

## District 5190 Newsletter – July 2020 – ROTARY YOUTH EXCHANGE

Your bags are packed – at least in your head. Your language lessons are going along well, only two more lessons and the series is complete. You have told *all* of your friends that you won't be back for school next year because you'll be going to school in Italy. Your family has agreed to host an inbound student because your room will be free. You have been working and saving money to help your parents pay for this one-year exchange. You have looked in *Google Earth* to virtually explore the city where you will live next year. You have purchased your travel adaptors so you can use your computer and hair dryer in your host parents' home and at school. You have studied the weather statistics for your destination, so you know what clothes to take. You have begun your introductory PowerPoint presentation to your hosting Rotary club, thanking them for this incredible opportunity and to help them get to know you. It is only now and then that you get butterflies in your stomach when you think of getting on the plane. More often, your excitement makes you want to jump out of your skin, and you can hardly wait. You have managed to connect with your first host family who have assured you they are just as excited for your arrival. You're going to miss your dog, but you have explained to him that you'll be back, and time will fly.

What's left, what's left? Oh yeah, the Rotary Youth Exchange District 5190 Committee has some more paperwork to complete. But the instructions are pretty clear so that won't take long. And just another couple of months and away we go!!!

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And then it happened. All the uncertainty and unknowns about the pandemic came flooding in mid-March. Will the program continue this year? Will my sponsoring country suspend for 2020-2021? Will District 5190 suspend the program?

The District Rotary Youth Exchange Committee responded to the pandemic by continuing to move forward, preparing our students and working with our partner countries until we had a final decision. We were determined to go until we couldn't go any further.

Finally, we have the answers.

The RYE Executive Committee met (via ZOOM) to review the guidelines offered by Rotary International in order to continue the 2020-2021 program. The policy/statement from Rotary International includes a number of "conditions" that after careful and exhaustive consideration, we determined we simply cannot meet. As expected, Rotary International strives to protect the health and safety of our student participants. The RYE Committee, because of our deep commitment to the program, was more than willing to do the work required by these conditions if we could. However, some of these requirements have prevented us from achieving the conditions and from continuing with the 2020-2021 exchange year.

Sadly, all of our go-until-we-can't activities have come to a halt. We have informed the students, their families and our hosting partners that District 5190 will be suspending the Rotary Youth Exchange Program for 2020-2021. There are 15 outbound students who will not be going out and a corresponding 15 inbound students that we now cannot host.

What we have offered our outbounds, who have worked very hard after their selection to become exemplary Rotary and American ambassadors for our country, is an opportunity to go on exchange in 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 if they have not aged out according to program parameters. We have also provided our selected outbound students the chance to participate in a virtual Short-term exchange which we will help to facilitate.

What about the students not able to go on a future exchange because of exceeding the age limit? Regrettably, we cannot include them in a future exchange because of the rules of the Rotary Youth Exchange program cannot be side-stepped. We are advising them to seek out international exchange programs offered by most colleges and universities. We have asked them to consider involving themselves in Rotaract to maintain contact with Rotary in their future. We want them to be a part of Rotary's future.

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Now you'll unpack your bags – in your head. You should finish the language lessons anyway. Encourage your parents to hold your room for next year's inbound – we'll still need their help. Continue to work and save for your next adventure. Pat your dog on his head and tell him that you'll be around for a while longer; you're not leaving just yet.

And channel that excitement into your next quest where you will begin packing a couple months early – in your head. In everything your encounter in your life, there will be disappointment. It's all a part of life. Let this disappointment be a teacher for you. Let what you have gained as you prepared for your exchange year carry you forward into the next step of your life.

We know how disappointed you must be. The pandemic has made a lot of plans for a lot of people go by the wayside. We know that the contrast of preparing to go and the acceptance that you can't go must feel deeply discouraging. And for that, we want you to know that we feel the disappointment, too. Please remember, however, that just being accepted will enhance your college application as well as future resumés. You haven't lost your way; you haven't lost your support. You have been protected from potential danger. And there is much ahead of you and more to come than you can even imagine.

Stay in the Rotary family and you will find your way around the world in so many ways. We will be with you on this journey. The future still offers a myriad of opportunities – this won't be your last.