

PRESS RELEASE

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Making Lifelong Friends And A Better World

By Lion Ray Tweedale

The Wisconsin Lions host 50-70 youths every year from 25 or so different countries through the Wisconsin Lions Youth Camp and Exchange program (YCE). For the guest youth, simple family practices and daily routines here will be an eye opening experience. Most youths from Europe will comment on how “big” things are here – cars, trucks, stores, restaurants and just about everything. Many also comment on noticing the pride in the U.S. flag as they see it prominently displayed everywhere they visit.

The Wisconsin Lions YCE is much like the 100+ other camps offered by Lions Clubs throughout the world. Youths apply to participate in this cultural exchange and are sponsored by Lions Clubs -- one in their home city and one where they will be visiting. Once approved the youth are ready to serve as ambassadors for their country.

One of the many benefits of the YEC is the discounting of myths and stereotypes as we find out more about each other and our homelands. While here, the youths are introduced to each other at a week-long camp which is designed with fun and informative activities. There are discussions about world issues and presentations about each country from the youth’s perspective. Friendly competitions such as the “Un-Olympics” also lead to life-long friendships. A highlight is the trip to Madison to visit the State Capitol and Lions Eye Bank of Wisconsin.

With the generosity of the program, all of the friendly people they meet and their relationships with the families they are visiting, the youth find they have created lasting friendships. Each youth returns home and shares their experiences with family, friends and sponsoring Lions. Social networks like Facebook and SKYPE provide an avenue to keep conversations and friendships alive. Every year at least one camper will return from the previous year’s camp to be a counselor – at their own expense.

This program helps make lifelong friendships that ultimately make a better world for us all. As a young visitor from Hungary said, “We should all have our country’s leaders attend camp with us.”

If you would like to participate and create your own lasting memories and friendships in our program, please visit our website at <http://www.wilions.org/youthexchange>.