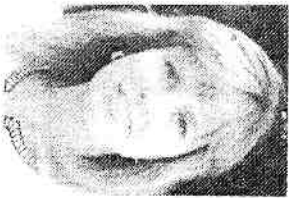


Exchange program offers unique experience

With warm smiles, students, teachers and staff at David A. Brown Middle School welcomed 17 foreign exchange students from Sasebo



PAULA CHURCH

School Days

School District officials including superintendent Dr. Sharron Lindsay, bilingual coordinator Deedee Davis, board member Jeanne Corral and publicist Roy Southwick.

While at BMS, Japanese students each connect to an American counterpart, following them throughout the school day. The visiting students attend regular classes, club meetings and social gatherings. These kids are busy.

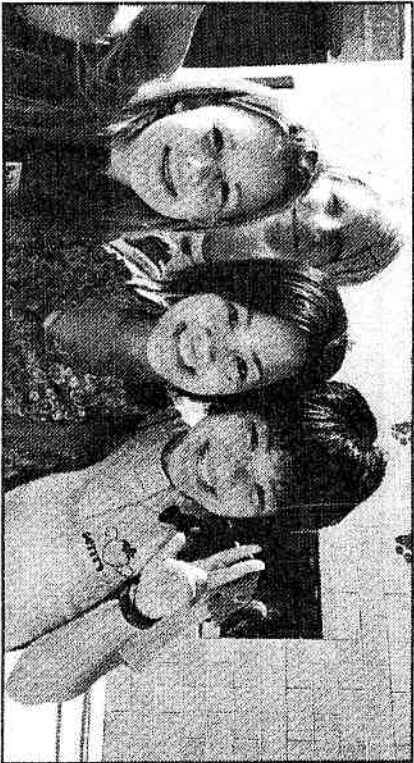


Photo courtesy of David A. Brown Middle School

Exchange program participants, from left: Britney Engeman and Ali Van Zanlen, both of Brown Middle School, and Yumiko Onishi and Yuko Nagano, both of Sasebo Minami High School in Japan.

But keeping them even busier is their after-school itinerary. It includes trips to Disneyland, Universal Studios, Knott's Berry Farm, San Diego's Seaport Village, U.C. Riverside, and even Old Town Temecula. To give Japanese students a real taste of the American lifestyle, weekends are devoted entirely to staying at home with local host families.

Sasebo Minami High and BMS became sister schools about four years ago. Sasebo is a small city located in southwestern Japan, approximately 4050 miles from

explained. "She wanted students from all around the world to get to know one another."

Erskine tells me the exchange program in Japan is highly sought after:

"Japanese students are just yearning to get here," Erskine said. "This is a popular adventure for these kids. They are very interested in everything about us, but academically these students have to make the grades and have the financial whereabouts to get here."

According to Erskine, the program is gaining popularity on our end, too. A variety of schools in Lake Elsinore, Murrieta and Temecula are becoming quite involved in student exchange.

At BMS, Erskine has been helping to connect American and Japanese students from the start. Either through Erskine's culture class, Peers Helping Peers, or through the after-school Culture Club, students are set up with pen-pals from Sasebo, and they will keep in touch with their new friends throughout the year. In addition to connecting to an exchange student, BMS students active in the program are also given the

opportunity to visit Japan. Last April, Erskine joined a group of nine in just such an adventure.

"This is a cultural as well as educational exchange in the truest sense," Erskine explained. "For the kids, one trip to Japan is as good as a semester in college. It adds so much depth to the school experience, and it really builds bridges."

But Erskine also believes that hosting a foreign exchange student in your home is a priceless experience.

"These students are here because they choose to come here," Erskine said. "Japanese students are absolutely precious human beings. They are kind, respectful and very appreciative. Having them here is truly a nice experience."

Want information on how your student can become involved in the foreign exchange program? Or interested in becoming a host family? Contact your child's school administrator, or local PACE representative Nancy Loeschmig at 698-3886.

Paula Church's School Days column appears regularly in the Sun-Tribune.