

Azalea Belles

ASSE Exchange Students Vanessa Larson (Norway) and Laura González (Mexico) were delighted to be chosen as Cape Fear Garden Club Azalea Belles to serve as ambassadors for the City of Wilmington, North Carolina, USA during the Azalea Festival. According to the Cape Fear Garden Club website, the Azalea Belles "enhance the beauty of several activities during the Festival, but their primary duty is to act as hostesses in the gardens featured on the Cape Fear Garden Club Azalea Garden Tour".

Tine Vanessa Larson

ASSE Exchange Student (Norway)

It started when I told my host mother that I had always wanted to try a southern Belle dress. She told Laura and me that there was a festival in April where girls dressed up in dresses like that. One of my host mother's friends put out on Facebook that she had two applications for the Azalea Belles, so we decided to apply just for fun and we actually got two of the 150 spots! We had to rent dresses, so we got a lot of support from our host family and their friends which helped us a lot.

This was a really great experience I am so thankful for being a part of. I learned a lot



ASSE Exchange Students Laura González (Mexico) and Vanessa Larson (Norway) at the New Hanover County Arboretum in Wilmington, North Carolina, USA.

about the southern culture, met new people and got to wear the most beautiful dress ever. This is definitely something I am going to remember for the rest of my life and I feel so lucky for getting to experience a real exchange student dream.

When I go home, I'm definitely going to keep in touch with my "family" and all the friends I have got here. I am going to remember the southern hospitality and hopefully bring some of it to the little village I live in back in Norway. Thank you so much for the perfect year ASSE!

~ **Vanessa**

Laura González

ASSE Exchange Student (Mexico)

The story of how we became Azalea Belles is amazing. Vanessa said that she would love to use a Belle dress and I got involved because I wanted to have a unique experience; something that other exchange students haven't had. Also I wanted to have a cultural experience with the South. I wanted to know their festivities and which things are important for them.

I will definitely take home the politeness. People here are sooo polite. I also learned to be less shy and to be friendlier (because as an exchange student we need to do a huge effort to speak with people and have friends).

Being an exchange student is something huge and interesting. Is a very fun experience where you're not just learning about other cultures but about yourself; and you can get really surprised by what you become in less than a year.

This exchange year helped me to grow not only as a student but as a human. I discovered a lot of things in people, like kindness as well as being tolerant & patient; respecting different points of view, ideas, opinions and also daily habits they might have.

Thank you!!

~ **Laura**



ASSE Exchange Students Laura González (Mexico) and Vanessa Larson (Norway), Azalea Belles in the Wilmington North Carolina, USA Azalea Festival.

Donna Ray Mitchell
ASSE Host Mom

Donna Ray Mitchell had never hosted before this year. She chose to host both Vanessa and Laura because both girls sounded enthusiastic and cheerful, and they enjoyed a wide range of interests and were athletic. "I'm always on the go so it was important to me to know that they could be independent, resourceful, and active physically."

"I raised 3 boys who are all off to college, and my house seemed so empty. I knew if I had one student that she might be lonely without anyone here of high school age to share outings. Since I had 2 spare bedrooms, it seemed smart to invite 2 so they could keep each other company. They call each other 'sisters' as both of them do not have a sister—and luckily they get along very well." As in most relationships, Donna also adds, "I will say we have had a few bumps, but we are pretty good about talking things out and working out a solution."

"As a family we have tried a little of everything—bowling, going to the beach and other points of interest, local sports events, shopping at the beginning. We stay pretty busy with school and work so sometimes it is a challenge to go places on the weekends, but we have done a lot."

~ **Donna**

Donna, Vanessa and Laura will keep wonderful memories of this year and will especially treasure the excitement and opportunity as Azalea Belles!

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More Than Just a Team

By Jacob Wolfiel, ASSE Exchange Student (Sweden) spending his exchange year in Pierz, Minnesota, USA

Jacob Wolfiel, ASSE Exchange Student (Sweden) spending his exchange year in Pierz, Minnesota, USA won county wide athlete of the week from his involvement in track and field.

