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Rotary Youth Exchange Offers the World

By Cristina Kim



Becky Ware got the chance to visit Villa La Angostura, Argentina while on a school break. Photo provided.

that the program provides a great service. Naro explains, "Cultural barriers are one of the things that prevent us from world peace. If all high school kids were required to do one year of community service in another country, can you imagine what would be possible?"

Becky Ware, who graduated from Acalanes High School in 2009, is currently with the program in Argentina. Ware echoes Naro's excitement. "I think more students should want to go abroad. It is an incredible learning experience...Positive relationships between countries are extremely important and now more than ever we should be strengthening those relationships, starting with the youth of the world," she writes. While Ware is away in Argentina, Acalanes is further facilitating global communication by hosting Belgian student Aymeric Van Den Hove.

In addition to increasing international cultural understanding, the exchange program benefits student participants. Students become more mature, experience another culture, learn another language and make new friends while abroad. Participation in the exchange program also happens to look great on college applications. Stephen Ware, a local Rotarian and Becky Ware's father, spoke to many admissions officers when he went on college visits in the East Coast and California. According to Stephen Ware, "Every single admissions officer told us that they love 'gap year' students because they are much more mature, and less likely to drop out or have disciplinary problems." Becky will return to the United States in July and is set to attend the California State Maritime Academy in the fall of 2010.

Although it is too late to apply for the 2010-2011 school year, students interested in Rotary Youth Exchange can find information about how to apply for the following school year on the Rotary website, www.rotary.org.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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"Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends."

- Maya Angelou

Boasting over 1.2 million members worldwide and comprised of over 32,000 local Rotary Clubs, Rotary International is the largest organization of service clubs in the world. Dedicated to providing humanitarian service, Rotarians are united in their efforts to help build goodwill and peace. Rotary Clubs are non-partisan groups that meet weekly to discuss the planning of service events; Lamorinda has several very active clubs.

Since 1929, Rotary International has provided high school students with a chance to study abroad for a school year through the Rotary Youth Exchange Program. Students accepted into the program are placed with host families (generally Rotarians from the host country) and enrolled in local schools at no cost to the student. The Rotary Youth Exchange program is available to high school sophomores and juniors, and to graduating seniors who are interested in taking a "gap year" before attending college or pursuing careers.

David Naro, the chairman of the Rotary Youth Exchange, believes