

TRAVEL

Exchange program with Italy targets adults

Through "CIAO Project," Italians will visit area and stay with local families.

By CINDY LARSON
clarson@news-sentinel.com

It started with a simple question: "Why do the kids have all the fun?"

The reference was to youths who participate in international exchange programs. Three women — two in Italy, one in Kendallville — came up with a simple answer: Exchange programs don't have to be just for youths.

Their musings gave birth to the "CIAO Project," an exchange program matching about a dozen Italians with host families in northeast Indiana. The Italians will be here from Thursday to April 14; it's anticipated the American hosts will visit their guests in Italy in 2008. CIAO in this case is an acronym that stands for "Creating Italy/Indiana Adventures Overseas."

The project is the brainchild of Italian Gloria Defilippi, Grace Housholder of Kendallville and Cathy Linsenmayer, who lives on Sylvan Lake near Rome City in the summer but spends the rest of the year in Ivrea, Italy. She is the sister of News-Sentinel photographer Steve Linsenmayer.



Housholder: Did legwork in organizing trip

Cathy Linsenmayer has lived and worked in Italy since 1987 as a computer programmer, project manager and in marketing and sales support. She's married to an Italian, Antonio, and now does part-time consulting work while raising a family.

She's been a volunteer for years with AFS, a nonprofit group that provides intercultural learning and community-service opportunities through exchange programs, and has served as an AFS exchange student host. One day while talking, Linsenmayer and her friend, Defilippi, another AFS volunteer, lamented the fact that only youths traditionally are exchange students.

Later that year, while in Indiana for the summer, Linsenmayer found herself saying the same thing to Housholder, who is an AFS volunteer here. She's also the editor of the Greater Fort Wayne Family magazine, a product of KPC Media Group Inc. out of Kendallville.

"She is a wonderfully enthusiastic and active person, and so the idea of organizing the CIAO exchange was born," Linsenmayer said.



Courtesy photo

A group from Italy will visit Indiana in early April, staying with people in the Kendallville area. A sort of exchange program for mostly adults, the "CIAO project" matches Italians with Hoosier families, who plan to go to Italy as guests of the Italians in 2008. Cathy Linsenmayer, front row, far right, is an American who helped organize the trip and who spends part of each summer at her home on Sylvan Lake in Rome City.

EXCHANGE:

Local program targets adults

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Both Linsenmayer and Housholder credit each other for doing much of the legwork in organizing the trip.

The group of 13 Italians will be here over Easter and will attend Mass at University of Notre Dame in South Bend.

Housholder said that was the one thing the group most wanted to do, and the timing was good for a trip because Italians get a generous amount of time off from work at Easter. Although if she'd had her preference, she'd have had them come in the summer "when Indiana is at its best."

Although the lakes won't be warm enough for swimming and the weather will certainly be unpredictable in early April, the hosts have a full itinerary of activities planned, and the Italians are eager to see Indiana.

"All are excited about the opportunity to discover 'real life' in America as opposed to seeing the usual tourist sites like Disneyland, New York, Chicago, etc.," Linsenmayer said in an e-mail.

Aside from the trip to Notre Dame, the group will have lunch with an Amish family and will spend an afternoon in Shipshewana.

They'll tour the new downtown Allen County Public Library and the historic Allen County Courthouse. They'll have lunch with East Noble High School teach-

ers and tour downtown Kendallville. On the work-exchange day, Italians will be spending time with Hoosiers who work in similar fields.

Because some of the host families still have work responsibilities while the Italians are in town, Housholder has arranged for some volunteers from the community to help with the "field trips." And Housholder, who will be going on most of the excursions, said the outings will be an education for her because even she hasn't been to all the places they'll visit.

The trip isn't sponsored by anybody — all visitors are paying their own costs. However, by staying with a host family, the Italians will save money on lodging. And besides, "Everyone really appreciates the opportunity to stay with an American family, because this is really the key to being able to get to know and understand the culture in the short time we will be there," said Linsenmayer, who is traveling with the group.

She doesn't anticipate any major communication problems between the Americans and the Italians.

"Almost everyone (of the Italians) speaks English fairly well, but there will certainly be some interesting and amusing moments as people try to communicate," she said.

Language problems aside, Housholder, who has hosted exchange students in the past, says it's fascinating to learn about other people's cultures and belief systems.

"The No. 1 thing, I think, is it's fun and it makes your life so much richer," she said. "The world is becoming smaller, and it just really helps when you try to see the things we have in common with other people."