

.....

Wants to See the *World*

.....

Rotary Youth Exchange Student – Oceane

By Overlook Resident Karen Steffens



Oceane (or Océ as she prefers) is 16 years old and from France. She has been living in the Mt Island Lake area since her arrival here late summer 2013. She is a senior in high school and will be living in the US through summer

2014. She is a Rotary Youth Exchange student and spending an academic year living with host families, attending US high school and experiencing US life and culture while sharing French culture with us.

Why did you want to be an exchange student?

My father thought it would be a good idea and after some thought I agreed it would be nice to spend a year in a new country, meet new people and learn English. It has been a great decision!

Tell us about your family in France and your host families here in the US.

In France I have an older sister and a younger sister. My father is a director for a university and teaches math and physics. My mother is a teacher assistant for kindergarten. Here in the US I will have three host families throughout the year. I had two host brothers in my first host family and now I have one host brother in my second host family. My third host family I will have a host sister who is also a senior in high school.

Tell us about your hometown in France.

In France I live in a town called Evreux. It is about one hour from Paris and one hour from the ocean. It is much smaller than Charlotte.

What do you like to do?

I like to play basketball, do judo and swim. I like to be with friends and go to see the Charlotte Panthers play football.

What do you miss about France?

The food and also family and friends.

How is school different here than in France?

In France we start school at 8:00 am and go until 5 or 6 pm. We have no sports clubs or social clubs at school. I love all the activities here in high school. I even made the basketball team which is so much fun.

What do you want us to know about France or French people?

That Paris is not the only city in France. Also that we are not rude. In France we don't always say "thank you" when someone holds the door or does something nice and people think we are rude but it is just part of our culture.

What have been your favorite experiences here in the US?

Christmas lights are crazy – I love them! Halloween was fun and something I have never experienced. I also traveled to Ohio for Thanksgiving with my first host family and that was neat to see all the relatives - and the snow. The time I remember the most is jumping into the ocean for fun on New Year's Eve and then going inside and drinking hot chocolate. That was the best!

What do you want to see or do in your remaining time in the US?

I would like to see Washington DC. I will be going on the Rotary Western trip and will see the western states but I will not be going on the Rotary Eastern trip to see Washington DC



and other states in the east. I want the time to slow down – my exchange is almost half over and the time is going too quick. I know I will see my family in France in a few months but may not see my host families for a long time after I leave.

What is the biggest challenge about your exchange?

Learning the language is a challenge but I try not to be afraid to use it. Also, I get nervous meeting my new host families and adjusting to their family but once you feel welcome everything is good. I also have a hard time making best friends here because teenagers seem very busy all the time.

Would you recommend an exchange to other students?

Yes. Coming here was the best decision of my life and this is the best year of my life. US students need to think about living in a different country with a different culture and open their minds. They should find out about an exchange program like Rotary and not be afraid to see the world.

What have you learned about yourself through this exchange?

Before I came here I did not take time to know things and in my first host family my host brother has Down syndrome. I learned so much about that and not to be scared and how wonderful he is. I also learned that I like having brothers. They do lots of sports and fun things.

What surprises you the most about the US?

That a lot of students eat fast food hamburgers for breakfast when they arrive at school! Also, that the people here are so friendly and helpful.

Oce's advice.

When you smile people smile back and things are good.

Oce would first like to thank her host families for everything they do for her and including her in their lives. She would also like to thank her friends Anna-Claire, Jordan and Shelby for always including her in things and making her feel welcome.

If you are interested in the Rotary Youth Exchange program you can email Overlook resident Karen Steffens at karen.steffens@banko-famerica.com.