



mullinax  **.com**

Around Osceola

search...

[Home](#) ▶ [Community](#) ▶ [Community News](#) ▶ [A world of exchange](#)

Community News

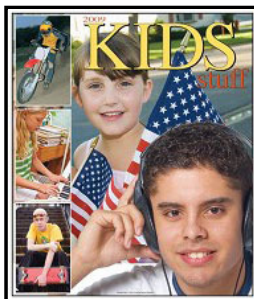
Community News
Community Events
Poinciana
BVL
Pets of Week
Engagements
Anniversaries
City and County Officials
Where to Recycle
Volunteers Needed
Support Groups
Religious Organizations
Home
Advanced Search
News
Police News
Sports
Opinions
Entertainment
Community
Obituaries
Obit Archives
Osceola Legals
Classifieds
Rental Locator Map
Home Plans
Submit A Classified
Archive Site
Past Special Sections
Poinciana Pioneer
Harmony Notes
Vending Locations
Advertising Media Kit
Contact Us
Images of Osceola 2009
Osceola County Tax
Collector

Archives

News
Sports
Opinions
Entertainment
Community
Police News

Related Items

Special Sections



A world of exchange



Foreign students enjoy new life experiences in Osceola County
By Juliana A. Torres
Staff Writer

The experience is a far cry from what the 17-year-old is used to. Kwon lived in the city of Wonju, South Korea, before coming to spend 10 months as a high school exchange student at the Schweiger family home, east of St. Cloud. "I'm having a good experience because I would have never lived in a farm," he said. He's learned to help care for the family's collection of animals, which include a llama, chickens and so many milk goats that the family can't give an exact number.

"It's different. I can't tell which is better. You can't compare a city and a farm." Kwon said. "At first, I felt uncomfortable because everything was nearby my house when I lived in Korea. I'm now adapting to here, so I feel comfortable."

Kwon has joined the Harmony High School Ballroom Dance Club and became a youth group leader at a local church he attends. One of the eight goats he showed at the South Florida Fair was named grand champion this year. Aside from the extracurricular activities, Kwon is able to apply about nine years of studying the English language.

"When I was in Korea, I always try to speak English, but I couldn't because everyone is Korean. Here, I had to use English because no one can speak Korean," he said.

Overall, Kwon's stay in the United States, which will end with the school year in June, has allowed him to grow as a person.

"I was a boy, but I feel like I'm being a man now," he said. "I couldn't make decisions by myself. I'd always ask my mom, 'Mom, what should I do?' Here, I couldn't do that. I have to make my own decisions."

Kwon is one of several international high school students who came to the St. Cloud area through the Center for Cultural Interchange, a nonprofit exchange program based in Chicago. Kwon's "host mother," Mary Ellen Schweiger, has been the program's representative in here for the last 11 years.

"Because I've been here so long, people have really started to see the culture at schools and stuff. I find I actually have people calling me that want to host," she said.

The St. Cloud area particularly has at least a few exchange students staying with various families each year. Angel Villamil is hosting two students, a junior and a sophomore, who are attending St. Cloud High School this year. Andrei Grimut, 17, is from Moldova while 15-year-old Chu-Ting Lee is from Taiwan.

"Everybody is very curious about exchange students," Lee said. "So, they ask me questions about my country."

Both teenagers live in cities with a population of about a million each and said, like Kwon, that the lack of public transportation was a hard adjustment.

"The food is very different. Here, it's more hamburgers and pizza," Lee said. "There, it's like rice and fish."

"We like free refills," Grimut added. "We don't have that in our country."

Both have taken advantage of the unique experiences that Central Florida has to offer, from Disney to driving out to NASA to see the shuttle launch.

"I think the most unique experience that I think I will see in my life was the shuttle launch," Grimut said. "It was at night and it was very beautiful."

Villamil said that hosting the students was an opportunity to help youth as well as relive his own parenting years.

"What most drove me was to have foreign people learn about our culture, learn about the United States of America. To show them why this country is as great as it is, why we are who we are," he said. "They have a chance to live our culture and our history throughout that year. I don't think any American should hold back on sharing that with any foreign person."

This year is Villamil's second hosting exchange students. The Schweigers have hosted at least one teenager every school year

Print Editions Online

OSCEOLA NEWS-GAZETTE

OSCEOLA SHOPPER

HOLA OSCEOLA

Hometown

osceola



Click here for your Garage Sale Map

FIND THE PERFECT APARTMENT OR RENTAL HOUSE

KISSIMMEE CIVIC CENTER

Edward Jones

KISSIMMEE
OSCEOLA COUNTY

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
All-America City

2008

Click here to
visit the City of Kissimmee Web site.

access
osceola
The House of Education and Inspiration

Click here

since 1996.

"They're a part of your family. They're usually such great kids, very respectful, very smart," Mary Ellen Schweiger said. "Oh, it's so hard when they leave!"

Over the years, Mary Ellen and her husband Tom have hosted students from Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Italy, Vietnam, Russia, Poland and Hungary, to name just the countries they can list off quickly.

"Some of the kids stay in touch. Some just vanish," Tom Schweiger said. "You never know where they're going to, what they're going to do."

As an area coordinator, Mary Ellen interviews families who are interested in the program and matches them with students. She explains to new host families that they are responsible for the teenagers that come to live with them as if the students were their own, she said.

"They're your child. This is my child," she said, grabbing hold of Kwon's arm. "He's now become my son. And I'm going to be sad when he leaves. Hopefully, we'll stay in touch and he'll come back to visit and who knows, maybe some day, we'll go to South Korea."

For more information on the Center for Cultural Interchange, visit www.cci-exchange.com or contact Mary Ellen Schweiger at 321-624-0545.

for the Access Osceola Program Listing

**American
Profile.com**

Free Recipes • Articles
Message Boards



Next>

[Back](#)

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinions](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Community](#)



Powered By Mambo
Content Copyright Sun Publications of Florida