

Danish teen reflects on time spent in Canada

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DAILY HERALD

Annika Moeller-Kristensen wasn't sure what to expect when she came to Canada.

The Danish teen arrived last August as a part of an international youth exchange program put on by the Rotary Club.

Now, months later, she's preparing for the long trip home. She'll leave on July 11. But while she's leaving the country behind, she's taking a lot of good memories with her.

"I always wanted to experience another culture, and just see what else lies beyond our own borders of Denmark," the 16-year-old said Tuesday.

"My parents knew of this option, and I jumped right in."

According to Rotary Club youth services director Bob Twyver, Moeller-Kristensen was one of 8,000 students around the globe who took part in the exchange program. Every year, students from 80 countries go to 80 different places, either for a two-month or a ten-month term.

"In our case, they're hosted by three families. They share those parenting duties for the 10 months," Twyver said.

"Our job is to ensure the infrastructure is in place for them where they're going. We provide the insurances necessary and provide the host families for their security and their well-being while they're here."



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Annika Moeller-Kristensen poses in front of City Hall Tuesday.

This year, no students from P.A. participated. Instead, Rotary sponsored a student from Warman who went to Taiwan.

There seems to be interest for an exchange next year, though.

"We've had a number of students interested and we anticipate that perhaps next year we will send an outbound student in order to get an inbound stu-

dent," Twyver said.

Along with students from all over the world, Moeller-Kristensen saw some of what the prairies had to offer. She took a train trip out to Churchill, Man., to see polar bears, and visited small communities such as Canora, Sask., and The Pas, Man.

"These people became

family, really quickly," she said.

The teen, though, spent most of her time in P.A., where she attended school and got to know some of her classmates.

"(P.A.) is pretty nice, the parts I've been in," she said. "Of course it's a saying that Canadians are all nice, but it really is true."

The thing that caught her

most off-guard is how vast the country is.

"The flatness and the long roads. All that surprised me a great deal," she said.

"Also the distances you guys drive. I went nine hours just in a car. When I got back from Churchill it was 16 hours on a train. We don't really do that back home."

Going back will be bitter-sweet. Moeller-Kristensen will miss the people she's met.

"I'll miss the connections I've made here," she said. She also regrets not being able to see "everything."

"But then again, you can't see everything, there's so much more to discover."

But at the same time, she's looking forward to going back to what's familiar.

"The hardest part was leaving what I know. I've always been kind of an introvert, but I've become an extrovert while I've been here," Moeller-Kristensen said.

"I'm looking forward to the familiarity of everything," she said. "But I'm going to continue my education, and show what I've learned to other people, give them a sense of what Canada can offer if they want to go here."

Her message for anyone considering an exchange was simple.

"It's really worth it," she said.

"You learn so much. It will become greatly important in your life. You'll really value it."