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MIDTOWN ROTARY SPONSORS STUDENT IN EXCHANGE PROGRAM

BY ANDREA LUNA
NNB Student Reporter

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Midtown Rotary is sponsoring two exchange students this year as part of the Rotary Youth Exchange Program. The local rotary provides a host family, a small stipend and different volunteer opportunities for the students to be involved in.

Joe Smith, 50, is the president elect of the Midtown Rotary club.

"If you know people you don’t go to war with them. We strive to influence the youth of the nation," Smith said in a telephone interview.

Pimtip Pim Promgerd, 17, is from Thailand and living in the states for the next year.

Her host family, the Comsikey's welcomed her into their home as their son, Andrew Comiskey, ventured off to the Czech Republic.

"We hope she has a good time and that she likes us," Nancy Comiskey said.

Promgerd attends high school, rotary events and is helping out the Interact Club at the Academy Prep School in Midtown on their mission to help an under funded school in Thailand.

"Pim is an integral part of that project, she will be speaking to the students about Thailand and she may even know the school that the students are trying to help. Do you see the connection and impact?" Smith asks.

When you think about it, these young people are extremely courageous. They are immersed in a different culture, living with strangers, sometimes barely knowing the language, and they serve the host community.

Promgerd is enrolled at Saint Petersburg High School.

"The first week of school I bowed when I passed older people. In Thailand we cannot color our nails, we have to cut our nails, and we have to pull back our hair. We wear uniform and skirt that is down to your knees," Promgerd said.

The kids also behave differently.

"In school here I see boyfriend and girlfriend holding hands and kissing. In Thailand it’s rude," Promgerd said.

Making new friends has also been difficult.
"In Thailand when I study, it's all the same friends in one class and we will make more friendship," Promegerd said.

Promegerd also revealed what she gave up to have this experience.

"My mom told me that if I not come here she would buy me a car and I come here," Promegerd laughs, "but when I go back my mom will buy me a car."

The program also ensures that the students experience different parts of the American culture.

"I went to baseball game, I can't understand that," Promegerd said about a recent Rays game she attended.

Promegerd will spend a full year in America and will have to readjust her mannerisms when she returns home.

"My mom told me here it is more relaxed. When I go back to Thailand you have to forget about more relaxed," Promegerd giggles.

The Midtown Rotary hopes that these students take a piece of St. Petersburg back home with them, and that the whole experience impacts their life for a long time.

"We want these students to be citizens of the world and not just their country," Smith reflects.