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## Adventurer and Future Community Leader Seeks Nurturing Family Sister Cities program needs host family for visiting student from Tabor

Laurie Snyder



Michael Cepek, Orinda's 2012 Sister City student from the Czech Republic, hopes one day to "encourage the young people's relationship toward sport and friendship." Photo provided

and skills - big and small - that the girls took home to Tabor.

Stepanka Jandova, who lived with the Thompsons and attended Miramonte High School from August 2011 to February 2012, recently e-mailed to say that she was making salsa and guacamole from the recipes she had learned from the Orinda family's housekeeper. And both Jandova and Michi Kopecka, the Thompsons' other Sister Cities student, have written of how much bigger America is - and how much smaller their home town now seems.

In addition to experiencing first hand the day-to-day lives of one American family, the students were given the larger gift of learning about the beauty and complexity of America through visits with the Thompsons to places as diverse as the Grand Canyon, Texas, Hawaii, Disneyland, and Washington, DC.

"They have been a great, great experience," says Thompson of her exchange students. "You open your eyes to try to see the world through their eyes."

This year, one more fortunate family from Orinda will have the chance to embark on the next great adventure by hosting Michael Cepek, a student from Tabor's Pierre de Coubertin high school.

Michael's father is a sporting goods trader, his mother a physical education teacher at the local grammar school. "They encourage my dreams," says Michael of his parents. "I would like to make them proud of me."

He calls older brother, Hynek, his inspiration because he studied in the U.S. nine years ago and now, at age 31, holds a degree in Economics. His other brother, 27-year-old Adam, works as a financial advisor for a bank.

Michael, a student of the English language since the age of 10, also speaks advanced German and lists geography as one of his favorite subjects. An avid athlete, he participates in soccer, track and field, and volleyball, and has won medals at the regional level for swimming and cross-country. He also enjoys skiing and snowboarding with his family, as well as cycling, rafting, hiking, camping, and guitar.

He hopes, one day, "to work with young people and help to organize international sport events. This way I could encourage the young people's relationship toward sport and friendship."

Michael also tells us that he admires "the American attitude toward upbringing and education. The American system which gives children and students space to show what they can do."

All who apply to become exchange students, according to Orinda's Sister City web site "are thoroughly interviewed and vetted by the Orinda Klub in Tabor, and then screened again by our local Sister City members."

To become the host family for Michael, contact Bobbie Landers, president of the Orinda/Tabor Sister City Foundation: (925) 254-8260.

"Men come tamely home at night only from the next field or street, where their household echoes haunt, and their life pines because it breathes its own breath over again; their shadows, morning and evening, reach farther than their daily steps. We should come home from far, from adventures, and perils, and discoveries every day, with new experience and character."

Though Thoreau was describing his time at Baker farm when he penned those words, his mid-19th century vision could well be the mission statement for Orinda's current Sister Cities program. This annual international friendship initiative has not only helped students from the Czech Republic to step beyond their shadows to develop "new experience and character," but has enriched the lives of the Orindans who have become temporary host families for these trailblazers from Tabor.

Maryett Thompson and her family have hosted a number of exchange students over the years, and noted that the two who joined her from Orinda's Sister Cities program with Tabor have been the best.

"All of my kids have gotten to know these students, and they really became part of the family," said Thompson, who talked about the joys of watching the students grow as human beings, as well as about the memories, messages

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