

May 14, 2009 - Presentation by five foreign exchange students in American high schools and college

Five foreign exchange students from Colombia, Germany, Japan, Slovakia and South Korea, talk about their experiences in the US and in Harrison County, Indiana.

Fun fact: Where is Slovakia?

They've gained weight, family members, new clothes and different attitudes while they've been in the United States. Foreign exchange students from Asia, Europe and South America shared these experiences about spending this school year in Harrison County, Indiana. Speaking at Community Unity's May meeting all five young women talked about the welcome they received here while they learned to adjust to a very different culture from theirs back home. 2008-2009 students from South Central High School included Sari Kanetake from Japan who lives with the Fitzgeralds, Margarita Perez of Colombia with Terri Rennirt, and Vivien Runnwerth of Germany with the Klinstivers. From Lanesville High School student Ivana Slobodnikova from Slovakia was joined at the home of the McKims by previous exchange student Jin-Hee Jung of South Korea who has returned to attend IUS.

While admitting that Americans don't know much about other countries and languages ("where is Slovakia?!") the girls eagerly responded to the question of whether their own attitudes had changed while they've been here. They admitted that the view from watching American movies (blond, blue-eyed people with 90% happy endings) was changed as was the negative stereotype that all Americans are fat, ignorant and selfish. The students spoke about American's attitudes of respect for people and nature, while noting that "everything here is easy" compared to working, shopping and cooking in some of their countries. "Things that were boring routine to Americans were exciting to me," said Jin-Hee Jung. Margarita Perez, whose home in Colombia rarely gets below 90 degrees, even found that winter was okay – seeing snow for the first time and making snow angels. Both Vivien Runnwerth of Germany and Sari Kanetake of Japan mentioned that going to church was a new experience. They all agreed that it was good to meet not only Americans but also people from other countries and that their perspective was broadened by hearing new opinions. Jin-Hee Sung said that the positive American conviction she gained, summed up by her host parent Denzil Wiseman "If you dream it, you can do it," inspired her to return for college here. At the end of their Community Unity presentation, Ivana Slobodnikova summed up their experience – "We all agree that America rocks!"

Fun fact answer: Slovakia, or the Slovak Republic, is in Eastern Europe, between Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Austria, and the Czech Republic (its former partner in "Czechoslovakia" which dissolved in 1993.) About 5½ million people live there.

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