

Ginny McAllister looking forward to exchange trip

By Bill Rea



Ginny McAllister has a wide assortment of Canadian pins she's planning to distribute to people she meets in Poland.

Poland has had a very interesting past, especially since the mid-20th century, so it would have a lot of appeal to a person interested in history.

Bolton resident Ginny McAllister is such a person, and that's one of the reasons why she's been looking forward to spending a year there, through the Rotary Student Exchange, representing the Bolton club.

Ginny, who just turned 17, said she didn't select her destination. "I had no idea where I would be going," she said, adding no student from this Rotary district has gone to Poland before.

"I'm very excited," she declared. "I love history, and it's full of it."

She will be staying in Gdańsk, where the Solidarity trade union was formed in 1980.

Ginny said she became interested in the program after a Rotarian mentioned it in an address to the St. Michael Catholic Secondary School council, of which her mother is a member. She applied, and learned she had been accepted in October.

She's planning to leave on her trip tomorrow (Friday), and will be staying with a series of host families while away.

Her first host family includes a "brother" who will soon be embarking on a Rotary trip to Pennsylvania and a 14-year-old "sister."

"I've never had a sister before, which should be interesting," she remarked.

There are other adjustments she knows she'll have to make.

Ginny said she will be attending school while she's away, and she's going to have to learn the language. But she added there's a sports program at the school she'll be attending (not all Polish schools have them). "I'm very excited about that," she said.

An active athlete, Ginny takes part in basketball, swimming, ultimate Frisbee and cross-country skiing at school, as well as triathlon in the community.

There will also be some side trips, including a 22-day European tour, in which she will get to visit 10 other countries. She added there will be a trip to the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Ginny said she's looking forward to "learning a new language and experiencing a new culture."

She's already done some research into the country.

"I know they eat a lot of pierogies," she commented, adding she put on a Polish dinner for the Rotarians, with the hall decorated in a Polish theme.

Although this is a pretty big experience she will be having, Ginny said she's not nervous at the prospect.

"I haven't felt that yet," she observed. "I'm really excited."

She added she's only going to be away a year. "I don't want to waste my time being nervous," she said.

Ginny is not sure if the schooling she gets in Poland will enable her to get enough credits to pass Grade 12, and she's still hoping to pick up where she leaves off when she gets home.

"I would definitely like to come back and do my Grade 12," she said, adding she'd want to work on her average to get into university.

But she also knows her year in Poland is going to include other benefits, such as gaining what she called "a worldly knowledge."

?That's not something you can get out of a text book going to school,? she observed. ?That's something you have to experience for yourself.?