

City of Walnut Creek YAE!! Youth Ambassador Exchange

One of Sister Cities International goals is to create relationships based on cultural, educational, information and trade exchanges creating lifelong friendships that provide prosperity and peace through person-to-person “citizen diplomacy”. To further this, our local Sister Cities organization began the Youth Ambassador Exchange program in 2012 beginning with Siofok, Hungary. The exclamation marks in YAE!! represent our two sister cities, Siofok and Noceto, Italy.

Eleven eighth grade students left in October for a week in Siofok, staying with families in their homes. In April the Hungarian students, with whom they stayed, traveled to Walnut Creek, for a week-long home stay. Noceto joined the program in 2013-14 with eight student ambassadors in a mutual exchange. An unintended benefit of this student exchange is that a teacher exchange has also developed, as the lead chaperone is an educator. This gives the adults the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the educational systems of our sister countries.

YAE!! was a vision of Walt Schick, Walnut Creek Sister Cities’ member. His positive leadership set the precedent for an ongoing annual educational and cultural opportunity for Walnut Creek youth. Applications are taken from seventh grade students, personal interviews are held, and the selected Ambassadors are announced in the spring. Prior to school starting in the fall, the eighth grade ambassadors meet weekly for six weeks to learn about geography, history, cultural differences, language, and travel tips. They then become Ambassadors of our city, state, and country.

It is a pleasure to see the bonds develop between the students and with their host families. This truly is a unique experience and opportunity, one that furthers the Sister Cities mission of “promoting peace through mutual respect, understanding and cooperation”.

This year Principal April Bush has been invited to join the YAE and will spend 10 days in Noceto interacting and collaborating with the staff of their middle school. In April 2016, the Noceto team will travel to Walnut Creek. This exchange supports the MDUSD goals of building strong and collaborative relationships with community and the world.