Jacob says, "My experience with track has been a lot of fun, probably the most fun so far in my exchange year. It's not just that I can compete in a high level, I also meet new friends and we have fun together every day at practice and at the

meets! In the bus to and from the meets and at the different events it feels like we are more than just a team. We take good care of each other and we support each one. We are like a family!

It's great that things have gone so well for me and I'm doing better than I expected. I've taking first place 12 times out of 15 so that's a big thing for me. I'm really glad that I joined track, because that's something I absolutely will remember forever from my

exchange year!"



Editor's Box

Many thanks to all of you who have contributed your wonderful articles and photographs. Without you, there would not be any ASSE News! Tell us about yourself and you may possible find yourself highlighted in the next newsletter or posted on the ASSE or World Heritage Facebook page. Pictures are encouraged to be sent by email. Let us know the fun things you are doing as a student, host family or Area Representative.

Please send your best photograph and article to:
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Until next edition,
Mary Loving ASSE News Editor

ASSE Photo Gallery

ASSE is very grateful to receive so many photos from around the ASSE and World Heritage world! Enjoy the following examples of all of the fun!



In early March 2015, over 100 ASSE / WH Area Representatives, Area Coordinators, Directors and 8 FLEX, YES and CBYX students met in San Diego, California, USA to learn best practices in supporting our U.S. State Department sponsored grant program students. ASSE/WH *FLEX and *YES students were the highlight of our meetings and informal discussions as we heard first hand stories and experiences from students, giving inspiration and wisdom for the 2015-16 year.



PIE France / ASSE Exchange Students spent 1 week on the French Riviera. They visited Cannes, Nice, Monaco. The photo was taken at Cap D'Ail, Côte D'Azur, France and it is reported that they all had a lot of fun!

From left to right Sarah Gonzales, Regional Manager of the PIE France Paris office, Stephy Santillano (Mexico), Monica Garcia (Mexico), Joanna Aguilar (Mexico), Hung Yu-Ro (Taiwan), Christine Chen (Taiwan), Sih Yu Huang (Taiwan), Ailin Chen (Taiwan), Yu Wada (Japan), Paola Flores (Mexico)

Joanna Aguilar (Mexico) says, "I wouldn't change these few months for anything. I've not only learned a new language and culture but also made new friends from different countries and I've spent the best time with them."



ASSE Exchange Student Solenn Lortholary (France) was honored by the German Consul General with an award for ranking in the top 25% of students of the German Language in the United States. The ranking was based on the National German Award Exam.

Solenn's host parents Lorrie and Christopher Hinton celebrating with Solenn in the photo express, "We are so proud of her!". Solenn's German teacher has enjoyed having Solenn in her class and has raved about what a wonderful student Solenn has been.



ASSE Exchange Student Onnarin Yongkiatkarn, who goes by the name of "Mew" (Thailand) and her host sister Kelly Schwartz are ready for Prom.

"When I decided to be an exchange student, I got the chance to come to New Hampton, a small town in Iowa, USA. Everyone is so nice to me especially my host family, and I got the chance to see and do a lot of stuff that I never did. I rode on a tractor while my friends combined the corn, I pet a cow and saw the process of making milk, I went to a friend's bonfire and had s'mores. I definitely got a whole lot of new experiences!

I am so thankful to my parents to giving me the opportunity for these experiences. I also am thankful for my host family that picked me and made my year. I believe that every family can be a good host family and every place can give a great experience. My wish is that in the future, everyone that wants to be an exchange student will get selected and have a great year just like I did."

*FLEX – Future Leaders Exchange, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

*CBYX – Congress Bundestag Youth Exchange, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

*YES – Kennedy Lugar Youth Exchange and Study, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

Wisdom from Ben

By Former ASSE Canadian Director Ben Hannan

Some folks choose mountain climbing, others try bungee jumping, still others a vacation on a farm or in a big city, A school year student exchange is vastly different living a different culture, attending a school that is significantly different from the one at home, or trying new adventures whether in sports, play time, social time, studies with new and different people who are intrigued with you as a person from some faraway place. Friends may be easy to come by, with the assistance of your Host Family that chose just you!!

Oh yes, it has its challenges... probably a different language, maybe food that was previously unknown, being on a sports team, or being a cheerleader, in the school drama activities, orchestra, biology out of doors, understanding hockey or basketball rules, explaining what you and your friends do at home and finding your new friends have different ideas.

