



Cortland therapist enjoys Brazil learning experience

Alisha McCune did much more than vacation in Brazil.

The Cortland Acres Physical Therapist earned an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the Brazilian culture first hand through The Rotary Foundation's Group Study Exchange program.

"Living the culture was the most educating experience," McCune said. "Seeing and understanding differences and similarities was the biggest learning experience from this trip."

Part of the exchange experience requires participants to stay with different Rotarian host families during the four- to six-week stay in the host country.

"I loved my host families most of all," she said. "They were the best part of the exchange. Language barrier or not I was able to develop a relationship with each family. Each family welcomed me like family. Many bought special foods and even gifts for me."

How did this Tucker County resident learn about this unique opportunity? McCune credits Don Black, Cortland Acres administrator, who presented this idea to her several years ago.

"I was ineligible at that point in time," she said. "The opportunity came around again to apply for the Rotary Foundation's group study exchange to Brazil, so I applied again. After an interview process, I was selected."

An eligible candidate must be a non-Rotarian professional between the ages of 25 and 40, and fully employed with at least two years of work experience in their chosen field.

Last May, McCune packed her bags and headed to Brazil with a team of three other professionals from the same Rotarian District. During the stay in Brazil, she was exposed to multiple physical therapy clinics and universities.

“The education system and training was very similar to the United States but clinically there were differences,” she said. “The documentation and insurance guidelines which I spend a huge portion of my day completing here in the United States were essentially nonexistent in Brazil, freeing clinicians to treat.”

Along the way McCune visited major businesses in each town and took tours. “We met with mayors, gave radio and television interviews, talked to schoolchildren and presented to an array of groups,” she said. “We toured universities, schools, banks, factories, churches, coffee plantations and many more businesses.” She also took in some tourist activities.

“I got to take an astronomy class given by a host family, who was a professor, and see the southern hemisphere through a telescope,” she said. “I saw the rings of Saturn, Mars and the Southern Cross constellation. I saw several concerts, a symphony and even a rodeo. My favorite events were the all day barbeques.” Despite a hectic schedule, McCune learned to adapt to the Brazilian culture.

As time went, I felt myself changing and adapting to the culture,” she said. “Even now I am much more relaxed overall with improved patience.”

McCune highly encourage young professionals to get involved in the Rotary Foundation’s Group Study Exchange program.

“Rotary International is a wonderful organization and involved in many activities around the world,” she said. “If you ever get a chance to be involved, do so and you will gain more personally than you will ever give.”