

Tualatin Families Discover Enriching Experiences

BY LISA EVERS, EDUCATION, TRAVEL & CULTURE (ETC)

Some wonderful relationships have been made in Tualatin through the opportunity to host international exchange students. Tualatin families and students alike are nervous, excited and overwhelmed with emotion as they prepare for this new adventure. Soon, they are united and the students' fears of living in a strange land start to dissipate as they see their personalized "Welcome to America" signs. Host families are relieved to see the sweet faces of students anticipating the journey ahead. Both host families' and students' dreams have finally materialized and they are overcome with joy as they begin the experience of a lifetime.

Tualatin High School is host to several students each year and, among them, two recent students' stories show the impact of international students on their host families.

One such family, the Hegstroms, hosted a young lady, Sol, from Spain for a 3-week program in 2013. She had a wonderful, yet all-too-brief stay with Jeff and his family. She wanted a deeper experience and applied with Education, Travel & Culture to return on a J-1 visa in hopes of a "real-life" adventure with the Hegstrom family. She returned to



Hegstrom family photo with Jeff and wife, Linh, Sol and host daughter.

attend Tualatin High School, bringing a friend along, who was hosted by close friends of the Hegstrom family. "Sol was an exemplary student in every way, and she became part of our family," Jeff says. She played sports, was a cheerleader, and studied hard and played hard right along with Jeff's daughters. Some don't realize what a huge challenge it is for Spanish students to learn in English. It takes a lot of extra study time and Sol worked hard to do well. Jeff would recommend the experience to anyone and hopes that others would take a chance. "It's an incredible thing to do and I would gladly talk to anyone about hosting!"

Adrian, another student who attended Tualatin High School this past year from Mexico, applied for the 2015-16 school year 40 years after his own father was an exchange student here. Coincidentally, Adrian was placed with the Toyer family and attended Tualatin High School to repeat his father's experience so many years ago. It was a great feeling for Adrian's family to know the area and realize their son's experience would mimic that of his father who came before him. No doubt, the area has grown and changed tremendously, but the enriching experience of



The Toyer family with exchange student Adrian (right.)

being adopted into an American host family and living life as a teenager in Tualatin, would be similar. Adrian quickly connected with his host brother and, host mom Angela says, "Soon they were competing just like biological siblings do. That's when we knew he was one of the family!"



Sol (left) with friend Jennifer and host daughter, Amanda (right.)

Interested in Hosting a High School Exchange Student?

Your exchange student will:

- Be fluent in English
- Be Highly screened and interviewed
- Attend your local high school
- Stay for a semester or full school year
- Bring their own spending money
- Have health insurance

As the Volunteer Host Family you will:

- Provide a bed for your student (can share room with same sex/similar age sibling)
- Provide in home meals
- Protect and guide your new son or daughter as they discover our culture
- Treat them as a member of the family, no a guest - they will do chores too!
- Be able to truly impact the world... one kid at a time!

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The Toyers took Adrian with them on family trips and to their daughter's graduation at the end of the year. "We not only had another son, we made a connection with his family, too," Angela says.

Families across the U.S. have an opportunity to host this year and become part of an international family comprised of millions of host families and students who have participated in student exchange programs. Host families provide their students with a window in which to view and understand American life and culture. Both Jeff and Angela agree, for their Tualatin families, it has been a valuable experience.



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