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Former Rotary youth exchange student credits program for future success

By KELLY JAMES
For The Standard

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Photo supplied Former Rotary Youth Exchange student Natalia Kianickova, who left her home in Slovakia to stay in Blind River for 11 months during 2011-12, shows the honours bachelor of arts degree in politics and German that she recently received from the University of Manchester in England. She credits her year as an exchange student for helping her to develop as a person and ultimately achieve her goals.

Though it may seem to be a daunting task to leave home as a teenager to spend a year in a strange country, a former Rotary Youth Exchange student is crediting her year in Blind River as an important part of her development into a confident adult and recent university graduate.

Natalia Kianickova was a shy 17-year-old girl from Slovakia when she landed in Blind River in August of 2011. Thrust into the spotlight immediately, she was welcomed by the members of the Rotary Club of Blind River and introduced herself to the community at the Rotary Club's popular "Concerts by the River" series that summer.

After spending the year in Blind River with three different families (as is normal for Rotary Youth Exchange program participants), the now poised and confident young woman has moved on to achieve great success by graduating with highest honours with an honours bachelor of arts degree in politics and German from the prestigious University of Manchester in England. She will continue her studies this fall in pursuit of a master of science degree in international business and management at the Alliance Manchester Business School, and is expected to complete her studies next September.

Since her time in Canada and throughout her undergraduate studies, Natalia

has continued to work and learn abroad. She enhanced her language skills in German by working for a large company in Regensburg, Germany as an intern, and then spent last summer in Cannes, France (home of the famous film festival) working for a local Rotarian in a medical practice.

Throughout her travels, work and studies, Natalia has developed numerous friendships. She returned to Blind River three years ago for a short visit, and has continued to be active in Rotary-based organizations such as the Rotaract Club based at the University of Manchester.

In a letter to the Rotary Club of Blind River, Natalia credits her year abroad as a teenager for helping her to grow as a person.

She writes, "Without Rotary I wouldn't be where I am now. My stay in Canada was, thanks to Rotary, an unforgettable experience that developed me as a person in such a great way."

Natalia points out in her letter that the year as a Rotary Youth Exchange student made her become more open to other people, more tolerant and understanding of different cultures, and more accepting of different customs. She credits her stay with local families in Blind River (including Leo and Claudette French, Roger and Tammy Boyer and Neil and Ina Lynn Tulloch) with helping her to feel more comfortable in living away from her home and helping her to grow socially.

One of the most important goals of the renowned Rotary Youth Exchange program is to promote international peace and understanding through year-long visits abroad by young people. The Rotary Club of Blind River has helped to foster this spirit of understanding by helping numerous local teenagers to take part in the program and by coordinating the exchange visits of young people from around the world, such as Natalia Kianickova, to the Blind River area.

The Rotary Club of Blind River is active in the local community in numerous ways, including fundraising for charitable organizations, assisting persons and families in need, and in the Rotary Youth Exchange program. Anyone interested in becoming involved in this active local service organization can contact Bea or Ross Jensen at 705-356-1923.

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