

Meet the Exchange Students

Every year in recent memory many Vernonia families have opened their homes, and their hearts, and decided to host a foreign exchange student for an entire school year. Most of these host families will tell you it was a life changing experience for them, and many of them have done it year after year. The exchange students that come to Vernonia come from all around the globe to study in an American high school where they take part in classes, athletics, and other activities both in the school and in the community. They share their cultures and lifestyles with us and build friendships that sometimes continue long past their year here – it is usually a life changing experience for them as well.

This year Vernonia is hosting seven foreign exchange students. As we usually do at the start of their school year in Vernonia, we sat down with these students to learn about them and their exchange experience.

Dinu Ion Cohocaru is from the 600 year old city of Belz, considered the capital city in the north of Moldova. He says Moldova used to be part of Romania, so they share the same language and a lot of the same culture. He says there are a lot of old castles and buildings there. He will spend his year here living with Reginald and Cathy Ward. He is running cross country this fall, will try out for basketball in the winter,

and run track in the spring. He has traveled around Europe, visiting most of the capital cities with his family, but this is his first time visiting the United States. He says Vernonia's scenery is similar to his home country and is very lovely. He likes the different landscapes in Oregon, with volcanoes, deserts, mountains, and oceans all in close proximity. He says the people here are always happy, which is very different from his country, where the Slavic people don't smile and are not friendly. He misses being able to go to the cinema, theater, or the mall. He has one year of high school left to complete when he returns to his home country at the end of this school year, and then says he hopes to study computer technology, economics, and business.

Maris Meelimae is from a very small village in Estonia and is living with Justin and Ashley Ward. She has visited most of the countries in Europe and this is her first time in the United States. She says she really likes the nature and scenery around Vernonia, and she likes the small school where everyone knows each other and is friendly. She says she misses being able to use public transportation, but likes that everyone has cars to get around. She has three years left of high school to complete and hopes to study archeology at a university outside her country. Maris is on the JV volleyball team, will try out for basketball in

the winter and may try track in the spring.

Abraham Kpirikai is from Kumasi, Ghana, which is in west Africa, and is the second largest city in the country. He is running cross country this fall, and says he will try out for basketball and run track in the spring. He is living with Reginald and Cathy Ward. This is his first time outside the borders of his home country. He will return to Ghana to finish high school and would like to attend a university outside his country to study medicine. He says he had hoped he would be placed in a larger city for his exchange experience, but now that he is here he says he likes it in Vernonia, where the people are nice.

Barbora Kvapilova is from Velim in the Czech Republic, a small town about the size of Vernonia and one hour from the capital city of Prague. She is living with Justin and Ashley Ward. She has traveled a lot in Europe and also visited Egypt, Bali, and Indonesia, and visited Oregon five years ago. She



Clockwise from top left: Dinu Ion Cohocaru, Maris Meelimae, Abraham Kpirikai, Barbora Kvapilova, Hannah Creutz, Ines Saintignon, and Laura Tonnung

is playing volleyball this fall, will play basketball in the winter, and try track in the spring. She says she loves Vernonia, she loves the nature and seeing deer in the street. She likes the small school and people are friendly. She will have two more years of high school when she returns home and then plans to study veterinary medicine and work with animals.

Hannah Creutz is from Recklinghausen, Germany, a mid-sized city near Cologne and will stay with Erin and Tyler Swepston this year. Hannah is playing JV volleyball and will try out for track in the spring. When she returns to Germany she has three years left of high school and then would like to return to live in the United States and study psychology. She has been to the United States three times before, visiting the Rocky Mountains, California, the Grand Canyon, and Las Vegas, and has traveled to Canada. She has visited Spain, France, and Italy. She likes the small size of the Vernonia community but misses being able to easily go visit bigger places for things to do. She likes that you get to know so many people and that everyone knows who the exchange students are.

Ines Saintignon is from Lille, a large city in the north of France very near Belgium. She says the people in Vernonia have been nice, and even though it's small there are things to do with friends. She has one more year of high school to

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