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It's Not a Chore, It's an Opportunity Orinda Sister Cities program seeks host family

By Laurie Snyder



Roxana Rayová with her dog Photo provided

"It's just such a treat," says former Orinda mayor Bobbie Landers of her work with the Orinda Sister Cities group. Members just screened an acclaimed film about the 1939 rescue of Czech children from Nazis, and partnered with the Northern California Czech-Slovak Club to host a Spring Fest. Participants arrived in traditional, colorful dress on an April afternoon, and danced well into the evening.

But the program's most important initiative, stresses Landers, is to pair one lucky Orinda family each year with a teen from Tábor in the Czech Republic. "It's not a chore," she says, "it's an opportunity."

Chandler Visher and Deborah Lambert, the host parents of Tábor's most recent visitor, agree. "Michael was a delightful kid to have around; he was like a brother to the boys. They played soccer together," says Visher. The host experience was so rewarding, he adds, that families in Orinda should be competing for the opportunity.

The Orindans took their guest to Yosemite and Santa Barbara over Thanksgiving for a family visit with Lambert's parents, and then helped him fulfill his dream of visiting Las Vegas. They hope to travel to Tábor to visit Michael Cizek's entire family in the near future.

Each personable Táboran visitor is a winning teen in every sense of the word. "They have a competition over there to select the person," explains Landers. "From that they pick four students to interview with an English-speaking panel ... so that they'll be ready to step into an English-speaking community."

Roxana Rayová - a 16-year-old from Hodonice (near Bechyne) - topped this year's competition. A self-described bookworm who reads both Czech and English, her favorite subject is recitation. She plays basketball, runs cross-country, and enjoys painting and drawing. She has triumphed in math, geography and English competitions, and won this year's Czech language contest at the Gymnazium Pierra de Coubertina.

"But I am not only an indoor person, I am a nature lover. Hiking and camping gives me the contact with nature I need" - a need she feels can be explored in Orinda. "I just started to admire this city. I like the way the architecture is connected with nature, the way people take care of their environment."

Rayová has five siblings - two younger brothers and three sisters - one younger, two older. "My family is a great support for me in every decision I make. I know they are here for me in any situation," she observes. "With my siblings we regularly prepare a program of songs and poems for residents of home for elderly people in Bechyne to sweeten the time of Christmas and Easter when they feel lonely without their families." She also enjoys giving "dancing lessons for the young in Bechyne."

By coming to Orinda, Rayová hopes to learn and grow. "Even though I am working hard on my English, the main part of language knowledge is missing. English in use, communication, it is something I can't find in books or textbooks. If I went abroad I would get to know a new culture, new places and make new friends.... It would help me a lot to achieve my dreams."

To learn more about how you can become a host family or join in the fun of future festivals, call Bobbie Landers at (925) 254-8260.

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