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Ties That Bind

By Laurie Snyder



Orinda's 2015-16 Sister Cities visiting student, Karel Balogh (center, right), welcomed former Orinda Mayor Bobbie Landers (far right); Lamorinda Sunrise Rotarian, Buddy Burke; and Landers' daughter, Holly, to his home in Tabor, Czech Republic earlier this month. Photo courtesy Bobbie Landers

"Spring is lovely in Tabor!" That was the verdict from former Orinda Mayor Bobbie Landers in an email sent the afternoon of Sunday, May 10 from Orinda's Sister City in the Czech Republic. "We are warmly greeted by old friends, former visiting students, the mayor, vice mayor. Every visit shows the hard work by Czech citizens to return their country to glory after years of Communism."

Landers also spent two days in Prague revisiting the Castle, as well as enjoying a Dvorak concert and relaxing with a Czech beer on the roof of a reconstructed historic home.

But it was her time in Tabor that was clearly the most memorable. While there, Landers visited with Karel Balogh and his family.

Balogh is the newest Czech scholar to be named as a visiting student with the Orinda-Tabor Sister Cities initiative. He will attend Miramonte High School this fall. Like many high school students the world over, he helps out around the house by doing the dishes and mowing the lawn.

The Sister Cities initiative is a vitally important program, Landers explained, because it helps to foster the kinds of ties between people of differing cultures that bind - bonds that President Dwight D.

Eisenhower believed would ultimately lead the world to "the dawn of eternal peace." Eisenhower launched the Sister Cities program in 1956, hoping it would nudge the world in the right direction.

Sister Cities' host families typically provide room and board for their assigned students. In Orinda's case, each student goes through a highly competitive process to demonstrate that he or she is a good fit for the program, and is fluent enough in English to do well in classes at Miramonte.

Orindans Bob and Maryette Thompson have welcomed a number of exchange students over the years, and highly recommend the experience. "All of my kids have really gotten to know these students. They really became part of the family."

Chandler Visher and Deborah Lambert concur. Their student, Michael Cizek, became like a brother to their boys, and joined the family in Santa Barbara for a Thanksgiving visit with Lambert's parents and a trip to Yosemite. Their most memorable moments, though, were spent in Las Vegas. It was one of the places Cizek most wanted to see while he was in America.

It is these kinds of experiences that were precisely what Eisenhower was hoping when he gave his memorable "The Chance for Peace" speech in 1953, and what Landers strives for in organizing each visit by a Czech student. She reported recently that a host family is still urgently needed from August 2015 through January 2016 for Karel Balogh. If you can help, call Landers at (925) 254-8260.

Then, follow the adventures of the Orinda Klub Tabor on Facebook: www.facebook.com/OrindaKlub.

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