Please send your ideas or suggestions for upcoming issues of Future Leaders EXpress to: FLEX@americancouncils.org

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20th Anniversary Celebrations

On November 1-3, 2013, hundreds of FLEX alumni gathered in Moscow, Kyiv, Almaty and Tbilisi to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the FLEX program. The event included receptions at Ambassadors’ residences and included alumni from the very first year of the program (1993-94) to most recent 2012-13 alumni. The weekend events focused on career development, volunteerism, entrepreneurship, and networking. The highlight of the weekend was a video linkup between all four cities on November 2 featuring the FLEX program founder, Senator William Bradley. The achievements of the program “are represented in the lives of the students who participated in the program,” Bradley said. “They are contributing to the future of Russia or the former [Soviet] republics. They found parts of themselves they didn’t know existed.”

During the video linkup in Tbilisi, the three Alumni Coordinators posed questions to the Senator and at the end “virtually” presented him with a 20th anniversary commemorative t-shirt signed by the alumni.

A special appearance by Georgian Parliamentary Chairman Davit Usupushvili (a Muskie alumnus), attended by Ambassador Norland, was a fitting closure. In his remarks, Mr. Usupushvili reminisced about his time in the U.S., struggling with the language, the patience and support of people around him, and the enduring importance of exchange. Looking directly at Ambassador Norland and referring to FLEX, he implored, “We need another 20 years of this!”

Andriy Shevchenko, Ukrainian Member of Parliament and FLEX ’94, addressed the Kyiv group during the video conference, and shared that Senator Bradley was his inspiration for getting into politics.

Keynote speakers included the U.S. Embassy’s Cultural Affairs Officer, Andrew Paul, who presented the following remarks on behalf of U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyat: “Judging by the caliber of the FLEX alumni I have met so far, I can honestly say that the name we give this exchange program, “Future Leaders,” is well-deserved. Truly, your language skills, leadership abilities, cross-cultural knowledge, and progressive vision are unique and spectacular gifts...” Alumni also heard from special guest speaker from the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation and from their peers about exceptional alumni projects.

Alumni from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan gathered in Almaty where the festivities included a welcome from U.S. Consul General Theresa Grenchik, presentations by stellar alumni, speed-networking and an interactive training on how to successfully develop a strategic business plan. Special guests included Marina (Sharbakova) Sharipova ’02, a former Musical Channel Anchor and well-known blogger and Dinara Tanasheva ’94, currently a law partner at Ernst and Young and the first Kazakh legal partner among the “Big 4” companies in Kazakhstan.
International Education Week

Dates: November 11-22, 2013
International Education Week is an opportunity to celebrate the benefits of international education and exchange worldwide.

Announcing a FLEX photo contest!

Please submit all photos at https://flexprogram.submittable.com by January 13, 2014. Students may submit one photo per category. Winners will receive a special FLEX prize!

Categories:
- Best Volunteer Moment
- Showing Your School Spirit
- Best Holiday Photo

Find out more at:
eca.state.gov/programs-initiatives/international-education-week/
https://www.facebook.com/InternationalEdWeek

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Spread the word!
Tell your friends back home to check out FLEX recruitment here:
flex.americancouncils.org
Volunteer Spotlight

FLEX students around the U.S. are doing some amazing things in their host communities. Take a look at these stories about Lia, Yuliya, and eight FLEX students in Indiana.

**Lia** from Armenia, staying with the Kelley family in Lamar, Missouri, is digging into her American experience! Lia had completed 28 hours of volunteer work by late September through helping at the middle school and by being a dog judge at the Liberal Prairie Days Dog Contest.

She has also been featured in a news spot (right) highlighting her positive host family experience. Lia also started a new club at her school, Lamar High School. She says the ‘Club will organize different activities. Members will learn a language, which will be a benefit for their future college folder. Also there will be national dance learning day, national food day, music and different presentations, comparing different cultures, learning religious life, and maybe prayer in another language. Everybody is excited!’

**Yuliya** from Ukraine has shown a keen interest in engaging with her D.C. community, determined to complete over 100 hours of community service this year! In September she and her host sister, Isabel, volunteered at the D.C. Green Festival, an event that promotes building a sustainable community and living a more sustainable lifestyle. Yuliya has made the environment a priority in her goals for the year, and hopes to implement a project in her home country to protect the environment and apply lessons of sustainability learned during her FLEX year. Yuliya is pictured holding the “Recycle” sign.

Eight FLEX students in Indiana volunteered by sharing their culture at the Indianapolis Sister City Festival. These eager students volunteered the whole day for 9 hours each, a total of 72 hours!
Welcome to the United States!

Some of your first moments in the U.S. were caught on camera...
20th Anniversary Contest Winners: Share Your FLEX Story

The FLEX program is pleased to announce the winners of the Share Your FLEX Story, a 20th anniversary competition. FLEX students, alumni, host family members, and placement organization representatives were invited to submit their impressions and the impact the FLEX program has had on their lives.