You are an adventurer, experiencing things you will remember all your life, which will give you insights that are special... 'worldly wise' beyond many.

Then it dawns on you that you are now counting down your final weeks and days on your exchange and going home is the new adventure. You know you will miss your new friends, the funny times with your Host Family, that teacher who took special interest in your adventure, those activities you mastered and now must leave behind. You wonder what has

changed since you left on your exchange, how friends may also have changed and you begin to think of the favorite home foods you have missed... and whether your pet will remember you!! You make sure you have all your photos safely stored and your address book is full of names in places you didn't know existed before your exchange but now are as familiar as your home street. And you find your home friends want to tell you of their adventures while you were away and you work at trying to explain what you have experienced... and maybe they don't listen as you had hoped. They even ask you not to begin so many sentences with "When I was in Oregon, Manitoba, or wherever, I..." And you SKYPE, email, phone, Tweet your special people back there and a lifetime of sharing is underway. You have friends from many other countries, maybe some close enough to gather to have that unique Halloween party with its funny games and things... and you wonder when you might visit again with those people who were part of your adventure... or if they might come to share your town, city, home and see the things you talked about.

You are 'worldly wise', you see situations differently and you understand more than you ever did before. You are loved on two continents, by two families, for your success, your maturity, your insights... you are even more unique than you were... an extra special person.

A New Page in My Life

By Shushanna Arkelyan, ASSE Exchange Student (*FLEX Armenia) enjoying her exchange year in Edmond, Oklahoma, USA

Being a part of this life changing program is an achievement in itself. I have learned a lot of things about the U.S., people who live here, and I have learned a lot about myself. I have gotten to know a lot of wonderful people and gained a lot of confidence and experience.

I have done a lot of new things like zip-lining and hiking in Arkansas. Probably the most extreme thing I did was trying alligator meat.

My host mom is half Vietnamese so I fell in love with the food. I also liked Mexican, Indian and Thai foods.

My greatest achievement is my host family. Now I have a new family, best friends. I am really glad to have Silas and Briar, my host siblings, in my life.

I will miss my life, family and friends. This was a whole new page in my life, which I am pretty sure is one of the most important ones.

~ Shushanna



Shushanna Arkelyan, ASSE Exchange Student (*FLEX Armenia) explains, "We took this picture while we were in Alabama near Natchez. In the background are the ruins of the old plantation, which survived the Civil War, but later was caught on fire. The photo was taken by my host mom, a professional photographer." [photo used with permission]

Experiencing Diversity

By Pannathat Limpeedeechai, known as 'Pann',
ASSE Exchange Student (Thailand) living with the
Franco family in Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA.

Sa-was-dee means hello in Thai. My sisters had both been exchange students, and their stories and experiences encouraged me to take on this journey. I wanted to come to the U.S. to improve my English, learn the American culture, experience diversity, and learn how to cook and eat different types of food. The opportunity of coming to the U.S. would help me reach my goal to enroll in a culinary school to become a chef. Attending my American high school has given me the opportunity to take a culinary class, which I enjoy.

I knew that leaving my family, friends, and school was going to be challenging. My host family has welcomed me into their home as their very own child. This has helped from

being homesick and missing my family. My favorite part of New Mexico is eating green chile and Mexican food.

I am enjoying having a host brother my age. Jesse has taught me how to play football and basketball, a sport I never knew about. Donovan is the little host brother I always wanted. It is nice to be able to help him with homework and teach him soccer skills. Although, I have two older sisters, I always wondered what it would be like to have a little sister. Having Breanna as my little host sister has shown me to be that protective older brother. The best part of living with the Franco family is learning and experiencing their values, but also sharing my values with them.

~ 'Pann'



Host brother Donovan, ASSE Exchange Student 'Pann' (Thailand),
host sister Breanna and host brother Jesse enjoy a family outing.

Little Things - Biggest Memories

By Anna Sagan, ASSE Exchange Student (Vinton, Iowa, USA)
spending her exchange experience in Colombes, France

My three-month journey in France has been an amazing one that I will never forget. I have been blessed with an incredible host family who care for me as if I was one of them. They help me with my French every day and act like my personal tour guides by taking me to more places than I could have imagined. I have a map of Paris and highlight all the places I have visited and I keep a journal of every day that has passed here so I will never be able to forget.

