This year's Rotary Exchange student hails from rural area in southern France

## Small-town charm nothing new

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Attending school in a small high school for the She is now living with Chris and Mary of the Alps. autumn term, and then spending Christmas in a Woolf. small town, are nothing new for Laura Portanier. This year's sole guest of the St. Marys Rotary for our family," Scott Taylor explained Club in the Rotary Exchange program, the Grade during a recent visit by the Journal Argus 10 student hails from the south of France, in what to the Taylor home. He encouraged other I live," she commented about her home she describes as "a rural area" that's 45 minutes families to consider hosting a Rotary Ex- for the year. "But here, it is pretty flat." from the nearest large town and two hours from change student in the future. the region's largest city of Montpellier.

to France — prior to boarding the Toron- southern US. to-bound airplane in August.

than the school she attends at home Niagara Falls, to Toronto for a Blue Jays which houses students from Grade 6-9, um, and to see Man of La Mancha at the has about 800 students.

When she returns after her year in Canada, she'll move into another school so it has been an adjustment fitting into housing Grades 10-12.

a barrier, with Portanier's English now since she was age five, she has learned a being strong enough that she can under- range of disciplines, from jazz to hip hop stand almost everything, and express and now classical dance. herself with fluency.

Math," she admits. "With Math, when At the Taylor home, one of her final

sub-zero temperatures — has also been entirely new for her. something to which Portanier is accus- She laughs that there's one other tramoderate.

plained. "We don't usually have snow and which she admits she's not fond of. in December. We usually only have it in For New Year's Eve, meanwhile, she's January and February."

are certainly familiar with year-round ers back home in the south of France: snow. That's because, typically, the some dancing, of course.

with the family of Jill and Scott Taylor, towns and villages are in the valleys of with whom she had been living since she this mountainous region, while towering arrived in Canada at the end of August. above are the high, snow-capped peaks

And this is one of the things Portanier "This has been a wonderful experience has been missing as she prepares to spend Christmas in southwestern Ontario.

"I think it's pretty similar here as where

In February, a group of Rotary Ex-The most life-changing experiences, change students will enjoy a week of Portanier just recently wrapped up her stay of course, are those that are happening to downhill skiing, so she'll have an oppor-Portanier, who had not travelled to North tunity to feel more at home at that time. America — or anywhere outside of some Then next summer, there's a planned of the neighbouring European countries excursion to the Grand Canyon in the

> In the meantime, she's grateful to the St. Marys DCVI has fewer students Taylors for taking her along on visits to but only just. Her school in France, baseball game and the Ripley's Aquari-Stratford Festival.

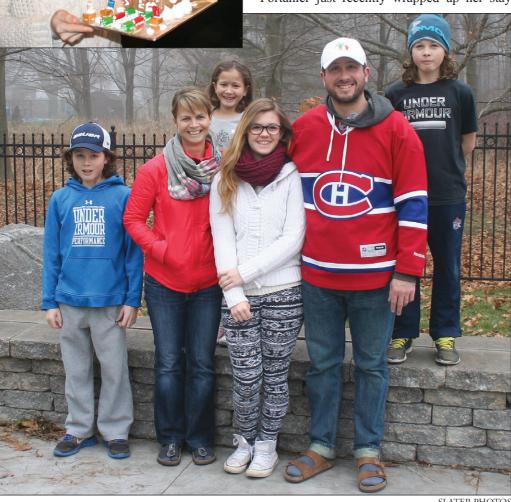
> She says she's not athletically inclined, a sports-minded lifestyle in St. Marys. Language hasn't been too much of At home, her favourite activity is dance;

> Still, she says taking part in Rotary Ex-"The only subject that's still hard is change "has been a good experience."

you don't understand what the teacher activities was building a gingerbread is saying right away, it can be difficult." house, attaching colourful, edible deco-So far this year, the weather in south- rations to her cottage made of gingerwestern Ontario — with our lack of bread that a friend of the family's had appreciable snow and only sporadic made from scratch. It was something

tomed. Her home is located at almost dition that she'd like to take home to exactly the same latitude as we are here, France — the tradition of shaking hands but with the Mediterranean Sea situated and saying 'Merry Christmas' at big soso close by, the climate is typically more cial gatherings. At home, she relates, it's always a kiss on either cheek for every-"A week ago, we had some snow, but one at the party — a tradition she says that's not normal for right now," she ex- seems to take forever when guests arrive,

hoping to have a party with at least one But the residents of her home region thing that she enjoys from the get-togeth-



The Taylor family, just days before the conclusion of their stint as Rotary Exchange host family for Laura Portanier of France. From left: Lake, Jill, Lydia, Portanier, Scott, and Eric. Top photo: Portanier, who is now staying with Chris and Mary Woolf, holds the gingerbread house she built a new Christmastime experience for her — in the Taylor kitchen.



## Lauren Whitney

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