



Feeling right at home ...

Exchange students are too busy to be homesick

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News editor

All are European, all are accomplished English speakers, and they hail from a range of places, from small villages to a capital city.

Meet the international students at Hood River Valley High School: Joel Aberg of Sweden, Martin Lanthaler of Italy, Amelie Broecker of Denmark, Vilde Feten of Norway, and Tjorboern Joerstad of Norway.

Call them Joel, Martin, Amelie, Willda, and Toby.

All five students have adopted Americanized pronunciations of their first names (see sidebar for more on that).

Four turned out for fall sports and one (Amelie) is a dancer; age 16; the rest are 17. All but one will reside with one host family for the year, while Amelie will live in three homes, the Rotary Exchange system.

Toby is here via the American Field Service program; Vilde, Joel and Martin are part of Education Foundation. All arrived in late August and report varying frequency and method of contact with home, whether by preference or policy of their program; emails are a regular thing, but phone calls or Skype they keep to a minimum.

Toby said, "You should kind of focus on the fact you're here all year.

You're kind of starting a new life almost."

All have felt welcomed and at home in Hood River; and are here for the 2013-14 school year. They've seen American traditions including baseball and rodeo, and like most teenagers in the western world, they relish fast food. These kids fit in and, whether they are seen playing soccer or dancing in Homecoming Air Guitar, most people don't know they are

exchange students.

As Amelie put it, "It's hard because people don't know you're an exchange student, after the (September) assembly they did, but you have to tell them you're an exchange student and that's always a big ice breaker and you start a conversation."

So, we introduce Tjorboern, Martin, Amelie, Wilde and Joel, five visitors to the community who say they feel right at home.



Toby, Norway

Host family: Laura Dunn and Michael Collins of Hood River; son Keenan, an HRVHS sophomore, and daughter Ivy, 7

Hometown: Hamar, Norway, inland north of Oslo

Early impressions: Everyone seems really nice, and something I'm used to is people coming up and starting a conversation. That doesn't really happen in Norway."

What's keeping you busy? I'm running cross country and I really like the school. I play the guitar and I bought one the first week I was here, and I'm having a great time.

How are you adjusting to a new place? It was weird in the beginning but I've gotten used to it and I feel like home here now.

What is something you want people to know about where you come from? I come from town that is quite a lot bigger than Hood River, but despite the fact that it is larger, there are only two or three churches, and here in Hood River there are 20 or 25. It's a weird thing to see churches everywhere.



Joel, Sweden

Host family: Bill and Mary Edwards of Parkdale, and their son, Billy, an HRVHS senior

Hometown: Stockholm, Sweden

Early impressions: I like the temperature here better. I like the school and I like playing soccer, and my teammates and the coach.

What keeps you busy? (Joel has become a top scorer for the HRVHS soccer team.)

How are you adjusting to a new place? I miss my family and friends but my host family and friends here are doing a good job so far.

What is something you want people to know about where you come from? We have good music, and there are almost as many fast food restaurants here as in Stockholm.



Martin, Italy

Host family: Patricia and Butch Gehrig, Odell; their son Joe, lives in Portland

Hometown: Cermes, Alto Adige, north of Italy near Austria

Early impressions: I like football, and I like the people. They are very friendly and nice to me always.

What's keeping you busy? (Martin has been an active member of the HRVHS football team, registering numerous point-after kicks.)

How are you adjusting to a new place? I miss my friends and family but I am always doing a lot of things so I don't have time for where I miss family.

What is something you want people to know about where you come from? My town also has just one church, all Catholic. Other towns are very much closer so I can go in a bike in five minutes, not like here where you have to use the car; all is such a far distance.



Amelie, Denmark

Host family: Greg Colt and his daughter Kaylee, an HRVHS senior

Hometown: Herning, Denmark, city west of capital Copenhagen

What's keeping you busy? I'm starting at Columbia Gorge Dance Academy, doing jazz and hip-hop. I'm looking forward to that. It's nice to have my sister here because I met a lot of Kaylee's friends when I came.

How are you adjusting to a new place? I'm not the kind of person who gets homesick, not that I don't miss them. I feel at home here and I get along with (people here) and I don't think of people at home.

What is something you want people to know about where you come from? My town has more shops, in Hood River there are not that many stores; it's a bigger town but Hood River feels bigger because you have to ride everywhere.



Vilde, Norway

Host family: Dave and Rendi Porter of Odell, host sister Kelly Porter, an HRVHS junior and son Austin, an HRVHS grad

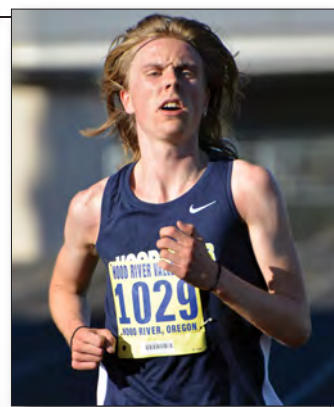
Hometown: Balestrand, Norway, near the Atlantic coast

Early impressions: I like my family; I have a lot of good friends. It's really fun and I love the weather because it's too cold in Norway

What's keeping you busy? I'm playing on the soccer team, which is a lot of fun. It's a kind of big school and I kind of get lost sometimes but I find my way because I have a map. (Unfortunately, Vilde injured her knee and is out for the season.)

How are you adjusting to a new place? I miss my family but not as bad as I thought. I have a great time; I feel like this is how it's supposed to be.

What is something you want people to know about where you come from? My town is so small, not only half of Hood River but it's my hometown and a very small town.



A short pronunciation guide

To ease your greeting of the visiting students, here are those localized versions, and a guide to pronouncing their names as they would back home:

Tjorboern Joerstad — To-woy-hyur-en YOUR-shtah

"It's really hard to pronounce my name, and even before I came my host family asked if they could call me Toby. Everyone's started calling me Toby and I like it. I've started calling myself Toby."

Joel Aberg — YO-well OH-bear-ig

His Spanish-speaking teammates pronounce the J as an H, "but my family calls me Joel, like the American way."

Martin Lanthaler — Maartehn LAWN-tall-er

He says it with an elongated first syllable but finds that his football teammates generally give him the Spanish pronunciation, "Mar-TEEN" which he is fine with.

Amelie Broecker — Eh-MAYlee-ah Bworgah

"I've heard Emily and Emilia, lots of different ways." Her friends mostly call her "Amelia."

Vilde Feten — VILL-deh Fetttn

Mostly she is called "Vilda," adding that "it's different for every person; I've heard Vanilla, Videlia, and Firehawk, for some reason. I do not know why."

FAR FROM HOME: Hood River Valley High School exchange students (top photo, from left) Amelie Broecker (Denmark), Joel Aberg (Sweden), Vilde Feten (Norway), Tjorboern Joerstad (Norway) and Martin Lanthaler (Italy) have been busy this fall with school, friends and extracurricular activities, as can be seen above, from top: Tjorboern (Toby) running cross country; Joel playing soccer; Martin on the football team and Amelie in a dance routine for Air Guitar. Vilde, too, played soccer for the Eagles until a recent knee injury put her out for the season.