I have highlighted and written about the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, Champs Élysée, the Madeleine, Moulin Rouge, the Louvre, and much more as well as others still to come. My favorite monuments in Paris have been the Musée d'Orsay, which is an old train station transformed into a beautiful art museum, and the Eiffel Tower at night. Every night at each hour, the Eiffel Tower lights up and glimmers white lights. I must say it was one of the most

stunning sites I've ever seen.

Although I love visiting all of the monuments, I think the little things will be the biggest part of the memories that meant the most to me. Making friends here that I will never forget, learning the French language by living in it, and spending valuable time with my host family, are a few of those.

While my experience in France has been life changing, it has also included some challenges. There have been times of homesickness that haven't been easy to get through as well as times when the language seemed impossible to learn. But I am lucky to have a lot of support here as well as at home in Iowa that has always helped me through.

I am very thankful for everyone within ASSE as well as my family and friends who have made this experience possible. I wouldn't trade it for the world.

~ Anna



Anna Sagan, ASSE Exchange Student (Vinton, Iowa, USA)
at the Love Lock Bridge and the Seine River in Paris, France

ASSE Outbound Scholarship Recipients for 2015-16 Program Year!

All of us at ASSE are very proud of our Outbound program - with good reason!

1. ASSE's Outbound Program is one of the largest – that is because we are dedicated to helping American High School Students go abroad!
2. ASSE's Outbound Students get to choose their destination country – other programs tell the students where they can go!
3. ASSE's Outbound Program does not require foreign language proficiency – our kids come home dreaming in their new language!
4. ASSE's Outbound Program have the lowest fees that are all inclusive – ASSE subsidizes all of its programs abroad, essentially offering partial scholarships to all students, and does not charge extra "add-on" fees for program components.
5. ASSE provides scholarships for Outbound Students every year – one 100% scholarship, as well as 90% Program Fee Reduction Scholarships

The Walter Danielson Scholarship – named for the founding father of ASSE – pays for the complete program.

- 100% of the Program Fee
- Passport and Visa fees, if necessary
- Domestic Flight Costs to and from the departure gateway
- Spending Money for incidentals while on program
- One optional Field Trip

How do we choose the lucky winners? These scholarships are intended to provide program opportunity for kids who otherwise would not be able to realize their dream for lack of financial resources – in other words "financial need" is the final qualifier. All of the applicants for these scholarships are amazing, really well-qualified kids. We wish we could provide scholarships for every student who applied. All of the applications were wonderful and we do hope many of our applicants will still choose to be an Ambassador for the USA and study abroad with ASSE in the country of their choice.



100% Walter Danielson Scholarship Winner - Melodee Ewing of Lima, Montana, USA. Melodee will be spending her exchange year in China. She has performed at the University of Montana with singing in Mandarin which she has been learning for more than 2 years. She also has been learning Korean and Spanish but is excited about the opportunity to China. Melodee loves to discover, live and learn about different cultures and people. Later in life she would like to study East Asian cultures and plans on encouraging more students to take up the adventure to study abroad.



Sierra 'Cici' Schlieff of Bemidji, Minnesota, USA has been chosen for an ASSE 90% scholarship and will spend her exchange year in Mexico. Cici is very interested in sustainable living and helping other and an active volunteer at the local nursing home. She is a member of National Honors Society and the Student councils for 2 years and has been learning Spanish and Ojibwe. Cici wants to gain a deeper understanding of herself and the world around her. Her exchange year in Mexico will be a great start for that.



Aimee Kustar of Sanbornton, New Hampshire, USA plans to spend her exchange year in Japan as an ASSE 90% scholarship winner. She loves playing Badminton, Ping Pong, swimming and dancing and speaks 5 languages. She hopes to learn how to cook traditional Japanese food while abroad. She realizes 'being an exchange student is so much more than just going over in a different country'. She looks forward to learning from the experience and meeting lifelong friends.



