

Host Family Testimonial

Bruce and Cathy Reichlen who hosted Nacho Alvarez from Argentina 2022-23

As a retired couple with grandchildren (we are young grandparents of course), hosting an exchange student was something we felt we had to think about and consider carefully. After all, we have freedom to play golf, kayak, bike ride, ski, and travel, so being responsible for a teenager again was a pretty scary idea! The Rotary program sounded like it includes a wonderful support system, so we jumped in.

It was admittedly an adjustment to be back in the high school scene again, but we wouldn't trade a minute of it. The Rotary program is truly set up to provide as much assistance as we could have needed and it is clear the students are well screened and well trained on rules.

We had a wonderful 6 months with Nacho who taught us about Argentina and soccer, and who loved helping out with chores around the house, especially shoveling snow!

We have a lifetime relationship with him now and we cannot wait to see him again. We highly recommend the Rotary Youth Exchange Program for anyone who would like to enrich your life by spending time with an energetic and enthusiastic teen.

Miami Blake who hosted Anna Bergandahl from Sweden for the entire 2018-19 school year

I realize what a daunting task it seems to take a student from another country into your home. As a single Mom, I was really nervous. It was easily one of the best decisions I have ever made. Not only did I help our exchange student experience what the United States has to offer, I learned about another culture. We have adapted parts of Swedish Christmas traditions into our holidays. It was so much fun to see our everyday world through the eyes of someone who had never experienced it. We look at life through the lens of our own experience and those lenses are incredibly small compared to how amazing and diverse this world is. By opening your heart and home to someone from another culture it changes you and broadens the size of that lens. It also helped my son to see the world as much larger than Meredith, NH. Anna and her family are friends of ours for life, we speak almost every day since she left and I look forward to visiting her in Sweden as soon as I can.



Anna at ILMHS graduation with her host family

Daphne, Richard, and Zoe Frentress who hosted Noora Pulkkinen from Finland in 2015-16 and Dariana Gavojdea from Romania in 2023-24

Hosting a Rotary Exchange student has been a wonderful experience. Our family has hosted two students in the last ten years. Every student is unique. Bringing a stranger into your home in the fall is full of questions, Will they like where they are staying, will we understand their needs, will we get along? The first day is a fast adjustment period for everyone. Fast forward to the switch in January. This young person who you have nurtured and taught, learned from and realized how different life is in other countries, you will cry to see them go. This young person is now part of your family and you will think of all the good times and struggles you dealt with during your time together. You and your family have helped change a young person's life, taught them about American family values and living in the United States. You have learned from them the way another country lives, eats, plays and works. Our first exchange was when our daughter had just returned from her Rotary Exchange experience in Denmark and was the same age as our exchange student from Finland. This year we are retired and have a grown daughter and an Exchange student from Romania. Two different experiences for us. Both are wonderful and as different as the students we hosted. We would highly recommend being a Rotary Exchange Host Family. Our Rotary District is outstanding in supporting not only the exchange student but the Host family as well. The Rotary members step up and offer opportunities they have available for the students, from Sports events and concerts to transportation to Rotary activities. This could be the best year, or at the least the most memorable year for you and your family.



Noora and Zoe Halloween 2015



The Frentress family with Dariana fall 2023



Tim and Amanda Bergquist who hosted Emmanuel Miserandini from France in 2018 and Sammy Camargo from Bolivia in 2019

We had the pleasure of hosting two different students through the Rotary youth exchange and both experiences were wonderful.

Our boys enjoyed learning and sharing with the exchange students. They felt the exchange program was a way to prepare for having a roommate before heading off to college.

At the end of the first exchange students stay, his parents came to the US from France. They stopped by our house for the afternoon and even though there was a language difference, and the exchange student was translating for everyone, it felt like family. The exchange student's younger brother spent the afternoon with our youngest son.

During the second exchange student's stay we really enjoyed watching him learn about so many things that we take for granted. A fitting example is that he learned how to ride a bike with great determination. He continued his bike riding once he went home, and we have seen on social media that he is now competing in bike races.

The Rotary exchange program is a wonderful way for your family to share the American life with students from around the world, and you get to learn more about their culture. The exchange student is around your family for less than 6-month period, and the time flies by. We had two great experiences and attest to Rotary's careful selection and vetting process.



Bergquist Family in 2018 with Emmanuel from France Bergquist Family in 2019 with Sammy from Bolivia

Grace Ainsworth who hosted Ben Rubio from the Philippines in 2011-12 and Marcus Jensen from Denmark in 2014-15

My family has had the pleasure of hosting two foreign exchange students for the Meredith Rotary Club. We were the second host family for Ben Rubio from the Philippines one year and the first host family for Marcus Jensen from Denmark a few years later. My husband, high-school age son and I were a bit hesitant to make this commitment at first. We weren't sure that we knew what we were getting ourselves into and we also wondered if we were qualified to take on this new role of parenting. In each case, our fears dissipated within the first few days. Our Rotary sons became members of our family immediately. The transition was smooth and seamless. The boys were open to experiencing every part of a typical teenage American life, including having chores, being committed to their education, participating in extracurricular activities, having a curfew, trying and appreciating a very different cuisine, and following the rules of the household. We held our Rotary sons to the same standard that we held our own children – and it worked out just fine. During the holidays, we were able to incorporate their customs into our customs and now they have become traditions for us. They taught us how to cook their favorite meals, they taught us how to speak their languages (on a very limited basis), and they taught us to appreciate our little patch of the world through a different lens. Becoming a host family for Rotary International was one of the most rewarding, educational and worthwhile endeavors we have undertaken. Being a host family didn't just change our home life, it enhanced it. Our outlook on the world was enriched in so many different ways and we have acquired friends and family members across the globe with whom we will always be close.

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Angela Webster, who hosted AnaLucia Besich from Peru in 2012-13



AnaLucia Besich-Adrian from Peru lived with the Webster family August 2012-January 2013

“I had no idea when we signed up to be a host family that Ana would bring so much more to our family as we gave to her. We still keep up with each other and she and [my daughter] are still close.”