

ERIN DUNN, FORTUNA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
COMMUNITY COMMENT FOR TUESDAY, APRIL 16

Congratulations to the new Humboldt/Del Norte high school singles tennis champion Pedro Morandi from Fortuna High. In this last Sunday's newspaper article about the tournament, the Times-Standard reporter described Pedro's success in Crescent City as a result of having variety in pace and shot-making as well as powerful ground strokes.

What the story didn't tell you is that Pedro's three moms—and three dads were there in the stands watching his matches.

It's not as dysfunctional as it might sound. In fact, I'm one of the moms. Pedro is Rotary exchange student from Brazil and is on loan to us from his parents in Campinas.

Pedro is simply an inspiration. He is a conscientious student, a committed athlete and best of all, he's funny, compassionate and an all-around good person.

I've been a host mom for five exchange students. And it's been a life-changing experience for me. If you've been thinking about hosting an exchange student—and Rotary and AFS are excellent programs—then I encourage you to take the next step and sign up. I thought about it for a year or two before finally gathering the nerve to say I was interested.

I am an unlikely host mom. I've never had kids—quite frankly I was always afraid of kids. I've never been married. I'm in my 50s. I don't like to cook. And yet, I managed to keep five kids alive for the four months they were in my care (the Rotary program works best for me because they have three host families throughout the year). If I can do it YOU can do it.

I do have one disclaimer—for two of the kids I did have a co-parent—my live-in boyfriend, and he did the cooking during that time—including for Pedro.

Sometimes I'm asked about how the exchange kids have compared to each other. I've loved them all—and they've all been different. Each one has been exceptional in their own way. They don't have to be tennis stars to be a perfect exchange student. It DID make it fun for sure to watch Pedro play, but so does going grocery shopping with them for the first time, experiencing homecoming with them, and having an international day at your house when kids from France, Italy, Hungary, Argentina, and Thailand stay the night.

There are also challenges. Not all of the kids arrive with perfect English skills, some are homesick in the beginning, some don't like to get up early on Wednesday mornings for Rotary. You work through it.

If you have been thinking about being an exchange parent or family, I urge you to find out more about it and have your questions answered by someone from the program. Or better yet, talk to another family that has hosted. Families are being lined up now for the next school year. My best advice: Take the plunge.