



Heather Ingram:
Someone to lean on



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WEEKENDER

Religion: The Gospel of
Simpsons

Entertainment: Pacin
Colour Comics

Foreign exchange

*The Rotary exchange program
offered two area students a taste
of life in other countries, and*



of life in other countries, and showed them just how soccer-mad people are in France and Brazil



SHEENA NEEL returned from her Rotary exchange with several mementos from France. Before she left for Lille, Neel spoke very little French; she's now fluent in the language.

Stories and photos
By **ROCCO FRANGIONE**
Special to The Star

BLIND RIVER

The intent of the Rotary exchange program for young people is to experience different cultures. For 18-year-old Sheena Neel of Algoma Mills it was quite an experience to see how one country reacts when terrorism strikes.

Last month, Neel returned home from Lille, France after spending a year in the northern French city as part of the exchange program.

On Sept. 11, when terrorists crashed planes into the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Neel saw France's reaction first-hand. She found it unnerving. "There were military personnel all over the place," Neel said.

"They were in malls, train stations, on the streets and they all had these huge machine guns chained to their hands. The machine guns were pointed at your lower body. It would scare me but it was normal for the French people. After a few months of seeing this it became normal and didn't bother me anymore. It's like they weren't there anymore."

Before she left for Lille, Neel spoke very little French. She's now fluent having spent the past year with five host families in the city of about 500,000 people.

Coming from Algoma Mills and driving into a large city gave Neel a good dose of culture shock.

"When I first drove into the city I was struck with the old buildings," she said.

Neel was also amazed to learn Lille has about 50 small-sized universities and three universities nearby are considered



ASHLEY YOUNG captured a part of the Brazilian flag's image in a painting. A highlight of her visit was swimming in the Amazon River.

ence for Neel, especially when she had meat and cracked an egg over it and

asked what was I waiting for and I said, 'Aren't they going to cook it?' They said no, you eat it like that."

Neel tried the meal, which she says is a food specialty in France, and admitted the taste wasn't "that bad."

"It was just the idea of eating something raw," she said.

Neel also saw first-hand how serious Europeans take their soccer.

Because her exchange coincided with the 2002 World Cup, she saw the city come to a virtual standstill during the month of June.

"If there was a game on, students would leave school and go to cafes to watch the game," she said.

"The country came to a stop, even businesses closed.

"There were a lot of celebrations every time France

won, but when the team lost, almost no one came out of their homes."

The soccer experience was much the same for 18-year-old Ashley Young, who spent the past year in San Carlos, Brazil.

The one major difference was that Brazil won the World Cup.

"June was one big party," said Young, a Blind River resident.

"School was canceled every time Brazil played because the games would take place early in the morning and school also starts early in San Carlos.

"For other games, there was a television at the school and students would watch the games during breaks. Some also brought small radios to class and even the teachers would ask them for

Young now has a better appreciation for Brazilian music.

She brought back numerous items with Portuguese songs and some dance classes in San Carlos where the focus was Brazilian.

Being below the equator, summer Christmas for Young

"It was hot even though we have a northern climate," she said. "Christmas just wasn't the same, but I got to celebrate New Years on a beach so that was fun for Christmas."

One highlight of her visit was swimming in the Amazon River

Focus on Algoma

saw an airplane. "We were on a bus and other Rotary students and I had to cause this drama was a road," Young said. "So the road to be r

from the road before we could use on."

San Carlos is a city of 200,000. Young had to prepare for culture shock when she returned. That includes changes to the

One thing Young noticed immediately are the several businesses in the community.

Meanwhile, for Neel the culture shock was getting used to the surroundings again.

Neel and Young basically had the same set of friends and families for several weeks all they've talked about is France and Brazil.

"I hope they're not getting bored talking about France," Neel said.

Young adds, "We've talked about we're talking too much about