

Foreign Exchange Students -

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Community comment

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With the coming of May, the end of another school year is drawing to a close. Humboldt State will bring a lot of parents and family members to witness this ceremony. Many will watch a child graduate as the first ever in that family. It's a great moment. Graduation from college takes some basic preparation, the ability to read and analyze, at least average mental capacity, hard work, and perseverance. More than this, it takes the desire and the will, and support and encouragement. An education, even to the founders of our country, was essential to a working democracy.

College of the Redwoods will also see another graduation. Did you know that if you graduate from a California community college, you have a good path for entrance into a University of California? Apparently, many of our high school students do not. Going to a community college can save money and time for your first two years.

In June, the high schools will graduate our local students and they will be ready to find work, a technical school, a university or whatever their dream happens to be. This year, while our kids have been out of high school for a long time, we have a high school senior living with us for the remainder of the year. She is a Rotary exchange student from Argentina. The Rotary Student Exchange program is intended to foster world peace through understanding, one student at a time. Rotary likes to find three families over the course of the year so the student has different family experiences.

These students may be as young as juniors and some travel after graduation. They have to learn the language of their host country and are expected to give at least a simple presentation to the local Rotary Club. They are also expected to be ambassadors for their country. There are basic rules of behavior that are expected to be followed.

It is not an easy thing to leave family and friends at this young age, learn enough of the language to go to school, and live in a different culture with new families and different customs. This takes real courage for anyone but especially one of just 15, 16, or 17 years of age. The young lady we have as our exchange daughter is an excellent example of this courage. She is smart. She is ready to try anything. She has made friends, both American friends but also the other exchange students from all over the world. Her English is quite good and she attends most Rotary meetings and tells us of her adventures.

My grown children live close so they interact with her often. But my grandchildren are also getting to know her as well. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about the world outside Arcata, California, and America. When they see that an open home and an open heart can lead to understanding and appreciating different cultures and customs, their world expands.

I think this is one of the best programs in the Rotary International world. If you have the chance to meet one of these kids, or to encourage one of our kids to apply for an exchange, please do. It can make a difference for our future.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.