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Youth Exchange Program; Student from Ecuador shares with Rotary his exciting GB experiences

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Visibly thrilled about his experience in Grand Bahama, Youth Exchange student Carlos Yugcha of Ecuador yesterday shared with members of the Rotary Club of Lucaya some of the various things he has learned thus far.

Proud of the many things he has engaged in with his Bahamian host families, Yugcha, while displaying a unique sense of humour, told the Rotarians during their weekly meeting at the Ruby Swiss Restaurant how wonderful it is for him to live with people who have been nothing but good to him.

Talking about his stay with Past President David Long and his present stay with Past President Peter Turnquest, the young man said he has learned a lot of interesting things in the company of these two Rotarians as well as their families.

The 18-year old said what keeps him going is knowing that some of the best weekends of his life have been spent in Grand Bahama, indicating that since he arrived in The Bahamas, it has been one exciting experience after another for him.

"Let me tell you that an exchange student can have some wonderful days," Yugcha said. "But there are also days that can be quite miserable, especially when you miss home."

One of the things he believes he has achieved in the last few months is having respect for the amazing Bahamian culture he has encountered in Grand Bahama. This, he said, is one of the main goals of the Youth Exchange Program.

According to the Rotary International website, the most powerful force in the promotion of international understanding and peace is exposure to different cultures. The Rotary Youth Exchange provides thousands of young people with the opportunity to meet people from other lands and to experience their cultures. This plants the seeds for a lifetime of that international understanding.

Administered by the various Rotary clubs, districts and multi-district groups, the program today involves more than 82 countries and over 8,000 students each year. The Rotary Clubs of Grand Bahama have been supporting the Youth Ex-change Program because they realise how critical it is to the development of young people not only in The Bahamas, but throughout the entire world.

"I believe there is a diverse world out there and I am prepared to learn and understand as much as I can," Yugcha said. "Right now, I may not fully understand, but I believe as time goes on, I will recognise the impact that this year has on my life."

Yugcha said he has been involved in so many intriguing things here in Grand Bahama, that he now feels as if he does not want to go back home sometimes, particularly because his present stay here feels like being home.

"Because I have the experience of living with Bahamian families, I have met a lot of new people," he said. "I believe the bonds of friendships I have established with some of them will be forever and I can say it has enabled me to know myself a little bit better."

With the use of a slide projector, Yugcha showed Rotarians the many photos taken with himself and his host families. He later presented them with a very informative documentary on his native country Ecuador, depicting its cultural, environmental and economic climate.

The brilliant student said the most memorable experience he will take back with him to Ecuador will be his participation in the annual Junkanoo parade. He said Grand Bahama will always hold a special place in his heart and looks forward to attending university this year, where he will be taking up engineering as it relates to the agricultural industry.

Also present at the meeting were two young ladies who will soon be entering the exchange program. They are Chardonnay Rose of Jack Hayward High School, who will be travelling to Ecuador in August of this year and Lindsay Langstaff of Lucaya International School, who will be taking flight to Brazil next year.

Rose, who is the headgirl at Jack Hayward is very excited about her visit to Ecuador, saying she hopes that it will end up being an extraordinary experience for her.

"I am very excited about going, because I always wanted to be bilingual and learn another language," she said. "I took up Spanish in school and I always saw it as interesting, but I didn't continue with it in senior high and I regret that.

"Now that Rotary is giving me a chance to learn Spanish on a new level, I am looking forward to that very much and I can't wait."

Langstaff, who is in grade 13 taking studies in her school's international baccalaureate program, is convinced that her trip to Brazil next year will be an amazing one.

"I have always wanted to become bilingual and to learn and experience a new culture," she said. "I am glad that I am going to Brazil because I want to learn as much as I can about its carnival, which is a completely different culture from The Bahamas.

As a Canadian growing up in The Bahamas, Langstaff said she has had the opportunity to experience both cultures and believes learning about new ones is very inspiring.

"I am very interested in cultures," she said. " Last summer I went to Scotland, so being able to meet people from different places of the world and what they have to offer is very exciting to me."

GREAT EXPERIENCE — Carlos Yugcha of Ecuador, a participant of the Rotary Youth Exchange Program, shared the experience of his stay in Grand Bahama for the past year with members of the Rotary Club of Lucaya in the form of a slide show, during the club's weekly meeting at the Ruby Swiss Restaurant on Tuesday. (Photo by JENNEVA RUSSELL)

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