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Exchange students prepare at the C.W. Post Campus for trips home after a year in the United States. Nearly 900 students from abroad said their tearful goodbyes.



Hard to Say Goodbye

Exchange students head home after year in U.S.

By Indrani Sen

STAFF WRITER

Before they arrived here a year ago, America was just a blur of images gleaned from TV and movies — gun-fights and baseball and homecoming dances.

But for almost 900 overseas exchange students who boarded buses taking them to the airport yesterday, those images have been replaced.

The thump of a snowboard on new snow and the face of one particular American girl will represent the United States for Fernando Sanches, 18, when he gets back to Brazil. An elegant senior dinner-dance stands out in the mind of Chayuda Siripong, 17, of Thailand. Elisabeth Mork, 18, went back to Norway clutching photos of her long-haired American boyfriend and basketball-playing American "sisters."

Girls hugged and clung to each other and boys awkwardly patted each other's backs, but all had tears in their eyes as American Field Service volunteers packed the departing students into buses at Long Island University's C.W. Post Campus. The 886 students from 54 countries assembled to say goodbye to one another and to a country most said they have come to love.

"The first two months it was really hard to get used to it," said Gokhan Kazar, 18, of Turkey, who lived with a host family upstate. "But right after you make friends, it turns out to be a really good experience."

Sanches, who had cloaked himself in a Brazilian flag for the journey home, agreed. Displaying his newfound grasp of American teen idiom, he explained, "I had an awesome relationship with my family, and an awesome relation-

ship with my friends."

The stereotype of Americans as more reticent in expressing their feelings than Latin Americans turned out to be untrue, in Sanches' experience.

"I couldn't believe it," he said. "My friends — big football players — they were crying when I left!"

Marie Schuh, 17, from Austria,



Maria Emilia Martinez Bucheli of Ecuador hugs a friend.

spoke of coming into contact with religions other than Catholicism and having close friendships with blacks for the first time during her year in Tampa, Fla.

"In the first days, I touched the black people's hair because I had never seen it," she said. "We don't have many black people or Hispanic people in Austria."

This widening of experience is part of the mission of the American Field Service program, said Christine Vogel, the organization's vice president for marketing and communications.

"I think the whole world has stereotypes . . ." she said. "There's nothing

like living with people to learn that it's very hard to make stereotypes that are true."

When asked what they would miss most about America, most students didn't hesitate before naming their friends and host families. Beyond that, however, the answers varied widely.

"Pop Tarts," was Siri Ann Tellevik's answer. "In Norway we have everything — we have McDonald's, we have pizzas . . . But we don't have Pop Tarts. The cinnamon and sugar ones, ooh!"

Speaking of food, her friend Elisabeth Haukland, 17, also of Norway, was reminded of one thing she won't miss from her year spent in Pennsylvania — scrapple, a sausage-like product made with the less appetizing-sounding parts of the pig.

"I couldn't take it," Haukland said of the dish. "I thought it was horrible."

When asked what he will miss most, Jorge Gavilán Fernandez, 18, had a complex answer. The tanned Chilean in his preppy plaid shirt, cargo pants, and pale blue visor said he changed a lot this year.

"It's like you were born when you came here, and you're going to die when you leave," said Fernandez, his eyes slightly red from crying. "I'm excited to see my family and friends and stuff, but still, it's mostly sad."

AFS organizers who have seen what they call "D-Day" unfold year after year say this moment is one that stays with the teens after they return home, and even into adulthood.

"People cry not only because they're sad, but because they're amazed," said Alex Frankel, 24, an AFS volunteer who was himself an exchange student in his teens. "This is an amazing trial for these 1,000 kids, and when they're done, I think they can't believe it."

Station Robber Held

Airgun Attendant killed Wyandanch man

By Kelly Bowser

STAFF WRITER

A Wyandanch man was the robber who was fatally shot by the attendant of a Mobil gas station in North Bellmore during a Monday afternoon holdup, Nassau police said yesterday.

Jerry N. Simmons II, 20, was killed just before 12:30 p.m. after the attendant, Bruce W. Longley, 64, a retired New York City correction officer, shot him twice in the chest with a .40-caliber semi-automatic handgun, said Det. Lt. Frank Guidice, head of Nassau County's Homicide Squad.

Guidice said Simmons was carrying a silver Crosman airgun when he robbed the store. The gun probably shoots BBs, Guidice said, adding that they cannot confirm if it was loaded.

"It looks just like a handgun," Guidice said. "A lot of stores sell them."

Guidice said it would have been impossible for Longley to determine whether Simmons' gun was real at the time of the robbery.

Longley was not available to comment. He is cooperating with police and the district attorney, Guidice said.

"We're saying that, at this point, his motivation appears to be defending himself," Guidice said.

Simmons walked into Newbridge Automotive Service at 871 Newbridge Rd. and asked to use a telephone before he held up the station. Longley opened the register for Simmons, who reached over the counter and removed its contents. Police said no one else was in the store at the time.

Simmons fits the description of a suspect in two armed robberies in Suffolk County, Guidice said. Guidice said he did not have additional information on Simmons' background.

Simmons' family identified his body at the county morgue yesterday afternoon. His mother, Pamela Simmons, said she was unable to talk about her son and what happened Monday afternoon.