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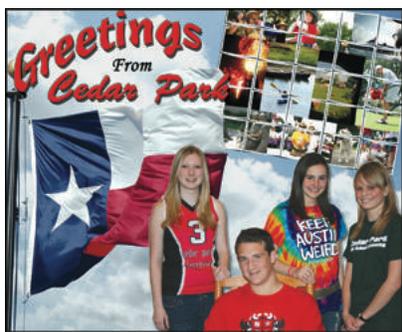
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# HILL COUNTRY NEWS

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## Experience of a lifetime



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Experience of a lifetime

Posted Thursday, February 12, 2009 5:00 pm

by Jenn Rains, Hill Country News

Opening one's heart and home to someone can be a scary thing, especially if the person is from another country. It can also be a rewarding experience, though - one that three Cedar Park families have learned when they opened their doors to foreign exchange students this year.

For the Alger family, who hasn't hosted a student before, they didn't know what to expect when Julian Lindeken, 17, came into their home last August. However, the Essen, Germany, native immediately made a lasting impression and became a member of the family.

"It's been better than I think any of us had ever expected," said Leslie Alger. "He's just fit right in as one of our sons." The Algers have two sons, Justin, 14, and Jacob, 12, who prompted their parents to think about hosting a foreign exchange student after meeting one on a mission trip.

Jacob said he really likes having "another brother" around. "It's been so much fun and I've just really enjoyed it," he said.

Lindeken, who was the kicker on the Vista Ridge football team and is the soccer goalie, considers himself lucky to live with the Algers. "I love my host family," he said. "They're like my second real family." He even calls them mom and dad.

Joe and Amber Willis also made the decision to be a host family this year, taking in two students - Hanna Ladstaetter from Munich, Germany, and Michelle Skrucana from Bratislava, Slovakia.

Amber said they've always enjoyed playing host to friends and thought it would be fun to host foreign exchange students and experience the different cultures.

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She said the most rewarding part has been treating the girls to the American culture and taking them to new places, such as New Orleans or the NASA Space Center in Houston.

“Taking them different places and showing them new things is very rewarding,” said Amber. “I enjoy seeing their reactions to new places.”

Skrucana, a swimmer for Cedar Park High School, had never been to America before and, though she was homesick at first, has enjoyed her experience here. “Everything is new here and I would never regret that I came,” she said. “I see the friendships I’ve made and the things I’ve accomplished. It’s given me so much.”

Ladstaetter, who has traveled to America before, said she is very grateful for the experience. “I’m a completely different person after coming here.”

Like her fellow foreign exchange students, Fiona Urban, a native of Hamburg, Germany, has thoroughly enjoyed the experience. “I always wanted to do this and to experience American life,” she said.

Urban, 16, is the second exchange student to live with Chris and Leslie Ross’ family, and they expect to host more in the future, Leslie said. “They become part of your family and are just another one of your kids,” she said. “It’s fun having a part of your family in another part of the world.”

Leslie is the local coordinator for the Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE) and helps find host families for foreign exchange students. In her second year as a coordinator, Leslie said she enjoys meeting the students and introducing them to a new culture. “I do it as a ministry to help them experience life in America,” she said.

CIEE is currently looking for families to host students for the upcoming school year, Leslie said. Families can host a student for five or 10 months and are matched with students who have similar interests. To learn more about CIEE and becoming a host family, e-mail [leslieross5@yahoo.com](mailto:leslieross5@yahoo.com) (<mailto:leslieross5@yahoo.com>) or visit [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org) (<http://www.ciee.org>).

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