

Solana Beach residents join the UCSD Host Family Program

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SOLANA BEACH RESIDENTS HOST FOREIGN STUDENTS

For Solana Beach residents Betsy and John Neu, sometimes China is just a few steps away. They host students from other countries including China on a regular basis as part of a Host Family Program at the University of California, San Diego.

The goal of the International Center program is to welcome incoming UCSD international students and scholars and provide them with housing during their first few days in San Diego. More than one hundred families in the San Diego area have opened their homes in the past 15 years, many several times, to international students and scholars immediately following their arrival.

Betsy Neu was especially interested in hosting a Chinese student because her son, Chris, had lived in China for a year to learn the language. "The first student that we hosted was Chinese and his name was Dong-Xiao Yu. His nickname was Tx and we found him to be a delightful young man," said Betsy. "He is an applied physics graduate student at UCSD and we still see him regularly.

"Tx likes to cook, so sometimes he visits us with preparations for dumplings and makes them to go along with stir-fry vegetables that we help prepare. My husband and Tx really enjoy talking about our respective cultures and learning about each other," she added.

Right after Thanksgiving last year, the Neus hosted a traditional holiday celebration. The guests of honor included Tx and his girlfriend, a Rockefeller Foundation graduate researcher in microbiology named Jaibizu, and Tu, a 19 year old graduate student in physics. All were former guests of the Neus during their first arrival to San Diego.

The Neus prepare for a new guest student by looking at a map to see where they are from and reading about their region. "The fact that I have been to China helps me appreciate their feelings about the awesomeness of our country," said Betsy.

Her son is able to advise her on certain dietary preferences such as not serving salad. "Unless the student is from Canton or Shanghai where they would be exposed to Western culture, they don't eat raw vegetables," said Betsy. "They are also unaccustomed to our fat-laced diet," she added.

"We are able to help in ways that might seem insignificant, but are important to a foreigner. For example, I told Tu about the Chinese grocery store on Convoy Street in San Diego. I also taught him how to reserve an airline ticket so he could visit his uncle in New York for Christmas, and I went to AAA to get him a guide and a map of New York. This enabled him to study New York before he arrived," said Betsy.

The Neus have a spare bedroom always ready for the students. They usually stay three to four days until their graduate housing is arranged. The first thing Betsy does is take the student to campus for the foreign student orientation held every September at the International Center. She also takes them back to campus as they need it and then to their assigned housing.

Betsy gives her student guests household items to get them started in their apartments. "We assisted Tu in adjusting to his new apartment and showed him how to use the garbage disposal and vacuum cleaner. I just teach the basics and they take it in stride and adapt very quickly," she said.

Next year the Neus may branch out and request a Central or South American student. "Our son Jeffrey has been in Chile as part of a foreign student exchange program through the American Field Service," said Betsy. "Since Jeffrey has become fluent in Spanish, we would enjoy hosting a student from a South or Central American country. We are all very internationally oriented in this family," she added.

Betsy recommends the UCSD Host Family Program highly. "I would like to see more families involved in the program. It is very rewarding and an excellent exchange of cultures and ideas, especially for families with teenage or college-age children. It stimulates their thinking and gives us all a greater appreciation of what we have and where others come from," she said.

There are more than 1,000 international students and scholars from over 80 different countries at UCSD. International students and scholars have come from around the world, including Africa, Latin America, Asian countries, the Middle East and almost every European country.

The Host Family Program is just one of many programs and activities that the International Center provides for international students and scholars. Others vary from social organizations and events such as the International Club, an International Cafe, ethnic dinners and an International Kitchen; to educational programs such as lectures, films, the American English-in-Action Tutor Program and a variety of orientation programs.

For more information about the UCSD Host Family Program, call Dottie Conway, the Host Family Program Coordinator at 459-2706 or 534-3730 or Betsy Neu at 755-7274.

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