

# Students share holidays, culture

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Thanks to parishioners at St. Rita's Parish in Webster, six college students from South Korea, Taiwan and Japan got a taste of Christmas for the first time.

This past holiday season, four St. Rita's families opened their homes and hearts to students as part of Christmas International House, a Christian program that provides international students attending college in the United States with a place to stay during the holiday break. Founded in 1965, it is billed as a peacemaking program, one that will allow both the host families and the visiting students to learn more about each other's cultures.

In order to participate, organizations, church groups or individual families post a listing on the Christmas International House Web site at [www.christmasih.org](http://www.christmasih.org), describing the area and community in which they live and how many students they can host. Interested students can browse the Web site to find host families in an area of the country they're interested in visiting. Students registering for the program pay \$75, and also pay for their round-trip transportation and the cost of attractions and activities they visit or take part in during their stay.

"It's sharing, and it really brings the true meaning of Christmas," said St. Rita's parishioner Joyce Hollander, who has hosted students through Christmas International House since 1988.

Jamie Nieh, 21, is from Taiwan and is studying business at Pittsburgh State University in Kansas. Nieh stayed at Hollander's house with JaMi Lee, 20, who is from South Korea and attends Concordia University in California. Three oth-

er South Korean students from Concordia University stayed with two host families from St. Rita's.

Toru Kawagoe, 19, is from Japan and is studying communications at the University of Central Oklahoma. He stayed with Dave and Marti Mauro and their 11-year-old son, Chris.

"Toru is a very gentle-spirited person," Dave Mauro said. "For Chris he's like a big brother, and we really enjoyed it. It was a great experience for us."

When interviewed during their Dec. 19 to Jan. 2 visit to Rochester, the students described their experience with Christmas International House as "awesome" and encouraged others to try it. Nieh said while international students are in school they often feel homesick because "the food is different, everything is different. We feel lonely ... we don't have family here."

Although there was a lot to adjust to — including Rochester's winter weather — the students said they felt comfortable with their host families.

"It never snows in my country, never," Nieh noted, while Lee and the other South Korean students, Yun Sun Kim, Hyun Jung Lee and So Young Park, said they thought Korean winters were colder.

During their stay, the students visited George Eastman House, Rochester Museum and Science Center, Strasenburg Planetarium and Niagara Falls. They also attended a Rochester Americans hockey game, baked Christmas cookies and went ice skating.

They may have been on a break from school, but the students certainly weren't on a break from learning. As they witnessed their host families celebrate Christmas, they took part in gift-giving and



Mike Crup/Catholic Courier

Six international students attending college in the United States spent the holidays with host families from St. Rita's Parish in Webster as participants in the Christmas International House program. During a Dec. 30 dinner at St. Rita's, Toru Kawagoe, a 19-year-old student from Japan, helps his host family's son, 11-year-old Chris Mauro, use chopsticks.

learned about the Catholic Mass and culture. They even got to know St. Rita's parish community.

"They were part of the church even though they weren't taking part in the Eucharist. They become part of your family," Hollander said.

Mauro said his favorite part of the experience was the cultural inter-

change that took place. Not only did Kawagoe ask questions and learn about American culture, he said, but Kawagoe shared with them his culture. Kawagoe gave the Mauros a book on Japan, with one side of each page in English and the other in Japanese. He also wrote the name of each family member in Japanese.

"I felt a connection pretty quick," Mauro said. "He took us in, we took him in."

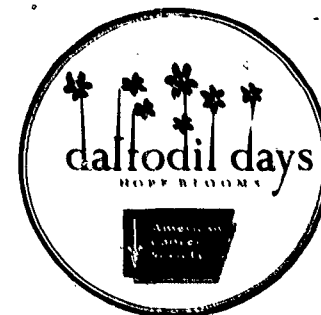
Puzzle No. 29 answers from page 13

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