

May 10, 2006

Section: Crossroads

### Del. 4-H hosts Bosnian teens for leadership program

TARA LYNN JOHNSON

CR:Delmarva

BY TARA LYNN JOHNSON

Special to The News Journal

There's no place like home away from home.

For 15 Bosnian teens, Delaware was their second home from April 9 until Saturday, when they returned to Europe.

The delegation's trip was part of the **4-H/Bosnia** Youth Leadership Program sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo, which selected Delaware **4-H**, a group for girls and boys ages 5 to 19, to be the host.

The teens spent their first two weeks with host families in Sussex and Kent counties and their last two weeks with hosts in New Castle County.

The goals: to help participants understand civic participation and democracy, develop leadership skills, learn how to plan and execute service projects and build relationships.

Igor Gavric, 17, from Banja Luka, stayed with the Lopez family - parents Theresa and Jose, and children Jacob, 15; Valentino, 13; nephew Christopher Pedrogo, 11; and Elijah, 6 - in Claymont for his last two weeks.

Gavric likes them a lot.

"We have fun together," he said. "They are always laughing and they accepted me as a member of their family. We joke my new last name is Lopez."

Theresa Lopez said adding another boy to their brood temporarily hasn't changed much. "My kids have a gazillion friends over all the time," she said.

Adding Gavric to the mix, though, has exposed the Lopez family to a different culture. Theresa Lopez thinks that's important - she likes traveling and getting to know different people and wanted to expose her kids to that.

Gavric participates in classes and exercises through the **4-H** program each day, but during the evenings, he and the Lopez family shop at the mall, play sports in the backyard or go bowling.

They eat dinner together nightly. Gavric likes the food, but thinks Americans eat too much junk.

"We eat lots of vegetables [at home]," he said. "McDonald's - some consider that dinner here. A Big Mac is not an appropriate dinner."

The pace here is different, too.

"Everybody rushes - in the cars, to their jobs," he said. "Back home, we have responsibilities, but we have time for everything - to have fun, to chat with friends."

Bosnians also use bicycles more than cars, he said.

He may not rush around, but Gavric keeps busy in **Bosnia**. He takes acting classes, plays handball (a popular sport in Europe), volunteers and goes to discos. He spends a lot of time studying, too.

He's happy to be part of the exchange program and to see part of America. Lopez said this activity is another reason her family enjoys **4-H**. They've been involved with teen conferences, the state fair and summer camps for five years, and now with being a host family. Lopez said she'd do it again and she hopes her 15-year-old will be able to participate in a similar program.

Tracey McCracken hopes her kids might be able to travel abroad, too. She and her husband, Scott, and their children Taylor, 13; Mackenzie, 11; and Andrew, 6, welcomed Hana Pasic, 15, from Zenica, to their Newark home.

She likes her temporary family.

"I think they're wonderful and I love them," Pasic said. "I'm having a great time."

Like Gavric, Pasic has shopped and eaten at McDonald's. She went ice skating and enjoyed Chinese food for the first time.

"I like trying new things," she said.

Pasic spends a lot of time reading American newspapers and watching TV news. Because she's interested in journalism, she enjoyed a lecture by UD professor and former CNN correspondent Ralph Begleiter.

During her stay, Pasic also noticed that Americans eat more junk food than Bosnians.

"We have McDonald's [at home], but try to eat more healthy foods," she said.

People here wear their seatbelts more, though.

"That is mandatory in my country, too, but not many people respect it," she said.

Living in a home with three new "siblings" is different from her life with only one brother at home.

"It's very fun. I'm learning different things from them at their different ages," she said.

American music and movies are familiar to her, except country, which she heard for the first time here.

"I heard a few nice songs, but didn't like it," she said.

Pasic likes Delaware because it's a peaceful place. Before the trip, she worried that America was like she saw in some movies, a "place with gunshots every day."

Pasic thinks the **4-H** exchange program is neat and a great opportunity.

"I wish that everyone could have a chance to visit America and see how it is really," she said.

And having a new family, with whom she'll keep in touch when she returns to **Bosnia**, has been one of the greatest gifts.

"They're nice people," she said. "I'm grateful for them."