

# Exchange student absorbs culture

By Tony Judnich

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In many ways, 16-year-old Yi-Miao "Ivy" Huang is a typical teenager.

For example, she enjoys hanging out at the beach, shopping at the mall and playing sports.

Ivy is studying at Melbourne High School and living in Brevard County as part of the Rotary Youth Exchange, in which students live with host families and absorb different cultures. Rotary International is an organization of service clubs, known as Rotary Clubs, which are located worldwide.

Ivy currently is living with Pat Shankle, president of the Suntree Rotary Club.

"Here, she goes by her American name, 'Ivy,'" Ms. Shankle said. "It has been a real delight to have her here."

Ivy, who is a junior at MHS, will live with Ms. Shankle for three months before living with other local families for the remainder of the school year.

Ivy hails from Tainan, a city of more than 500,000 residents in Taiwan. The daily schedule at MHS is very different compared to the typical school day in Taiwan, Ms. Shankle said.

"Students here change classes and teachers all day long," she said. "At her school in Taiwan, they are in the same classroom all day, and they don't change teachers for every class. Here, she finds it difficult to rush to her locker and then to her other classes."

Also, the school day in Taiwan usually lasts from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., while here it runs from 8:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m., Ms. Shankle

said.

"It's different," Ivy said about attending MHS. "Every class has different students. It's difficult to make friends."

Ms. Shankle said students in Taiwan take a test similar to the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.

"When they are preparing for the test (in Taiwan), they will stay in school until 9 p.m.," Ms. Shankle said. "Also, the school year there begins in August and ends in July. They only get about six weeks off."

This school year is challenging for Ivy because although the days are shorter than what she is used to, she must interpret her English-language lessons into Chinese, Ms. Shankle said.

"She did have English as a second language back home," said Ms. Shankle, who helps Ivy with her homework. "Now, she's trying to make it her first language."

Ivy's classes at MHS include math, which Ms. Shankle said is not as difficult as the math she was taught in Taiwan, and English literature.

"It's tough because of the translation. It's the older English," Ms. Shankle said.

She said outside of school, Ivy enjoys exploring the local area, communicating with her family back home, attending church and participating in Rotary events, such as the recent Great Tastes of Suntree fundraiser at the Brevard Zoo.

Ivy said the main challenges have been being away from her family and learning more of the English language.

"I like it here very much," she said. "But it's kind of different from my country.

"The whole idea is that the students are learning cultures and differences at a young age. They get to learn our language, and it's our way of spreading peace and goodwill throughout the world."

## Pat Shankle Suntree Rotary Club

The culture is different, and the food, because I ate rice with every meal in Taiwan. Here, many people eat fast food."

She sounded surprised when she talked about how American teenagers can drive starting at age 16, while teens in Taiwan must wait until they are 18.

"I can't really find any similarities (between the United States and Taiwan)," Ivy said.

She said she enjoys the local beaches, the ocean and the Indian River Lagoon.

"It's very beautiful here. There is so much water, with the ocean and the river," she said.

Ivy played basketball, volleyball and badminton at her school back home, and she plans to try out for the girls' basketball team at MHS.

She is one of 67 "inbound" youth exchange students, or high school students who came from other countries to live and study in Florida this school year.

Students who are chosen for the exchange program must complete an application process that lasts about a year. Rotary officials organize living arrangements with the students' hosts and help pay for the students' living expenses.

The Suntree Rotary Club is part of Rotary Interna-

tional District 6930. The district consists of more than 50 Rotary clubs in Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Okeechobee, Martin and Palm Beach counties.

The district is hosting four inbound students this school year. While Ivy is in Brevard County, the other students are in other counties in the district.

"The whole idea is that the students are learning cultures and differences at a young age," Ms. Shankle said. "They get to learn our language, and it's our way of spreading peace and goodwill throughout the world."

She said Rotary Club members take the inbound youth exchange students on several trips -- such as visits to Kennedy Space Center and Disney World -- that expose them to American culture.

Before the school year began, Ivy enjoyed a beach picnic with the other inbound students and 52 "outbound" students -- or those from Florida who went on to live and study abroad this school year.

"The students who are outbound are ambassadors for the United States and Florida," Ms. Shankle said.

*Florida high school students interested in joining the youth exchange for the 2009-10 school year can learn more about the program at [www.ryeflorida.org](http://www.ryeflorida.org).*

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