

Meet the Exchange Students

By Scott Laird

Each year the Vernonia High School and the Vernonia community welcomes foreign exchange students into our homes, schools, and town. These students come from countries all over the world and make Vernonia their home for about nine months, attending classes, joining sports teams, volunteering at community and school events, and joining in other activities. Vernonia has been a leader in providing this exchange opportunity over the years and has developed a unique and exciting program that offers the school and community an uncommon experience. In exchange for sharing our lives with these youth from around the globe, Vernonians have the opportunity to learn about other cultures and make international friends worldwide.

Please join me in welcoming this year's group of foreign exchange students.

Lene Jacobsen – Lene is from the small but very picturesque city of Bergen, Norway. She is living with the Rethwill family this year. She ran cross country in the fall and will try wrestling this winter. Lene says she likes that Vernonia is a small town where everyone knows each other. She says she also likes that sports are part of the school system, instead of a separate club like in most European countries. She says she is having a hard time with the language barrier—she says she can understand most everyone, but has had difficulty speaking Eng-

lish. When asked if she has a favorite American food she said they don't have ice cream in Norway and she loves it! Lene says she has traveled around Europe including Italy, Croatia, England, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany but has never been to the U.S. before.

Gabriela Nunes – Gabriela is from the city of San Paulo in Brazil, the largest city in that country. She played volleyball this fall and is trying wrestling this winter and may run track or try softball in the spring. She is staying with Christy and Ben Davis. Gabriela says she likes the forests in Vernonia, but thinks the weather is little too cold and wet. She says she misses her family and the food from her home country and has also had a hard time adjusting to the cold and wet weather. She says she loves ranch dressing and eats it on "everything." She says this is the first time she has ever traveled outside Brazil.

Theresa Bomke – "Tessa" is living with Gretchen and Terry Lindauer and is from the capital city of Berlin in Germany.



(Back) Lene Jacobsen, Gabriela Nunes, Theresa Bomke, Pongwiwat Kookitwattana.
(Bottom) Javier Arenas Oliver and Serhiy Bauer

She ran cross country and will wrestle this winter and try softball in the spring. She says she loves cheeseburgers. In the past she has traveled around Europe, including trips to France, Switzerland, Austria, Holland, Italy, and Poland, but this is her first trip to the U.S. Tessa says she likes the small town feel of Vernonia, especially that she knows everyone when she walks around town. She says she has had a hard time adjusting to the monetary system here.

Pongwiwat Kookitwattana – "Leng" is living this year with Shelley Hennesey and is from the capital city of Bangkok, Thailand. He ran cross country this

fall, will play basketball this winter and probably run track this spring. Leng says he likes the clean and healthy air in Vernonia which is very different from Bangkok where there is a lot of pollution. He also says he likes how friendly people are in Vernonia. He says he has had difficulty with language and has had a hard time being understood when he speaks. He also says he is struggling with the weather, as it never gets this cold in Thailand. He says his favorite American food is hamburgers. He has traveled to the coast and beaches of Thailand and to Singapore and Malaysia, but never to the U.S.

Javier Arenas Oliver – Javier is from the city of Malaga in southern Spain and will spend this year with Kathy and Reggie Ward. Javier says he likes that everyone knows each other in Vernonia. He played cornerback on the football team, even starting a few games, and will play basketball this winter and run track in the spring; he says he hopes to reach the state meet in the triple jump this year. Javier says he has only visited Germany in the past but also traveled extensively around Spain with sports clubs. He says he misses his family and has had a hard time adjusting to the climate here. He says really loves s'mores.

Serhiy Bauer – Serhiy is from the small city of Melitopol, Ukraine and is living with Joann Beamish. He played both defensive and offensive line on the

continued on page 11

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