Kevin Marcus Pierre from Fort Myers, Florida, USA gratefully accepted the 90% ASSE Scholarship and will spend his next school year in Norway. Marcus is fluent in French and Spanish and is involved in the 'Be-A-Buddy' program at his school, which helps kids with special needs such as autism. He is excited to learn about the Norwegian culture firsthand and becoming an exchange student has been a longtime dream of his.



Lea Guerin from Hebertville, Quebec Canada has been chosen for an ASSE 90% scholarship and will spend her exchange year in Mexico. Lea is a quirky person and it is 'important to her to smile all the time'. We are sure she will smile a lot with her future Mexican host family and friends. She loves school and studies a lot. She knows all countries and their capitals and flags. She has been studying Spanish for 3 years and will surely greatly improve her skills during her year in Mexico.

East Asian Training



ASSE/WH Area Coordinators and Directors gathered in San Francisco April 2015 for the East Asian training.

ASSE / WH Area Coordinators and Directors set aside April 9 - 12, 2015 to gather for a second year in San Francisco, Japantown to set their hearts and minds toward the East... Far East, as in Japan, China, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, and Mongolia. The purpose of the East Asian Workshop is to collaborate on ideas in order to make better placements for our East Asian students. One of the great highlights of this time was networking with some exceptional ASSE/WH students from Japan, China, Taiwan and Thailand. They helped us recognize the unique value of hosting an East Asia student and the importance of placing the students early in the season.



ASSE Exchange Students who helped the ASSE Area Coordinators and Directors learn valuable information about their home countries also had an opportunity to spend time taking in a few San Francisco sights! Left to Right: Shan Po (Bob) Yang - Taiwan, Ayu Takashima - Japan, Jiayuan, (Michelle) Guo - China, and Boonsiri Nonthapan - Thailand

Unforgettable Adventure

By **Nicholas McMillan, ASSE CBYX Exchange Student (Vancouver, Washington, USA) spending his exchange year in Stolberg, Germany**

Heading into my exchange year, I thought that I was prepared for whatever the year could throw at me. However, during the past months on exchange I have been constantly surprised at every corner: always learning, always making new memories, and making the best of each situation.

I live in Stolberg, Germany, a smaller town on the outskirts of Aachen. It is located right at the meeting point of Belgium and Holland, which I find amazing! In America I have to travel many hours in either direction to cross a border. Here, I can hop on my bicycle and without knowing it cross into a new country where the language, culture, and architecture is completely different.

The school system was a big part of the culture shock that I experienced. Without any sports or extracurricular activities in German Gymnasium, it makes it more difficult to meet people and fill up the day. However, I joined a swim team and triathlon team in a neighboring town and have had an amazing time training and competing. I competed in an annual swim and run competition and won first place! Earlier I went on a cross country skiing trip with my triathlon team in Belgium; which was a great new experience!

Another thing that I love out Germany is the variety of bread, every type that you can dream of. If it wasn't for all of the sport that I have been doing, I would have gained a lot of weight already!

The language part of the exchange has gone extremely well and I love learning the regional dialect/slang of my area here in Aachen. It makes me feel more connected to the place! I have come to appreciate the different pace of lifestyle while here in Germany. I love walking or taking public transport to all of the places that I need to get to. Culturally speaking, I loved exploring the different Christmas markets around my town! Even though there was no snow, it was the most "Christmas-y" atmosphere that I have experienced! The music, the people, the Printen, Glühwein, and Christkind (instead of Santa Claus) were just a couple of things that made Christmas time here in Germany unique and memorable.

I would have to say my favorite part has

been meeting and getting to know such an amazing myriad of people. I am incredibly thankful to not only my host family for adopting me into their life and showing me a different view of the world, but also to my extended host family (host cousins, host aunts, host uncles etc.) and friends from school and sports who have made me feel as if I have been in Germany not just for a few months, but for a lifetime.

As an exchange student, I have learned to never be afraid to strike up a conversation; I believe that life begins at the end of one's comfort zone!

I want anyone who is even considering an exchange year to realize that the experiences, good and bad, that you will have abroad are unquantifiable. The memories made, lifetime friendships forged, and cultural gaps bridged, will enrich your life far after your year abroad is over. The important thing is to take that leap of faith and board the airplane that will take you on an unforgettable adventure.

