

Meet the Exchange Students

Each year Vernonia welcomes a collection of foreign exchange students to our community. Students from around the globe will spend this school year attending Vernonia High School, playing sports, participating in community and school activities, and building, what sometimes become, lifelong friendships. This year 13 exchange students are calling Vernonia home. *Vernonia's Voice* is pleased to introduce this second group of students to the rest of the community.

Sara Ghislanzoni is from Lecco, Italy and is staying with Ben and Christy Davis's family. Sara is playing volleyball, will play basketball in the winter and hasn't decided whether to try softball or run track in the spring. This is Sara's third trip to the United States; she previously toured the east coast, visiting New York City, Boston and Washington, D.C., and some western states including California, Nevada, Texas, and Arizona. She has also traveled to France, Switzerland, and Austria. She says she likes how friendly and helpful people in Vernonia have been. "They always talk to us and try to get us involved in things and I really love living here," she says.

Nicola Biondi is from Ancona on the coast of Italy and is living with Reggie and Cathy Ward. He is playing football this fall, will play basketball in the winter (he has played basketball for 12 years in Italy) and then run track or try playing baseball in the spring. This is his first

trip to the U.S., but he has traveled in Europe, visiting Germany and Croatia. "I like it here in Vernonia. I think this is the real America," he says.



Left-right: Sara Ghislanzoni, Nicola Biondi, Sona Zakaryan, Jia-You Yu, Justine Massengo, Pakornkeat Insawang, and Murad Yazmedov

Sona Zakaryan is from a small community, about the size of Vernonia, Darbas, Armenia. She is spending the year living with Joann Beamish. This is the first time Sona has ever left her country; since she has been in the states she has visited the Oregon Coast and was very excited to see the Pacific Ocean. Sona is running cross country this fall. "Running cross country has really helped me, not just physically, but mentally and helped build my character and I am sad the season is almost over," says Sona. She says she will try playing basketball in the winter and run track in the spring. Sona says she is from a small town in her country and she likes how friendly,

warm, and helpful the people of Vernonia have been. "I really love this community," she says.

Jia-You Yu - "Lawrence" is from the east coast of Taiwan and is staying with Justin and Jeana Gump and their family. "I love Vernonia," he says. "People here are very friendly and the town is beautiful." This is his first time visiting the U.S., but he has traveled to Japan, England, France, and New Zealand. He is running cross country this fall, will play basketball in the winter, and play baseball in the spring.

Justine Massengo - "Tanzy" is from Dodoma, the capital city of Tanzania and is living with Reggie and Cathy Ward. This is his first trip to the United States, but he has visited South Africa. He is

the second best runner on the boys cross country team this fall, will play basketball in the winter and then run track. "People here have commitment and unity," he says. "You get to meet all kinds of different people here."

Pakornkeat Insawang is from Nonthaburi, an urban providence in Thailand near the capital city of Bangkok. He is going by the name "James" this year and is living with Shelley Hennesy. This is his first trip abroad. He is playing football this fall, will wrestle in the winter, and do field events on the track team in the spring. He says living in small town Vernonia is a drastic change for him, but he loves it here. "It's great. The Community is small but very warm and welcoming," he says.

Murad Yazmedov - "Misha" is from Balkanabat, Turkmenistan and is living with Justin and Ashley Ward's family. He is playing football this fall, will wrestle in the winter and run track in the spring. "I think people here are more kind than in the big cities in America," he says. "I like it here." This is his first time outside his country.

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