



Don and Louise Luth of Joelton are in their third year of hosting exchange students. Community service, such as volunteering at the Bethesda Center in Ashland City, plays an important role in helping the students draw closer to the heart of America. Pictured are (left to right) Louise Luth, Ching Yee Tik, Galyna Shlapay and Don Luth. RANDY MOOMAW/THE TIMES

Couple extends family through foreign exchange program

By Randy Moomaw
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For the third year running, Don and Louise Luth of Joelton are hosting two exchange students, and they couldn't be more delighted.

Currently, the couple is hosting Ching Yee Tik from Hong Kong and Galyna Shlapay from Feodosiya, a resort town of about 85,000 on the Mediterranean in the Ukraine.

"I must say, Sycamore High School and the students have welcomed all of our students with open arms. And all of our students have left school with an A or B average," Don Luth said.

Ching, 18, and Galyna, 16, known as "Lyna," to many at SHS, will definitely continue the tradition of academic excellence as both currently maintain an A average.

SHS math chair Gwen WhiteOwl has both Ching and Lyna in the same pre-calculus class, and she said both girls are brilliant students."

"Ching has a very positive attitude and seems to always be happy to be here. Lyna is more quiet but more studious. Both girls are a delight to have in class and both add to it," WhiteOwl said.

All of the students the Luths have hosted have been involved in community service. Ching and Galyna will have each completed more than 100 hours of community service before they head back home.



Exchange students Ching Tik from Hong Kong and Galyna Shlapay from the Ukraine help once a month with putting together food boxes at Ashland City's Bethesda Center. RANDY MOOMAW/THE TIMES

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DON LUTH

"They earn volunteer points toward getting a presidential certificate," Luth said. "It will be signed by the president of the United States."

Once a month the two volunteer at the Bethesda Center in Ashland City where they help out by making food boxes, organizing shelves, hanging clothes and others odds and ends.

They also help out at the Hope Center in Nashville once a month where they serve by helping with the center's outreach to homeless women and children.

Both girls would like to a community service center started when they return to their respective hometowns.

They both feel that travel is a challenge

locally since they're used to public transportation and wish they had cars. They also agree that the two things they enjoy most about living in Cheatham County are school and church. They both attend Pleasant View First Baptist Church.

Settling in

Don Luth said he and Louise first thought about looking into program after seeing a newspaper article about hosting students.

"It sounded like it would be pretty neat," he said. "And since I'm retired, and we have no kids at home anymore, we decided to give Pat Littrell a call," he said.

Littrell is a regional manager at Pacific Intercultural Exchange. The non-profit organization is based in San Diego, Calif, and brings students into the United States for six-month and 10-month academic home stays, and sends American students overseas for similar time periods.

"The biggest kick comes from watching and listening to them as they change from their native language to broken English and then to very good English before they go home," Luth said.

The couple still keeps in touch with every student they've hosted. Their previous four students were from Hong Kong, South Korea, Thailand and Germany.

Galyna said that language has been a challenge but her favorite teacher at Sycamore has been Beth Stokes, who teaches English. For Ching, math is her favorite subject and White-Owl and Joseph Jones are among her favorite teachers. Others favorites for the two include Spanish teacher Tom Hilyer and Maggie Mason, the school's choir instructor.

"For a while, I don't think any of us realized how very difficult it must be to be so far away from home," Mason said. "It was amazing to me how Ching jumped right in to everything. She sang everything with us, even if some of the words were unfamiliar to her, came to all of our after school events, and was an important part of our group. For our first concert, the entire choir learned a Chinese folk song in honor of Ching. She said she learned it as a child."

Galyna said she is undecided as far as a career choice is concerned.

Ching is drawn to potential careers in zoology, design and architecture, and has been

approached by the U.S. Navy because of her academic achievement and extracurricular activities. Ching also worked as a professional model when she was younger.

One of the highlights for the girls is a road trip they took with Don and Louise from Tennessee to California and back, where they were amazed at the expanse of forests and mountains along the way.

The Luths recall stopping at a filling station out West where the girls had their picture taken with a Native American.

SHS currently counts three other exchange students among its student body.

Anni-Marie Puhlert of Germany and Yelizaveta "Lisa" Verkhovskikh of Russia are being hosted by Kevin and Beth Jarrell of Pleasant View, while Mike and Amy Rayson of Pleasant View are hosting Claudia DiUrbano