My year in Brazil with Jon Birch

Jon Birch, our speaker and returning outbound exchange student to Brazil (2008-2009), had prepared an elaborate power point slide show for us. Alas, the hotel’s projector failed to translate the digital presentation to the screen from either Jon’s or Anna Snell’s laptop computers for reasons none of our experts or the Otesaga Hotel’s staff could explain. But, life goes on.

As it turned out, we were able to view a selection of photos from Jon’s master photo file from which Jon selected appropriate pictures as he went along and did his best to describe what each photo represented.

By way of introduction Jon spoke in Portuguese to demonstrate his language fluency and told us that his year in Brazil was “one of the greatest years of my life.”

For the past year John has been based in the northeast sector of Brazil, a bit off the coast but within striking distance of Brazil’s famous beaches which he was able to visit. In fact, travel around Brazil, the largest country in South America, was a recurring and frequent opportunity for Jon and other Rotary exchange students — which explains why most of the photos we viewed were of venues other than his home base.

“The travel was awesome,” Jon said. “I got to see the whole country eventually.”

Being a large country, Brazil supports a large quota of youth exchange students and they often travel together. Many of Jon’s photos were filled with the smiling faces of his youth exchange colleagues from other countries — Germany, Mexico, etc.

Brazil is known in many quarters, and perhaps it is a stereotype, as a country of beaches, babes and bikinis — but, of course, there’s much more to Brazil than sand, sun and tanned skin. Inadvertently, as Jon scrolled through his photo file, we were briefly exposed to a fine series of female forms, several taken from interesting angles, e.g. the derriere (to borrow a French term), but all appropriately clad, of course. “I’m not responsible for those pictures,” Jon said, issuing a blanket disclaimer. “My camera got passed around a lot on these trips.”

There’s something to be said for the sunshine in South America where the calendar and the seasons are the reverse of our own — winter there is like a summer here, well, maybe not this summer. Whatever their hemispheric heritage and the consequent weather conditions, Brazilians on the whole appear to benefit from lots of sunshine as evidenced by well-tanned skin tones. But, it takes a few weeks to absorb the requisite rays and get the look. When Jon first arrived his pale Cooperstown skin stood out. “When I first went to my school, they just stared at me.”

In spite of all the travel, Jon’s education wasn’t neglected in Brazil. Clad in an official school uniform, Jon reported for classes at 7 a.m. “We had three different classes with three different teachers in the same room,” Jon explained. “Then, after a break, we’d go back in our room for three more classes and school was over by noon. Then, everyone goes home to be with their families and have the noon meal.” This is the time the whole family gets together and the mid-day siesta can last up to three hours. After that, the rest of the day and the night is free and negotiable — homework, entertainment, or whatever. Jon’s experience with host families was positive. “My host brother will go to Germany on exchange next year,” Jon noted. “My Rotary club met Monday nights, but the Rotarians aren’t much involved with the students,” Jon said while screening a photo of himself with the club president. Cont. on p. 2
My Year in Brazil with Jon Birch (continued)

Jon's travels in Brazil with his host family and with other exchange students were filled with a spectra of unique opportunities and experiences, all illustrative of Brazil's cultural variety and natural beauty. Jon's photos conveyed the richness of the country's flora and fauna which Jon captured on a group trip to the Amazon River, one of the world's greatest waterways.

“We spent seven days on an Amazon river boat. We slept in hammocks hanging from the rigging on the deck,” John recalled.

John screened a photo depicting the confluence of two rivers, one known as the Black River and the other the White River. Flowing into one another, the relative colors in the two waters remain separated until they gradually merge as one downstream. The symbolism is not lost on the diverse Brazilian population.

While on the broad Amazon, the students encountered floating villages. Motorized canoes are used at night to hunt the alligators that infest the river's shallows. The native weaponry of the Amazon region intrigued Jon and his friends. A photo of a boy's knee bearing a visible wound appeared. “One of the guys bought a blow gun (a hollow tube through which a sharp dart is propelled by air pressure) and we wanted to see if it actually worked. It did,” Jon confirmed.

Off the water, Jon and his friends were taken into the Amazon jungle. “We painted our faces with tribal markings,” Jon said explaining his facial decorations in a photo. The face paint is made from a common red berry found in the region.

The exchange student group was taken on treks through the Amazon rain forest by guides who were knowledgeable and informative and able to find the most interesting features of the tour.

