

Students perform cultural exchange on quiet crescent



By Brock Weir

Culture in Aurora is not limited to a few places in and around Church Street – a clear, tangible exchange has spanned from Switzerland all the way to a quiet Aurora crescent.

14 year old Laura Dubais recently left Aurora bound for her home in Geneva, after experiencing a cross-cultural exchange with 13 year old Alice Sandiford, a Grade 8 student at Devins Drive Public School.

The exchange between the girls began several months ago when they applied to learn more about each other's countries and languages through learning – on the scene. When The Auroran last visited Alice, she was anxiously awaiting word on whether she had made it through to the next round in her application.

She needn't have worried and this summer, she and a host of Canadian students made their way across the Atlantic to their destinations via Paris.

“It was amazing and I loved it,” said Alice of her 24 day experience in Europe. “The trip was really long – bad airplane food! – but on the first night we went to Paris, and then we were on a flight to Geneva.

“Switzerland isn't the biggest country, but it is really nice. It's just really pretty and there are mountains everywhere. It felt like I was in a hometown. Laura's family was really nice. Her sister was really funny; she's a year younger than me and she is absolutely crazy!”

Sitting around their dining room table, when Laura was asked if she agreed her sister was crazy, she gave a resounding “yes!” and whipped out an iPhone to produce some convincing photographic evidence!

All kidding aside, Alice said it was “really interesting” to meet Laura's family and Laura herself.

“She is nice and awesome,” said Alice. “As the weeks went by, we got to know each other way better and became friends.”

They certainly had a lot of time and adventures to get acquainted as they took trips into Italy and Liechtenstein before coming back to Aurora together for the second leg of their cultural exchange.

“They are really nice,” said Laura of the Sandifords. “We talk about everything, we laugh together and it is very nice. The program is very cool and interesting and it is cool to learn another language and to be with other people.”

While Alice said the program did indeed help her hone her French, it was a bit of a challenge at first as Laura's family lived in a very

Germanic part of Switzerland. Nevertheless, still in awe of her experience, she said it is something she would encourage any student to try.

?It is a once in a lifetime thing and you want to make the most of it,? she said. ?It is an amazing experience. If you have a real interest in it, go for it. It is just a really nice way to learn about a new culture, enrich your language, and give you a whole different perspective on home.?

As for Alice's parents, Judy and Dave, who previously hosted a student from Beijing, they are equally enthusiastic about the exchange.

?Don't do it!? she joked with a laugh when asked what advice she would give to parents who might hesitate at the idea of an exchange. ?No, it is fantastic. [Alice and Laura] work great together.?

Added Dave: ?It also helps you get to know your child better, and through the eyes of another child as well.?