

Teens of different cultures gather

By Casey Hana
staff writer

From sliced cheese and drive-through banking, to a very different schedule of eating meals, exchange students from overseas view their American counterparts with amazement.

"I think you have to be open, if you want to have a good experience," said Laura Olivares, a Spanish exchange student who is staying with the Felten family of Farmington. She attends Mercy High School in Farmington Hills.

"Our mentality is so different here. It's difficult to explain. There are not common things (between the two cultures). It's hard to form friendships. I am, all the time, watching everything."

The Felten's experience with ex-



cultural collage

change students during the past two years prompted them to take a different cultural challenge this fall. They invited a group of teen exchange students from throughout the Detroit area to an informal dinner party at their home.

TO THEIR delight, 21 students from nine different countries and a variety of high schools accepted the invitation. So did many of the host parents, who were also interested in

the cultural exchange.

"Every one of these kids is totally different," said Jane Felten. "They all had different impressions. It's so much fun to learn and try to understand all these different ideas."

"I think we all need to be exposed to a lot more, and many different cultures."

Students from Spain, Brazil, France, Japan, Germany, Norway and Sweden attended the party to visit and share experiences.

Besides Olivares, other exchange students from Farmington schools also attended. They included: Marianne Bockelle of Norway and Niels Schroder of Germany, who both attend Harrison High School; Srephane Duphil of France, who attends North Farmington High School; and Natalia Martinez of Spain, who is attending Farmington High School.

Many Swedish students at the party attend Detroit Country Day School in Beverly Hills, which has its own student exchange program with Sweden, Felten said.

THE FAMILY considered giving the party after welcoming Olivares, the family's second student from the American Institute for Foreign Study student exchange program. It "started a lot of soul searching," said Jane Felten. "I just started calling high schools. It was a self-motivating thing."

What she discovered was a group of typical teens, who all spoke English with varying degrees of skill, and who were happy to be having the exchange experience. Many were homesick and pleased to meet with others having the same feelings, Felten said.

Mostly, they just enjoyed talking about their home countries and their experiences in the U.S.

"They all mentioned the food and the hours (when meals are eaten)," said Felten. "They realized as time went on, they ran out of common ground (with Americans). And it's a universally difficult thing for them to not have their friends."

Many of the students attending the



Marianne Bockelle (left), exchange student from Norway, attends Farmington Hills Harrison. Anna Liljeblom, exchange student from Sweden, attends Bloomfield Hills Rooper. Both are at a party given by the Felten family of Farmington.

party are visiting America for the first time, Olivares said, and most are staying for a full year. "Everyone thinks American people are very friendly," she added, "but some students had trouble adjusting."

One Brazilian student racked up a \$600 phone bill calling home.

"It's very, very difficult," she continued. "You feel one day very sad, and you don't have your family around you. You just get used to it."

Felten said she saw some "very unhappy faces" arriving at the party. "Some of them are not really prepared," she added.

The exchange student group plans to have another one or two parties during the remainder of the school year, Olivares said.

"I remind her all the time she's doing something great," said Felten, who is "out to make the world less conscious of geographical boundaries. The world is getting smaller and smaller."

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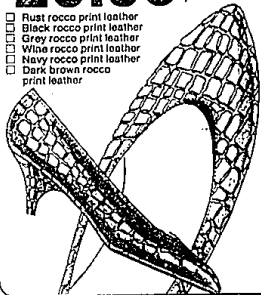
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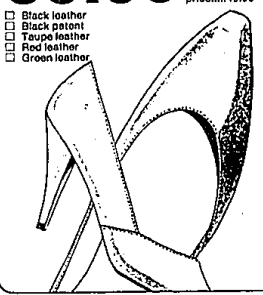


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