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Host families sought for Italy/Indiana exchange

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KENDALLVILLE - We often hear about the wonderful experiences students have with foreign exchange programs.

One day while enjoying coffee together in their hometown of Ivrea, Italy, Cathy Linsenmayer and her friend Gloria deFillippi said simultaneously, "Why do the kids have all the fun?" The two AFS volunteers have spent many years arranging for Italian students to go abroad with AFS and for foreign students to come to Italy with AFS.

Several months later when Cathy was at her summer home on Sylvan Lake, she and I were talking and the same question came up: "Why do the kids have all the fun?"

That gave birth to CIAO - Creating Italy/Indiana Adventures Overseas. "Ciao" is Italian for "Hi there!" "Welcome," "How's it going?" or "See you later." Cathy and I came up with that name through a series of e-mails after she returned to Ivrea in northern Italy, near Turin.

Cathy, who has relatives in Fort Wayne, is an American. She worked in Italy during the 1980s and then married an Italian (Antonio). They bought a home on Sylvan Lake three years ago and they come here during the summer. Her mother Caroline Linsenmayer is a volunteer at the Gene Stratton-Porter Memorial on Sylvan Lake.

Twelve to 15 Italians (some are single or coming without their spouses, some are couples and some are father/son combinations) will be coming to the Kendallville area for nine days in April. For most of them this will be their first trip to the U.S., although Gloria studied in California in 1975 as an AFS student, and Cathy, of course, grew up in the U.S. and spends her summers here. Their ability to speak English varies. The whole idea is to have a fun, educational, low-cost week getting to know everyday people from a different culture.

The Italians will arrive in Chicago on Thursday, April 5, and depart Saturday, April 14. The only events scheduled so far are a welcome potluck Friday night, April 6, at the McCray Mansion in Kendallville and attending Easter services at the chapel at Notre Dame in South Bend.

We will give the CIAO participants a list of options, let them number them in order of preference and then work out a schedule for the week. A visit to Shipshewana and learning about the Amish is already definitely on the schedule, as well as a tour of the Windmill Museum.

The host families will be welcome to participate in the CIAO group activities during the week, but they will have no obligation to do so.



Gloria deFillippi (left) and Cathy Linsenmayer are looking for families to host Italian visitors to Kendallville in April.

People in the Kendallville area can get involved even if they don't host. We are looking for suggestions of locations and activities to put on the list of possibilities for the CIAO participants and also some volunteer drivers. For the host families this will be a chance to be a tourist in their hometown.

But the most exciting part of the story is this - the families that host will make a trip to Italy to stay with the people they hosted. We will either go in February 2008 (during Ivrea's famed Mardi Gras festivities) or summer 2008. Airfare will be cheaper in February but June may fit into people's schedules better.

If you would like to suggest an activity for the CIAO group, would like to help with transportation or would like to consider hosting, I would love to hear from you. Please call me at 347-0738 or e-mail me at graceh@kpcnews.net.

Ciao!

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