Exotic birds (parrots and macaws), fish (the Piranha), animals (lots of monkeys and capybaras), snakes (boa constrictors), insects (spectacular beetles) and palm-sized Arachnids (spiders) are common in the Amazon region. Jon showed us pictures of some rather ugly looking spiders.

The cuisine of the Amazon offered some interesting appetizers. “We made tapioca pancakes and drank juice made from Acai berries — it’s good for antioxidants,” Jon advised. Another common Brazilian dish is the Armadillo, an animal that has found its way north in recent decades into the American southwest.

The exchange student group met with a member of a primitive Amazonian forest tribe, a tribe with its own native language, culture and way of life. “When a tribe member dies, they believe that somewhere a tree sprouts or a fish is born and life continues in some way to benefit the tribe,” Jon explained. At a ceremony the students were invited to sample a ceremonial beverage from a common bowl. Later, having been informed that the brew included the saliva of all the tribal women, several students reported to sick bay.

Other experiences came to light in a series of photos. Jon had the opportunity to take some college-level classes and found himself being interviewed on a local television show. Jon was able to contact a former inbound exchange student to Cooperstown at her home in Brazil and was invited to attend a family wedding. Soccer is the national sport in Brazil and the cities all have their soccer stadiums which are filled with noisy fans. Jon and other exchange students once played a group of young Brazilians and won the match.

“I was proud about that,” John said. And, we’re proud of Jon. He made the most of his exchange year.

Tom Heitz, Editor
O
ur invocation was presented by Jim High. We quote: “Another Rotary year has begun — a new district governor, a new club president — and we look around our community for needs to address. People in need? Here in Cooperstown? Heavenly father, help us remember that the jerk who cut us off on Main Street last night is a single mother who worked nine hours and was rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children. Help us to remember that the pierced, tattooed, seemingly disinterested young man, who can’t make change correctly, is a worried 19-year-old college student, balancing his apprehension over finals with his fear of not getting loans for the next semester. Remind us, Lord, that the scary-looking bum, begging for money in the same spot every day, (who really ought to get a job!) is a slave of addictions that we can only imagine in our worst nightmares. Help us to remember that the old couple walking annoyingly slow through the aisles of the Great American and blocking our shopping progress are savoring the moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report from last week, this will be the last year that they will go shopping together. Heavenly father, remind us each day that, of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love. Open our hearts not just to those who are close to us, but to all humanity. Let us be slow to judgment and quick to forgiveness, patience, empathy and love. May this food and fellowship we enjoy open our our eyes, our ears, and our lives so that we may recognize the needs of others even when they are right next to us. Amen.”

The introduction of guests was presided over by Sergeant-at-Arms Charles Ellsworth. Lily Tillapaugh was the guest of her father, Martin Tillapaugh. Cathy Andrews was hosted by Jeff Woeppe. George Logan was treated to lunch by his daughter Margie Landers. Peg Walrath came along for lunch with Doug Walrath. Eileen Lieber came all the way from California to have lunch with us and her spouse Tom Lieber. Marcy Birch, mother of our speaker, outbound youth exchange student Jon Birch (Brazil), was with us. Ralph Snell brought his youth exchange daughter Anna Snell (Peru) back to Rotary to provide, as Ralph said, “moral and technical support” for Jon Birch, Anna’s South American colleague. Jon had borrowed Anna’s laptop in an effort to get his slide program to work properly.

Finally, Cliff Kachline, our esteemed honorary member was back in town for a visit in the company of his daughter Joyce Thomas and her fiancé Ed Schumer. Joyce and Ed had known one another way back in the eighth grade when both resided in St. Louis, Missouri. They parted ways in 1969 when Cliff and Eve-

lun moved their family elsewhere for new employment. Cliff eventually came to Cooperstown as Historian at the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Joyce and Ed reunited recently where both are engaged in various ways at the University of Illinois. Later on, Ed Schumer proved to be the lucky winner of our 50/50 draw ($16)

Vicki Gates, our songmeister, noted the recent improvement in the weather and asked us to sing Blue Skies (Never saw the sun shinin’ so bright). We concluded the musical interlude with Oh’ What a Beautiful Morning (There’s a bright golden haze on the meadow).

The sign-up clipboards for the BBHoF Induction Weekend sales table and parking lot detail were in circulation at our tables.

President Bill advised that Amanda May, our projected newest member and the first to be inducted in the new Rotary year (2009-2010) will join with us formally on Tuesday, July 28.

Mike Otis collected our happy dollars, and for his own behalf gave a dollar and said he’d been to a family reunion gathering at Big Spirit Lake.

