



## When east meets west

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Taiwan exchange student finds Keys interesting place

Monday was a busy day for 16-year-old Chieh-Hsu Cheng, who, only hours after disembarking a plane from his home country of Taiwan, rushed through Marathon setting up bank accounts, enrolling in school and even visiting the local newspaper.

"Very busy," said Cheng, who hoped the activities would soon slow down enough for him to accomplish his main goal while in the Keys - fishing.

"I haven't fished before, but I want to learn," he said. "It's quite interesting and seems relaxing."

But relaxation on the water will have to wait, as Cheng prepares to spend the next 10 months in the Keys as part of the Marathon Rotary Youth Exchange program.

Cheng, who has been given an English name of "Davy," will spend his junior year at Marathon High School while living with several Rotary families, and throughout it all, won't be allowed to speak any Taiwanese.

"The exchange is an immersion program," Marathon Rotary Youth Exchange Officer Chris Bull said. "The primary language of the country has to be the student's second language, and he can only speak English while he's here."

Cheng, who can find his way through an English conversation quite well, learned the language from a teacher in Taiwan. When he decided to take part in the exchange program, he knew he had to go to an English-speaking country, and was shy to admit the U.S. wasn't his first choice.

"England," Cheng proclaimed. "America No. 2," just ahead of Canada.

But Cheng seemed glad to be in the U.S. and particularly the Keys, even though he admits, "It's quite hot here, but the people are friendly and warm."

Cheng said he experienced the friendliness of Americans firsthand, after a Pacific typhoon caused his flight out of Hong Kong to be delayed and him to miss his connecting flight from Los Angeles to Miami.

A good Samaritan helped Cheng book a second flight the next day, find him some food and book him into a hotel room, which he was too young to rent himself.

"I met a lot of people," he said, "and they helped me a lot so I can come here smoothly."

Now that Cheng's getting settled, he said he's both excited and nervous to begin a year of life in America, but seems eager to begin school.

"They asked him if he was ready to go back to school and he said, 'yeah,'" said Bull's wife Cindy, who showed Cheng around Marathon. "They said that's the first time any student has said that."

While Cheng said he enjoys just about every area of study, Marathon sports fans may soon find the tall and athletic teenager on the basketball courts.

Cheng will also make several presentations on Taiwanese culture to groups throughout the Keys as well as participate in other Rotary activities.

In between it all, he'll likely be doing the chores that every 16-year-old must adhere to while living with American families, but he said that's OK.

"I want to try everything I never do at home," Cheng said. "I like to live by myself ... away from my parents."

The angst of adolescence, it seems, is universal.



Taiwanese exchange student Davy Cheng (second from right) is welcomed to Florida by Marathon residents (from left) Cindy Durkin, Riley Durkin, Lindsay Bull, Regan Durkin and Chris Bull. Cheng will stay with the Bulls for a few weeks before living with other Marathon families during his 10 months in the Keys. Photo courtesy of Chris Bull