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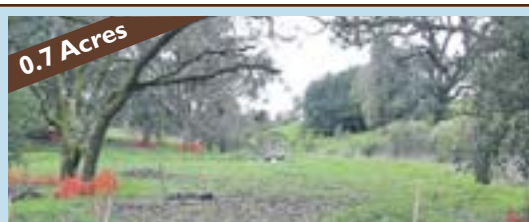
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Adventurer and Future Community Leader Seeks Nurturing Family

Sister Cities program needs host family for visiting student from Tábor

By Laurie Snyder



Michael Čížek, 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

"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 Tábor.

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 Tábor 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 and skills – big and small – that the girls took home to Tábor.

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 Čížek, a student from Tábor'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. ... continued on page A11

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