

## ■ BROADENING HORIZONS

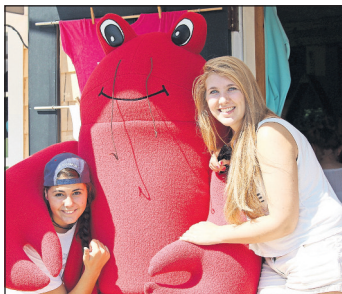
# Student Exchange Program

Each year the Rotary Club of Summerside hosts at least one exchange student. Rotarians work together to ensure the student has the chance to thoroughly experience the culture of Prince Edward Island. Most exchange students will find themselves completely immersed within the culture once they arrive, due to the differences in cuisine, architecture, family tradition, and even the way in which people carry out conversations.

The Student Exchange Program offers an excellent learning opportunity for students to better understand people from different walks of life and can really make them feel like “citizens of the world.” After they return to their native country, the exchange student will share those memories and experiences with family and friends.

Youth exchange officer, Leo-Paul Arsenault said there’s a lot of planning and paperwork to be done before the students can leave or arrive on P.E.I.

“My job is to make sure the exchange students have a good year, find host families, and oversee that all the paperwork is done especially for the outgoing students. I also have to find a counselor for each student, the counselor is responsible to contact the student assigned to him or her on a regular basis, assuring all is going well and that



there is no issue with their host family, school or anything else.”

The outgoing students are responsible to pay for their round trip, plus insurance, to the country of their choice. Then they are billeted for free with three different host families. Their stay is divided in approximately three to four months each. The country’s sponsoring clubs will give the students a monthly allowance for spending money of around \$125.

“We explain that the incoming and outgoing students are treated like another member of the family and are expected to help out around the house. They also have to make an effort to learn their new country’s language and customs. At school they have to fit in and study just like other students. This is not a vacation but a chance to learn the ways and culture of another country. The exchange students are expected to attend weekly meetings with their sponsoring Rotary Club,” explained Arsenault.

In the fall, an information

meeting is organized where the local high school students have the opportunity to apply for the exchange program. Arsenault said here they get to meet the inbound and previous outbound exchange students, hear their stories and experiences. After the applications are received, interviews are conducted and a student is then chosen.

“At our Rotary Club meetings the students are asked to go up to the podium and talk about their experiences in the past week such as, where they visited or if they did something new. When the year starts the students are usually pretty shy and nervous to speak in front of a group of Rotarians but by the time the year comes to an end they are more at ease speaking publicly. We believe that this helps students gain confidence and self-esteem.”

Arsenault added: “We have a student exchange committee in which each member is responsible to make sure the students enjoy their stay in our community. For example one would be in charge of getting Rotarians to engage with the student by taking them to a movie, out for a meal, showing them around some of our island or having them over for a night. The more we involve them in our lives the better they will learn our culture.”

The exchange program has



many checks and balances to make sure that no exchange student gets in harm’s way. For example, there’s the 5 “D’s” that the students have to obey: No Drinking, No Driving, No Dating, No Drugs, No Defacing (such as tattoos). If a rule is broken the student risks being immediately sent home to his or her country, ending the exchange.

The Rotary Exchange Program is a great opportunity for students to meet other exchange students from all around the world, learn a new language, explore new interests, and even gain a second family. Hosting a student can create life-long connections to another part of the world, such as attending a past exchange student’s wedding several years after or simply visiting their family.

## Exchange Student Experiences

An overseas exchange program offered by the Rotary Club of Summerside provides students with distinct benefits as they develop responsibility, initiative and accountability. This is not just a one-time event, but also the beginning of an ex-

change of ideas that continues throughout the student’s life.

Justine Berteau, from Belgium, said the biggest cultural difference she found on Prince Edward Island was how people greet each other.

“You hug someone when you say hi and goodbye on P.E.I., and I kiss people on the cheek to do the same. We kiss all the time in Belgium. When we wake up, see people on the street, at work or somewhere else, and when we go to sleep. When we hug it’s very personal, so at first it was very hard and weird for me.”

Lara Pilas Moro, from Spain, said she is still getting accustomed to the food on P.E.I.

“My mom makes a home-made meal everyday and it’s usually spicy. But here it’s totally different, although that’s not a bad thing.”

“We also eat at different times in Spain. In the morning, we just have a coffee and then a snack around 11 a.m. After school (around 2 p.m.) we have a big meal, which is followed by a nap. Then at 6 p.m. we eat, and at 11 p.m. we have our last meal. So at first I was so hungry all the time because we eat only three times