

Rotary Club of Palgrave's Weekly Rotary Minute

By Jim Firth
and Sam Ferens

Rotary clubs around the world have been hosting youth exchanges since 1929.

There is a profound effect on both the youth and the hosting family. Our own family was a little anxious when 16-year-old Victoria, from Presidente Prudente, Brazil joined us for three months. Victoria had only been in Canada for nine weeks prior to joining us and when she arrived she spoke very little English.

It didn't take long to realize a teenager in Brazil is no different than a teenager here. We learned so much about her culture and gladly shared our culture with her. We take for granted the activities we enjoy close by, but for Victoria the memories of cutting a Christmas tree in Hockley Valley, learning to skate in Caledon East, downhill skiing at Caledon Ski Club or living through a three-day ice storm with no hydro; will stay with her for ever.

At a recent Rotary conference in Mississauga, four youths from around the world were brought to the stage and asked to give their impressions about Canada. Despite being in Canada for only three weeks, what they said shone a light on our country and left them with indelible memories.

The first boy from Finland said after three weeks he was amazed at how many Tim Hortons there are. The next youth, a teenage girl from Switzerland, said she was amazed that we always sang our national anthem. At school, at minor hockey games, even that morning at the conference we sang O Canada. That does not happen in Switzerland.

The third boy from Paraguay noted how multi-cultural Canada is. He didn't expect the diversity of cultures when he arrived.

Finally a young girl from Japan spoke. She was very quiet and hadn't yet picked up English as well as the others. However, when asked what her first, strongest impression of Canadians were, she whispered "hugs." Canadians hug a lot more than the Japanese.

The youth exchange is open to any youth between the ages of 15 and 18. If you would like your child to experience a year abroad and have the experience of a lifetime, please contact Palgrave Rotary Club for more information or call 905-880-5172.