1st Place, Essay Contest: Iryna Lysenko, Alumna ’03 (Mykolaiv, Ukraine)

Iryna’s essay, “Three Lessons Learned From Volunteering,” vividly describes the impact volunteerism had on her personal and professional development. Iryna took an active part in community service projects in Fruitland, Idaho while on the FLEX program, and continues to serve her home community to this day.

“I learned my first lesson of volunteering: helping people in new, meaningful and sustainable ways – that was the concept I adopted. It all started when I became a FLEX student in 2002. I spent an incredible year in Fruitland, Idaho, where I volunteered at the community library and in a school fundraising campaign for the homeless...

2nd Place, Essay Contest: Jodi Meek, FLEX Host Mother and Local Coordinator

Jodi shares her story of hosting a FLEX student from Ukraine and the impact it had on her family and her decision to become actively involved in working with exchange students from around the globe. Jodi’s essay highlights that FLEX is not a one-way exchange and that host communities are equally impacted by exchange students.

“...It all began 10 short months ago. With her first statement once we left the airport, “I have never seen so many cars!!”, I realized without a doubt that we had much to learn and she was in for some incredible new experiences.... I will always recall the joy and interest on her face as she tasted chocolate milk, peanut butter and the all-mighty Hershey’s candy. The simple pleasures of our lives which really we take for granted... They are all seen for the first time, although with you since birth, when you walk your path next to an exchange student...”

Read the rest of Iryna’s and Jodi’s essays, along with other 20th anniversary contest winners’ submissions: bradleyherald.org/2013/10/15/flex-20th-anniversary-competition-winners

20th Anniversary Contest Winners: $20 Challenge

FLEX alumni were invited to organize projects with a budget of $20 to highlight 20 years of the exchange with community projects throughout Eurasia.

1st Place: Vladimir Krekhmayer, Alumnus ’13 (Pavlodar, Kazakhstan)

Vladimir used the power of online media to promote his project, Make the Children Smile, a fundraising event and clothing drive for children at the Pavlodar Orphanage. Four alumni collected donations over a two-day period and attracted donors with cookies and American music.

Read about additional $20 projects here: bradleyherald.org/2013/10/15/flex-20th-anniversary-competition-winners
SEPTEMBER: Turan, a CIEE student from Azerbaijan, is described as a “future leader and a great ambassador for her country.” The exchange year has just begun and Turan is already involved in several school and community activities. She is a member of the volleyball team, Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) and the International Club at her host school. Turan has performed over 20 hours of community service. She volunteers at the local library, tutors elementary age children in math, and is a leader among other exchange students, helping them adjust to homesickness and school.

Turan has a courageous attitude and readily tries new activities. She recently auditioned for a part in the local community theatre production of “Frosty the Snowman,” started taking hip hop dance lessons with her younger host brother and joined her host family church choir.

Most of the people Turan meets cannot pronounce Azerbaijan correctly and have no idea where it’s located. She patiently helps them pronounce it and then shares interesting facts such as “It has the world’s largest KFC” and “Baku sits along the Caspian Sea.” Turan is also a strong supporter of exchange programs. At a recent speaking engagement she explained to the audience how much the FLEX program and other exchange programs mean to international exchange students, and then she asked them to consider becoming a host family. Turan impressively represents the FLEX program and Azerbaijan. Congratulations Turan!

OCTOBER: Anna Terekhova, a World Link student from Russia, is making a remarkable impact on her host community and school. Anna has already volunteered 21 hours of service at the Boys and Girls Club. She monitors the children’s activities, offers tutoring, reads books, and teaches crafts, but her community service doesn’t stop there! Anna has also gardened with the local rescue mission, played bingo and visited with veterans at the VA Hospital, and volunteered as a docent with the Arts and Museum Association.

Anna takes pleasure in her role as an ambassador; so far she has given four presentations about her home country, three to her classmates and one to a local men’s group. To make them more exciting, she cooked Russian pancakes, which were a big hit!

Anna is also very active in her host school. She is a member of four clubs: the Shelter Animals, Film, Key Club, and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) club—which gives her an opportunity to participate in discussions about teen life and a forum for supporting fellow classmates. Anna’s involvement in her high school and her dynamic leadership skills have not gone unnoticed. She already has been given an award for being a Leadership Commissioner of Eco-consciousness. Anna has started her FLEX year strong, engaging in activities that showcase her interests, dedication, and passion, along with principles of the FLEX program. Congratulations Anna!
My first meal I ate with my host family was _____________.

Submit your answers to FLEX@americancouncils.org. Answers will be included in the Spring newsletter.

“Chicken Enchiladas”
“Pot roast”
“Pasta”
“Macaroni & Cheese”
“Pizza”
“Hamburgers”

“You can take a person out of FLEX, but you cannot take FLEX out of a person, the famous saying nicely applies to my personal FLEX experience. Six years have passed but FLEX remains an integral part of my life. Thank you for the opportunity to feel the FLEX spirit again, alive and developing.”

- Ketevan Tateshvili ’07