Paul Kuhn was grateful and happy for the assistance he received from Jim Gates and others at the BBHoF who helped to entertain Juan Ramon, a Dominican Republic Rotarian with baseball and television connections who was in the area visiting with a member of the Delhi Rotary club. Juan wasn’t fluent in English as Bruce Markusen acted as translator. Juan took in an Oneonta Tigers’ game and threw out the first pitch.

Tim Wiles said his young son Ben, having attended his first professional baseball game recently, now tells Dad “I ready for baseball game” every time Tim and Marie strap him into the car seat. Baseball is in the boy’s blood and genes.

Anne Geddes-Atwell’s dog Blue caught a woodchuck recently and got a quick lesson on “how to release a woodchuck” from Anne.

Mary Earl said she and her spouse were celebrating 10 years of wedded bliss. Bob Schlather said he was celebrating 36 years of marriage and put in $36.

Jim Howarth had $5 for a July birthday and another $5 for his five grandchildren.

Will Green was celebrating his son’s first birthday.

Jim High noted that the Cooperstown Food Bank was looking for volunteers.

President Bill said he had spent a day motorcycle biking with our former Rotarary colleague Dennis Jaku bowicz. Bill went as far as Blue Mountain in the Adirondacks while other bikers continued for a five-day round trip.

Tim Wiles & Tom Heitz
Membership Roll
(By Date of Affiliation)
Hon. = Honorary Member; PHF = Paul Harris Fellow; SPH = Sustaining Paul Harris; PDG = Past District Governor
a. = Affiliation Date b. = Month/Day of Birth

