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Rotary exchange student lives dream

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Emil Salmhofer, a Keizer Rotary exchange student from Salzburg, Austria, played soccer and tennis for McNary High School.

By DEREK WILEY
Of the Keizertimes

From his home in Austria, Emil Salmhofer dreamed of living in the United States.

So when he arrived as a Keizer Rotary Club Exchange Student last August, Salmhofer made sure to see as much as possible, visiting Portland, Crater Lake, the Oregon Coast, Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Phoenix.

"I'm really glad that I could travel this much during my year here and pretty much saw most of the major cities at the west coast," Salmhofer said. "It's just something I dream of back in Austria. Everything here seems so far away but I'm really here and I'm going through all these cities and living this life. It's so awesome."

Salmhofer, age 16, is from Salzburg, Austria, a city of more than 150,000 people, best known in America as the setting for the musical and film *The Sound of Music*.

"It's really pretty. There's a river (Salzach) floating through downtown Salzburg and there's a castle (Hohensalzburg Fortress) and lots of tourists from mostly Asian countries but some American tourists too. It's just a beautiful city and I love living there but I really enjoyed my year here, too."

Salmhofer, who speaks three languages, began learning English in the fifth grade.

His father introduced him to American bands like AC/DC. Now he listens to more R&B and rap.

"I always had this interest in learning English," Salmhofer said. "I feel like my English improved a lot during my year here."

Salmhofer felt lucky to be placed in Oregon and Keizer.

"I'm just super glad that I got to go to McNary," Salmhofer said.

"It's a really good school and I made a lot of friends. It's going to be sad once I really leave."

Salmhofer immediately got involved at McNary, joining the soccer team.

Salmhofer began playing soccer when he was 4 but quit two years ago to focus on school.

"Coach (Miguel) Camarena treated me super nice and I really appreciate him being my coach," Salmhofer said. "I had lots of fun with the soccer team and I made lots of friends there, too. It was just so much fun and I wish I could play one more season. I'll probably play soccer when I return to Austria because I just re-discovered my love for soccer."

In the winter, Salmhofer enjoyed cheering on the basketball team.

"I pretty much went to every game," Salmhofer said. "They were so entertaining for me and it was so cool to see us win the GVC in basketball. That was probably one of the highlights of my exchange."

In the spring, Salmhofer tried a sport he'd never played before, tennis, and even won his first match with doubles partner Brayden Lyda.

To be with kids his own age, Salmhofer took junior classes like algebra and chemistry as well as electives like weights.

"I enjoyed working out in school," Salmhofer said. "That's something that we don't have in Europe.

"Everyone's talking down the American education system but I don't feel like it's bad. I liked that you mix sport and school together. That's really nice. I wish we would so something like that in Europe. I feel like most people are pretty smart here, too."

Salmhofer was also able to participate in McNary's graduation ceremony, even though he'll have three years of high school remaining when he returns to Austria.

"That was so cool that I got to have the experience of graduating even though I didn't really get a diploma," Salmhofer said. "I'm glad I got to do that because I feel like that's something that I won't forget my entire life."

For Rotary, Salmhofer attended meetings each Thursday and participated in community service projects—planting trees at Keizer Rapids Park and cleaning up at City Hall.

"In the beginning it's not that hard," Salmhofer said of being an exchange student.

"The first few months go by easy and then around Christmas time, you slowly start realizing how far you really are away from your parents. You're not alone but you've known most people for not more than two or three months. I'm glad I had friends who helped me through darker times of my exchange even though they weren't really dark. They helped me when I missed my family or my dog."

Salmhofer returned to Austria on July 1.

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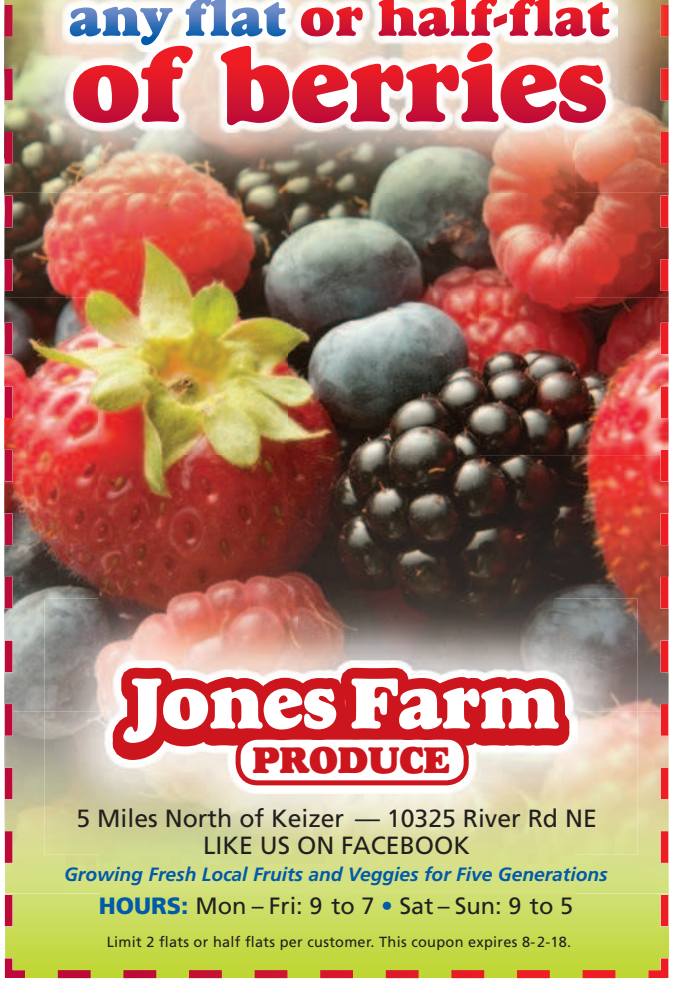
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