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Czech visiting student enjoys his time in California

By Sora O'Doherty



Erik Stoklasa Photo Sora O'Doherty

Sixteen-year-old Erik Stoklasa applied to the Orinda/Tabor Sister City Foundation to be this year's visiting student at Miramonte High School because he sees it as a great opportunity to experience staying in a foreign county for a semester, which he is finding to be a really intensive experience, taking Mandarin, photography, computer science, public speaking as well as U.S. History and English. His previous experience was last summer in Cyprus, at the Lyons Club youth exchange, where he spent two weeks with 20 people from different countries, visiting the cities around Cyprus and learning about Cypriot cultures. Stoklasa knows former visiting Czech students Karel Balogh 2015, Adam Kraus 2016, and Marak Vybiral 2017.

Although he lives in Tabor, Stoklasa attends Gymnazium Jana Keplera in Prague where he is in

his second year of the four-year high school. He spends most of his time living in a dorm in Prague, returning to Tabor on weekends. He wants to major in computer science. "It's a really great subject that develops over time a lot," he says. "It's not static, you have to learn new things over time, and it's a great way to create new things." Stoklasa says he programs a lot and that there is a growing tech sector in Prague. He does want to go to university, but is keeping his options open. He will consider attending an American university.

Stoklasa is only here until December; he'll be home before Christmas. He is excited that his host family, Maya and Daniel McBride and host brothers Kieran and Liam, is taking him to visit Silicon Valley in a week. "It will be one of the highlights of my tour," he exclaimed. He will also visit Los Angeles and New York City with his host family.

At home Stoklasa has two older sisters, one of them studies in Prague and their other is working at marketing in another Czech city. His mother is a nurse at a doctor's office and his father is a manager at a firm that sells tires for agriculture equipment.

An injured knee has kept Stoklasa from running cross country at Miramonte, but he has joined the computer science and astronomy clubs. One of the differences he finds between Czech and American schools is that a lot of people here want to do extracurricular activities. "We don't have many clubs at our high school," he says, but really likes the idea of being able to meet people who are interested in similar things as you.

What does he miss? His family and friends, he says, but adds, "I definitely don't miss the weather! At home now it is about 8 C, about 46 F. It rains a lot and snows in the winter." In San Francisco you can get a lot of types of food, he thinks. "At home we have a lot more bread and dumplings." But just in case he missed it, his host family took him to a Czech restaurant in Concord.

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