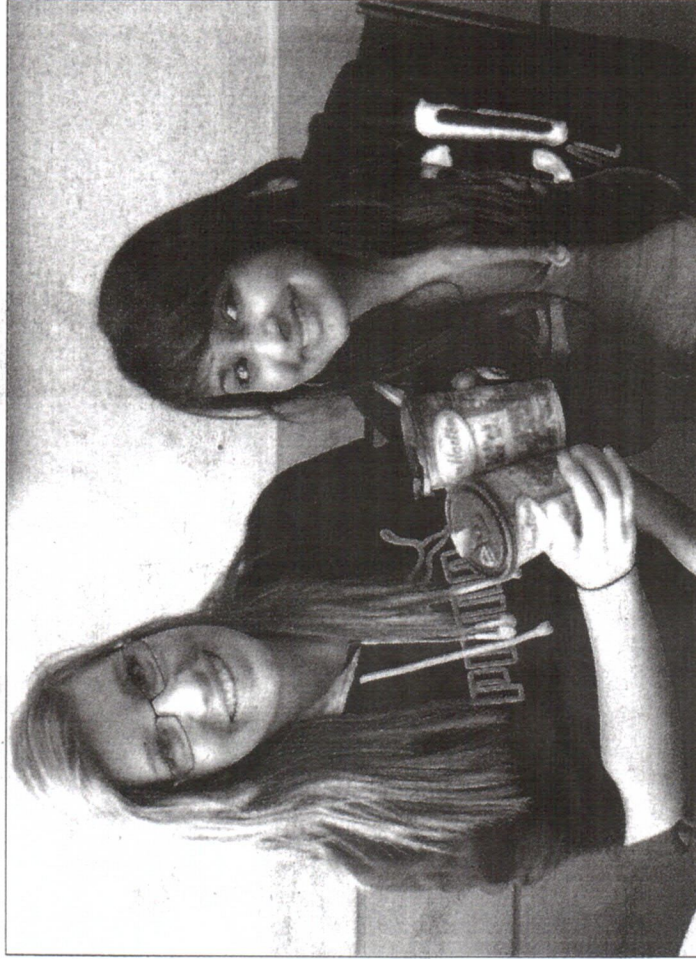
The biggest difference between her hometown and Airdrie is how quiet our city is, she added.

"I live in the heart of a huge city and this town is so quiet," she said.

"Also, the food is very plain."

Although she is not a fan of the bland cuisine, Jannagarwala said she loves the mountains and the fact that Canada is multicultural. She chose to come to Canada because it provided something different from what her home country has to offer. "Even school is so much more relaxed," she said.

"The teachers are less stringent and even the students are different. They are nice



CANADIAN CONNECTION - Michelle Wing and Tahseen Jannagarwala cheers with their Tim Hortons cups, Dec. 10. Jannagarwala is in Airdrie from India for the year with the Rotary Youth Exchange program.

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don't know the language and can learn about the culture," said Michelle. "I am most looking forward to seeing how they live day-to-day and experiencing that."

Michelle encouraged other high school students to take part in the program.

"It is a great experience," she said. "Most teenagers in Airdrie don't know what else is out there."

Wing agreed, saying the students go away as teenagers and come home as worldly adults.

"The transformation is amazing. You can't put it into words," he said.

After hosting students from Thailand, Denmark, France, Hungary, Turkey and Estonia, Wing said his most memorable moment was when a Japanese student woke him and his wife up at 4 a.m. screaming and crying because she was so excited to have her first dream in English.

"It's the opportunity of a lifetime to watch a student transform and grow," he said.

"They literally become part of your family in such a short period of time. It is one of the most profound things I've ever seen. Every student touches you in a different way that you can't even imagine. You know they are never going to forget you."

The Rotary Club of Airdrie hosts one international student between the ages of 14 and 18 every other year and sends a local student to another country in the years in between. If you are interested in taking part in the Rotary Youth Exchange program either as a student or a host family, email gregwing@shaw.ca or visit www.airdrierotary.ca

and get rid of some of the stigmas and fights that lead to wars. While she is here, Tahseen is an ambassador for India and when she goes back home, she will be an ambassador for Canada."

Wing's 15-year-old daughter Michelle is hoping to go on an exchange to Brazil in July.

"I have been so inspired by Tahseen and I would love to go somewhere where I

once you get to know them but they don't approach you and try to make friends like they would in India."

Greg Wing, Jannagarwala's host parent and Rotarian, has been hosting exchange students for 10 years.

"The whole point of this program is creating ambassadors for every country," said Wing.

"We are trying to break down borders