

# International hosting teaches lessons

**M**ost people think of their local county fair in association with 4-H. Far fewer people think of the international program through which families can host students from Japan, Korea, Norway, Finland, Mexico, Costa Rica and Argentina.

Since hosting our first exchange student in 2006, my family has hosted nine other people, and that number is growing each year. This summer, we will be hosting Manuel, who is from Argentina. A few days before he leaves, we will begin hosting Jae Woo, a Korean chaperone, for two weeks.

The lessons my family has learned through the international program have been invaluable. It's one thing to hang out with your friends a lot, but what about hosting a complete stranger for a month? Add on the fact that the stranger speaks limited English, and you have a pretty accurate picture. It's hard, but it is worth it. You learn about another culture, eat new food, learn new crafts, play new games and find new



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ways to communicate.

One of my most eye-opening experiences was hosting a 13-year-old girl from Japan.

In Japan, youths are expected to excel in school and thus have few household duties so that they can focus on their studies. It was so much fun watching Shizuka become independent as the home-stay progressed. She baked with us, and, surprisingly, one of her favorite things to do was clean the kitchen. She would stay up past midnight, if given the option, to clean the kitchen. When we asked her if she did anything like this at home, she laughed at the idea of it. That sort of thing just doesn't happen in Japanese culture.

A unique aspect of the exchange is that the delegates are supposed to be treated as a family member. Although most families do at least one special thing with

their students, they don't have to go out of their way to entertain their delegates. That's not to say you can't do something special with them; many families bring their delegates to places such as the State Fair, the Wisconsin Dells and Mall of America. Many families also go camping with their delegates.

When the month is over, the delegates are brought back to Madison. Everyone is separated into one of three debriefing groups: host parents, host siblings and exchange students. Everyone then gets a chance to share their highs and lows from the month. After that, everyone gathers together and goodbyes are said. Then it is time to begin the countdown for the next year's exchange.

If you are interested in learning more about the 4-H international program in Wisconsin please visit [wi4hinternational.org](http://wi4hinternational.org).

*Contributed by Kelsey Schoeppler, a member of Pesobic Pathfinders 4-H in Lincoln County.*

## Merrill Focus

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