Cheers,
~ **Nicholas**



Nick McMillan, ASSE CBYX Exchange Student (Vancouver, Washington, USA) on the right in the photo pauses after running his first half marathon. He placed first in his age group with a time of 1 hour and 24 minutes. Standing next to him is his host uncle and also a member of the triathlon team on which Nick also competes.

Forever Changed

By **Therese Brock, ASSE Exchange Student (Denmark) enjoying her exchange year with the Bostwick Family in Grand Blanc, Michigan, USA**

I really enjoy everything about my year here in America. Some of the highlights so far are playing the fairy godmothers in our high school production of 'Shrek the Musical', my first Thanksgiving, and a completely different way of celebrating Christmas and New Year's Eve.

I really love my school, Carman-Ainsworth High School. I think I have done as much as a student possibly can. Watching the Football games in the fall, helping at marching band competitions, Spirit week, homecoming parade, game and dance, watched boys and girls basketball, wrestling meets, baseball, spirit cup, getting inducted into National Honor Society, prom, graduation and playing for the varsity soccer team. I will miss my teachers, classmates, friends, soccer team, coaches and the whole atmosphere of an American high school. And the idea of team spirit will for me be forever changed.

The American school system is so different from what I am used to. I only have lovely teachers and lovely fellow students, and everyone has taking me in with open arms.

I have also learned that I can do much more on my own than I expected. I have also learned that Americans are proud people with huge interest in foreign countries. I have had people ask me all kinds of questions about my life back home, and they have all shown great interest in everything I have told them.

When I go home I will for sure miss every single person who has made this year so great for me. My family of course, who I know I will keep in touch with. Hopefully my host sister Emma will come visit one day, as we have talked about it so many times now.

I have learned to love peanut butter donuts, and covering everything in chocolate. My host mom, Ann, has taught me to bake amazing chocolate chip cookies. I am taking home a model of an old Ford car that I bought at the Henry Ford Museum in Detroit.

I know that this won't be my last time in the States, and I know that from now on I will have 2 homes - one in Denmark and one in



Therese Brock, ASSE Exchange Student (Denmark) with her host family: Host sister Emma, Theresa, Host mom Ann, host brother Darwin and host dad Todd. The photo was on an evening that Therese was inducted into the National Honor Society at Carman-Ainsworth High School in Flint, Michigan, USA. Therese was the only student asked to speak. A quote from her speech: "Volunteering is about more than racking up hours to put on a resume or college application. It's the idea that one can dedicate their time to aid others and ask nothing in return."

America. Also, I am looking forward to seeing my American friends and family in Denmark for a visit to seeing my American friends and family in Denmark for a visit in the future.

~ **Theresa**

Jodi Kiefer Memorial Scholarship

A dedicated advocate for ASSE exchange programs for over 25 years, Jodi Kiefer began her exchange student experiences as a host sister to an exchange student from Sweden and then as an exchange student herself in Germany. Having benefited from high school international exchange first hand, she began her lifelong career with ASSE immediately after graduating from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. Jodi's first job was in ASSE's Midwestern Region office, followed by a position with ASSE in Washington, DC, and then in ASSE's Southern Region office. Jodi served

ASSE as Regional Director, Grants Program Director and Area Coordinator. Jodi's work helped thousands of American families and teenagers from other countries realize the value of cultural exchange. Pictured here with Jodi is her mother, Karen Nau, who has served as an ASSE host family, Area Representative and Area Coordinator for well over 30 years.

Jodi passed away earlier this month after a courageous battle with cancer. Her family has established Jodi's International Student Scholarship for an ASSE outbound student as a memorial to her passion and devotion in support of exchange students. Jodi believed that international student exchange makes the world a better place one student at a time.

Students eligible for this new scholarship will be highly qualified but lack the funds to participate in an exchange program without scholarship assistance. Jodi believed that one student can make a huge impact and worked to make student dreams come true. Jodi's International Student Scholarship is a culmination of a dedicated and caring life well spent.

Everyone who personally knew Jodi looked forward to spending time with her. Jodi's warm personality, unconditional kindness and cheerfulness, and dedication to exchange students made her an inspiration to us all.



Jodi Kiefer (right) with her mother, Karen Nau, Autumn 2014