Howard Talbot, Hon; PHF; a. 12/51; b. 10/06
Ted Peters, PHF; a. 12/59; b. 05/12
Ed Badgley, Hon; a. 06/61; b. 07/07
Cliff Kachline, Hon; PHF; a. 07/70; b. 07/25
Doug Walrath, PHF; a. 10/70; b. 12/11
Bob Schlather, PHF; a. 01/79; b. 05/03
Will Monie, PHF; a. 09/80; b. 11/21
George Cade, PHF, a. 12/80; b. 12/18
Ed Walsh, PHF; a. 03/24/81; b. 04/09
Roger Smith, a. 01/12/82; b. 04/28
Jeff Woeppel, a. 03/02/82; b. 08/05
Ferd Thering, PHF; a. 05/82; b. 02/12
Mike Jerome, PHF; a. 08/13/85; b. 07/23
Bob Birch, PHF; a. 09/23/86; b. 12/30
Jim Woolson, PHF; a. 03/87; b. 10/05
Hugh MacDougall, PHF; a. 04/87; b. 08/30
John Ramsey, PHF; a. 06/87; b. 03/03
Chuck Carrier, PHF; a. 01/88; b. 06/19
Bruno Tali, PHF; a. 04/88; a. 16/01
Doris Holdorf, a. 01/20/90; b. 07/04
Joan Badgley, a. 05/22/90; b. 06/07
Catherine Black, PHF; PDC; a. 01/22/91; b. 04/22
Ellen Tillapaugh-Kuch, PHF; a. 10/01/91; b. 02/16
Cathy Raddatz, PHF; a. 12/92/92; b. 03/02
Tom Heitz, PHF; a. 03/02/93; b. 12/20
Bill Coleman, PHF; a. 04/13/93; b. 02/16
Pati Grady, a. 01/11/94; b. 03/07
Jim Gates, PHF; a. 02/20/96; b. 03/09
Michael Otis, PHF; a. 05/28/96; b. 07/17
Carol Waller, PHF; a. 05/28/96; b. 08/19
Susan Streek, PHF; a. 19/11/96; b. 04/04
Mary Jo McPhail, a. 12/09/97; b. 01/03
Anne Geddes-Atwell, PHF; a. 01/27/98; b. 07/01
Carol Cade, PHF; a. 02/16/99; b. 02/23
Tom Lieber, PHF, a. 11/16/99; b. 07/15
Margaret Savoie, PHF; a. 12/07/99; b. 05/20
Francis May, PHF; a. 07/25/00; b. 04/02
Patricia Donnelly, PHF; a. 05/29/01; b. 02/24
Jim R. High, PHF; PDG; a. 09/04/01; b. 04/03
John Clow, a. 10/16/01; b. 02/17
Michael V. Coccoma, a. 12/18/01; b. 03/30
Mary R. Wright, PHF; a. 02/19/02; b. 07/01
Vicki Gates, PHF; a. 02/26/02; b. 11/06
Dave Bliss, a. 04/30/02; b. 10/28
Chad Welch, a. 09/17/02; b. 08/14
Mary Leonard, a. 09/17/02; b. 01/13
Carl Good, a. 04/01/03; b. 02/12
Lois Warrell, PHF; a. 04/08/03; b. 09/24
John Irvin, PHF; a. 04/08/03; b. 11/20
Bill Glockler, PHF; a. 08/05/03; b. 10/18
Paul Kuhn, PHF; a. 08/05/03; b. 05/14
Greg Noonan, a. 10/28/03; b. 07/03
Jane Forbes Clark, Hon; PHF; a. 01/08/04; b. 05/11
Doug Geertgens, PHF; a. 03/02/04; b. 01/04
Chuck Newman, PHF a. 03/02/04; b. 09/04
Betsy D. Jay, a. 05/18/04; b. 08/02
Martin Tillapaugh, PHF; a. 09/07/04; b. 11/29
David Vaules, PHF; a. 10/05/04; b. 02/14
Sundar Samuel, a. 09/20/05; b. 11/16
Donna Shipman, PHF; a. 10/04/05; b. 09/25
Will Green, a. 01/24/06; b. 01/29
Stephen Elliott, a. 02/07/06; b. 08/20
Scott Barrett, a. 02/14/06; b. 09/14
Teri Barown, a. 05/16/06; b. 04/17
Jim Kevelin, a. 07/25/06; b. 03/15
Lyn Edinger, a. 10/03/06; b. 07/29
Jake Majitla, a. 10/31/06; b. 06/22
Ray Holohan, a. 01/09/07; b. 09/21
Jeff Katz, a. 03/20/07; b. 09/14
Ben Novellano, a. 02/20/07; b. 11/03
Marjorie Landers, a. 05/01/07; b. 07/22
John Bullis, a. 05/29/07; b. 12/03
Mary Earl, a. 07/31/07; b. 11/28
Frank Capozza, a. 11/13/07; b. 11/27
Ralph Snell, a. 12/18/07; b. 11/23
Richard J. Blabay, a. 03/18/08; b. 03/11
Charles A. Ellsworth, a. 03/18/08; b. 11/19
Ed Whiting, a. 03/18/08; b. 11/19
Tabetha Rathbone, PHF; a. 05/13/08; b. 04/09
Tim Wiles, a. 05/20/08; b. 06/28
Frank Leo, a. 06/17/08; b. 03/28
Irene Fassett, Hon; PHF; a. 06/24/08; b. 01/20
Jim Howarth, a. 09/09/08; b. 07/02
Nancie Apps, a. 11/09/08; b. 10/28
Bruce Markussen, a. 12/16/08; b. 01/30
Ryan W. Mosek, a. 04/21/09; b. 12/09
John M. Mason, a. 04/21/09; b. 07/09
Diana Nichols-Dilorenzo, a. 05/05/09; b. 11/14
Andrew R. Marietta, a. 05/12/09; b. 10/02
Angie L. Erway, a. 05/12/09; b. 07/01
85 Active Members; 5 Honorary Members
90 Total Members / 61 Men / 29 Women
Inbound Exchange Students: 2
Outbound Exchange Students: 7
First Paul Harris Fellows:
Joe Vidosic Marj. Tillapaugh (Hon)
Non-Rotarian Paul Harris Fellows:
Donna Lamb High Walter Rich Santa Claus
Barbara Harman Anita High Martha Vaules
Karine Rich Virginia Heitz Marianne Bez

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Web Site: cooperstownrotary.org

Rotary International President
John Kenny (Scotland)

District 7170
Sam Kouny, District Governor (Oneonta)

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President-Elect: Open
Vice-President: Open
Paul Kuhn, Past-President
Margaret Savoie, Secretary
Anne Geddes-Atwell, Assistant Secretary
Jake Majitla, Treasurer
Charles Ellsworth, Sg.t.-At-Arms

Directors:
Marjorie Landers 2008-2010
Donna Shipman 2008-2010
Chad Welch 2008-2010
Frank Capozza 2009-2011
Ralph Snell 2009-2011
Teri Barown 2009-2011

The Oil Can Editor
Tom Heitz
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Inbound Exchange Students:
2008-2009
Outbound Exchange Students:
Emily Davidson (Belgium)
Anna Weber (Belgium)
Ryan Davine (Germany)
Kristal Tandle (Germany)
Julia Nelson (France)
Chelsea Moakler (Argentina)