

Summer camps and study options across the border

By JENNIFER COLTON

For generations, young people have attended summer camps and programs, sometimes going out of state. But if your teen is looking for something more, they might consider looking *internationally*. As an alternative to a regional summer camp, organizations offer youth exchange and study abroad programs where teens can experience another culture for a week, a month, or the entire summer.

Erica Nelson is a Heppner High School graduate who spent almost a year in Prague. She says international experiences have many benefits, even beyond experiencing another culture.

"I learned so much about the world and other cultures while developing my independence and my problem solving skills," she says. "Studying abroad really opens your eyes to everything that is available ... and opens so many doors."

For musical students, the Oregon Ambassadors of Music program gives high school students an opportunity to perform and travel across Europe, tasting other cultures while practicing and performing in beautiful locations.

For Union High School graduate Rebecca Myers, participating in Oregon Ambassadors of Music opened her eyes to German culture — where she later spent two terms of college through Eastern Oregon University.

"Oregon Ambassadors of Music was an amazing opportunity to experience different cultures, see many countries, make new friends and be mentored by excellent teachers," she says.

Students across Eastern Oregon, from Umatilla, Union and Morrow



counties have participated in the program through nominations by their music teachers. Sean McClanahan, with Hermiston High School, says eight students participated last year and 13 have been nominated for this year.

Many students, including Nelson and Myers, learn about study abroad and international exchange programs through their high schools, colleges and universities. Programs offer high school and college credits in general studies or specific fields, but not all international programs are based in academics. Programs with mission organizations have a religious or humanitarian focus and many exchange programs simply encourage students to serve as goodwill ambassadors for their home countries, including those offered by service clubs.

Service clubs also have their own exchange programs, giving young people an opportunity to expand horizons and become global

citizens. Both The Lions Club and Rotary International offer programs grounded in the idea of sharing a culture: Students represent their home country and interact and learn about their host country.

The Lions Club offers the Youth Camp and Exchange Program in two stages: A Lions Youth Exchange, or host family stay, where a family in another country takes in the student for two to six weeks, or Lions Youth Camps, which are one or two weeks long and include a host family stay before or after the camp. To participate, students must have a sponsorship from a Lions Club and a host Lions Club in the country the student will be staying in. Although local Lions Club chapters are not active in the exchange currently, they can help connect interested students with other clubs in Oregon, such as in Hood River, that continue to be active in the exchange.

Rotary International also offers the Rotary Youth Exchange, which individual Rotary clubs may

choose to participate in, giving students the opportunity to experience one of about 85 different countries through a host Rotary club. The Rotary Youth Exchange is open to students age 15 to 19, and the host Rotary club generally provides room and board with a host family. Participants are responsible for airfare, insurance and travel documents.

For any exchange or study abroad opportunity, students will need to research funding, but the good news is more than 45 organizations offer scholarships specifically for international opportunities

— and many programs offer scholarships as well. The first step is research, often through an organization the student is interested in or through their school.

One more bit of advice from the international travelers: stretch your expectations but know your limits. High school students may prefer guided programs, such as Oregon Ambassadors of Music, while older students may appreciate the freedom of a study abroad course. Nelson, for example, says she traveled to Prague at the perfect time.

"I had just turned 18, so it was my first adult decision, and it was the best decision I ever made," she says. "If I would have gone earlier, I don't think I would have been as grateful or grown as much, and it is so much harder to have an experience like the one I did later in life."

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