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FEATURED

Exchange student from Italy loves her time here

By VYTO STARINSKAS The Verde Independent
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Seventeen-year-old Alice Rossato is going to miss her time that she is spending as a Verde Valley girl. For the past year, the senior student at Mingus High School and exchange student from Italy has been living the life of a local teenager. (VVN/Vyto Starinskas)

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COTTONWOOD — Seventeen-year-old Alice Rossato is going to miss her time as a Verde Valley girl.

For the past year, the senior at Mingus Union High School and exchange student from Italy has been living the life of a local teenager.

Rossato, from Bolzano in Northern Italy, traveled to Mingus through an ASSE International Student Exchange program after she was selected by a Cottonwood host family from profiles posted by students from all over the world.

"Last night I was thinking, oh, in two months I am not going to wake up and see them and drive to school with Lindsey, and I'm starting to feel anxious about that," the teenager said while sitting on the picnic tables outside of Mingus Union High School.

"This makes me really sad, but at the same time, I'm so glad I had this experience."

Lindsey Gesell is a senior at Mingus, and her family felt the exchange program would be a great learning experience for a foreign student visiting the United States. They also thought it would help form friendships and cultural exchange for their daughter and other family members.

"Even if we're different, we're quite complimentary," she said of Lindsey, her American host. "We don't have similar cultures, but we get along really good."

Alice is staying with Lindsey, 17, her parents Stephen and Nesa, and her siblings Nathan, 17, and Lauren, 21.

"Fighting with Lindsey is not possible," Rossato said, "because she has a really good character. Because she is such a lovely person.

"I thought I would be the problem," she said with a laugh.

So living life as a teenager in the Verde Valley involves rides to school with Lindsey, afternoons playing tennis on the Mingus tennis team and, of course, pizza.

The pizza in Italy is better, Rossato said, smiling, "But to be honest, the pizza at Bocce is quite good." She's also a big fan of Indian and Chinese quinine.

Rossato burns off her energy on the tennis team. She was mostly undefeated until they faced Flagstaff recently. It's fun, because in Italy, they do not play sports in school, she said. If you want to play a sport, you have to pay a lot and go play in a club. She used to do karate, too.

The student is finishing her fourth year of high school, but in Italy, students go five years. However, she will be walking in cap and gown in the upcoming Mingus High School graduation.

"In Italy we don't do anything for graduation," she said. They just give students the diploma; no ceremony. She thinks school is much easier in the United States.

Rossato is a skier and loved her adventure to the Arizona Snowbowl in Flagstaff with Lindsey and her friends.

She lives right next to the ski slopes in the Dolomites in Northern Italy and started skiing with she was 3 years old. Besides Italian and English, Rossato speaks German, which is common in her region. Her parents are Gianni and Bina Rossato.

"I love the sun. I love the warm. Every time it's sunny outside, I send a picture to my mom – Are you jealous – because it's raining or is snowing or it's pretty cold."

Rossato said doesn't feel as homesick because she is always on the phone with her friends or her family in Italy. "If I miss my mom, I can just call her."

Lindsey's father Stephen Gesell, of Cottonwood, said there are a lot of students on the ASSE website that are looking for host families, and it's very special to get placed.

They got a list of available students, Alice among them. Those students write a letter to potential host families.

There was a Gesell family vote, and Alice was No. 1.

"That was based on very little information, but we could see her personality coming through in the letter," Gesell said. "All the students are well-vetted, high-performing and fluent in English. It's a huge step for them at that age, to break off from friends and family and go live with some people they don't know for almost a year.

"That's very courageous."

Rossato plans to go to high school one more year in Italy and then to a university in Milan for Business Administration. She took her SATs in the United States to get into the university in Italy and she crushed it.

"I wasn't expected to be hosted with so much love," Rossato said.

"I will forever have a home over there. This is the only time I will have to spend here," she said.

"They cannot get rid of me so easily, I will come back every year and a half," she said.

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