

Families learn through exchange program



Harrison graduate Eric Rosenthal, 18, of Farmington Hills plans to continue Spanish study this fall when he enters the University of Michigan.

By Janice Brunson
Staff writer

Pierre Pecheroff of Limoges, France, celebrated his 17th birthday earlier this month in Farmington Hills. And although he was not of legal drinking age in the U.S., hosts Cheryl and Gary Schurman of the Hills bowed to cultural differences and served champagne.

"He asked for champagne, champagne," Cheryl Schurman said, in describing the festive event. "So we broke out the champagne and served him a glass."

The Schurman family is one of some 15 families in the Farmington area to participate in this year's Nacel Cultural Exchange, a program in which 329 youngsters from France and Spain spent one month each in Michigan homes. Another 180 Michigan youth spent one month each in France, Spain or Germany.

Responding to cultural differences, developing a receptive tolerance for and an appreciation of the new, is what the Nacel program is all about, according to those who participate.

That, and enjoying a worldly experience provided temporarily by a child from abroad.

"MURIEL (CLADIERS), 16, fit in perfectly with our family," said Debbie Pinz of the French girl who spent one month with her, husband Gary and five daughters ranging in age from 10 years to 20.

Muriel, the daughter of an architect, told her hosts that her home in France are commonly constructed

of stone. "She was impressed with our wood construction, the roominess of our homes and the cleanliness of our neighborhoods," Pinz said.

Muriel also enjoyed an overnight trip to Chicago where she marveled at the city's architecture, "the combination of the old and new standing side by side," Pinz said.

Jean-Philippe Schmitt, 18, also of France and a musician who plays the organ, marveled at the music during his month in the home of Bruce and Linda Sneddon Smith. Both Smiths play violin with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Jean-Philippe attended nearly every practice and performance of the orchestra while here, according to the Smiths' son, Marlin, himself a musician and a senior at North Farmington High School.

Jean-Philippe, Marlin and father Bruce Smith vacationed in North Carolina, Washington, D.C. and Niagara Falls where the trio took in musical performances, including one conducted on antique instruments, Marlin said.

THIS IS THE fourth year Donald and Donna Adle have hosted a French student. Last summer, Laurent Vernachet, then 17, spent one month with the Adles. This summer, his sister, Cecilia, 15, came.

One of the Adles' three children, Dwayne, 20, now a student at Lawrence Institute of Technology, spent a month in France on two different occasions while in high school at North Farmington where he studied French.

Although Dwayne's French "is in dormancy right now," the experience was useful in developing fluency in the language, his mother said.

American teens may participate in the exchange program whether they host a foreign student or not. However, the children of host families receive priority in spending a month abroad according to Nacel area coordinator Evelyn Prince of West Bloomfield Township.

Some host families, like the Schurmans' whose only child, Jennifer, 10, is too young to participate, share their homes purely for the "very good experience."

This is the first summer Bill and Sharon Duncan and daughter Jennifer, 16, participated as hosts and the family was one of only a handful in Michigan to host students from both France and Spain.

"IT WAS a 'pinch hitter' sort of thing," said Bill Duncan of Marquette, Charles, 16, of France and Montser-

rat Corrius Gilmert, 16, of Spain, who were "last-minute placements." "It was a very good experience for all of us," Duncan said.

The Matthew Rosenthal family also hosted a Spanish student this summer. "It wasn't just pot luck," said Carol Rosenthal of the placement of Juan Maria Aranao Pardo, 18, when he arrived in July. The family already knew of Juan.

Eric Rosenthal, also 18, spent a month with Juan in his home last summer, in the small Basque village of Zarautz. Eric, who took four years of Spanish at Harrison High, plans to continue Spanish study this fall when he enters the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

"The thing I've learned (from the exchange program) is while people throughout the world do things differently, they are basically the same everywhere," Eric said.

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