

# Italian student spending a year in Calvert

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Unlike Mantua, Italy, there is no opera house in Huntingtown. However, to Emma Agazzani, a resident of Italy's "Capital of Culture," living in the U.S.A. in general and Calvert County in particular has hit a high note. According to her, it's been a dream come true.

"It was something I wanted to do since I was very young," the teen told Southern Maryland News, adding that "the language, the culture, the travel" had her determined to pursue the opportunity to experience the life of a foreign exchange student.

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"I applied in February 2022 with A.S.S.E.," Agazzani, 17, said. The American Scandinavian Student Exchange has expanded since it was established in 1976. The exchange has its origins in Europe in the late-1930s. After World War II the exchange gained momentum and today over 30 countries on six continents participate. On its website, the exchange states its mission is an effort "to foster international understanding through educational and cross cultural programs."

"My parents were hosts," Danielle Higginbotham of Huntingtown told Southern Maryland News in recalling how she and her family opened their home to Agazzani. "I knew it was something we wanted to do. We were researching students and Emma's profile stuck out with us."

Agazzani is a senior at Huntingtown High this year and will walk in the June graduation ceremony before returning to Italy later that month when her exchange program ends. She said since Italian high school is a

five-year program she still has another year of secondary schooling to go in her home country before she will be off to a university.

At Huntingtown, Agazzani has been able to experience something that wouldn't be possible in Europe. Of cheerleading, Agazzani said, "It was another of my dreams. When I think about the U.S. and high school, I think about cheerleading, because cheerleading is not a thing in Italy or Europe in general. It was my only option."

In addition to cheerleading, Agazzani has played lacrosse, a sport that hasn't caught on at all in Europe. "I just finished lacrosse season and I really like it," she said, crediting her coaches for teaching her how to play the sport and excel in it.

Life for Emma Agazzani of Mantua at Huntingtown High hasn't been all cheers and sports, though. As a student, she is taking classes in Advanced Placement English — she has been taught English since first grade — A.P. Government, pre-calculus, biology, photography and theater.

As for what she will study in college, Agazzani said, "It's going to be something about science. I would like to be a neurologist."

When not in school, the Higginbothams have given Agazzani a chance to see America. She has traveled to several locations in Florida, including Disney World, where she donned a cheerleader's outfit for the annual Christmas parade.

While in Florida, Agazzani also got a chance to swim with dolphins.

"We tried to do a whole bunch of 'must-sees,'" Higginbotham said.

The hosts and exchange student have also traveled to New York City, Atlanta and Philadelphia.

Agazzani recalled one obligatory culinary experience in Philadelphia.

"I had the cheesesteak," she said. "That was amazing."

She also has been to Washington, D.C., and visited the White House during the annual Easter Egg Roll, meeting President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump.

Comparing the urbanized character of her hometown, with its art galleries and opera houses, to the bucolic, wide open expanse of Huntingtown, Agazzani said, "it's very different. In Italy everything is tiny and compressed. Here, everything is spread out and very big."

Of her hometown she said, "We are walkable. We have a lot of history and arts."

Agazzani summed up her Hurricane high school experience, saying, "I really like the school and this town. I'm a senior here. I think it's more interesting."

Higginbotham conceded that the experience of having a teenage cheerleader in her home has been so incredible that, while she will offer aid and advice to other families who want to participate in hosting an exchange student, for now she feels fulfillment from her experiences with Agazzani.

"She's my daughter now," Higginbotham said. "We've created a friendship, a bond."