



CHERISH THE MOMENT At her host family's house in Chilgatoro, Honduras, senior Lauren Erickson, her partner and three neighborhood kids enjoy their last day together. "Our supervisor came that day [unexpectedly] with news that the political situation was getting worse and that we needed to evacuate," Erickson said. "[My partner and I] decided to go around the community to say goodbye to everyone. We were trying to explain to the kids that we had to leave early. Our Spanish skills weren't that great, so they didn't really understand until we drove away. It was devastating." Photo courtesy of Lauren Erickson.

a friend in need is an

amigo indeed.

Three East seniors spend their summer volunteering for AMIGOS, encountering life-changing experiences.

Design by Kate Kulaga and Gaby Thompson.



WARMING-UP Preparing to perform on stage, senior Leia Swanson practices the dance with her partner Chelsea Strickland. "We wore traditional Paraguayan dance costumes and danced at a festival in San Blas," Swanson said. Photo courtesy of Leia Swanson.



CLASSIC COLOR This brightly painted adobe brick house is the home where senior Lauren Erickson's partner Kevin McKay stayed. "It was only a two minute walk between my house and his, so we pretty much split our meals and time between both," Erickson said. Photo courtesy of Lauren Erickson.



KICKIN' IT UP Kids in Chilgaturu, Honduras kick a soccer ball around, practicing for neighborhood tournaments and competitions. "Soccer is huge there," senior Lauren Erickson said. "Everyone played every chance they got." Photo courtesy of Lauren Erickson.

"I never thought I loved Geography, but Mr. Nickels brought a new perspective. He said if you set your mind to something, you can accomplish anything. He gave us examples of people who started with nothing and accomplished amazing things." -RHONDA ANZAWI 10



THE LAST SPLASH Senior Alexa Donahue and her partner, Kristen Ellingboe, enjoy a swim with their classmates. "It was the last day of class for the week, so we decided to celebrate and go swimming in the river," Donahue said. Photo courtesy of Alexa Donahue.



AMIGOS MUST-HAVES

Senior Alexa Donahue explains the most important gear to take on the AMIGOS trip.



SNACKS

"Crystal Light was important because the water tasted like a pool. Snacks reminded me of home, and I spent time with my partner when we ate them."



BUG SPRAY

"There were lots of bugs, and I hated wearing [long] pants because it was so hot."



PHOTO ALBUM

"It had photos that reminded me of home. My host family was curious about my life [in America], so it helped to show what my family looked like."



GIFTS

"They showed that we appreciate them having us, and gave them something to remember us by."

What has left an impression on you this year?

FRIENDSHIP.

It's a universal word and action that transcends cultures and languages, countries and citizens. It's a power that can support the impoverished with the help of the blessed. It comes in every form- great and small, international and local, young and old.

For seniors Lauren Erickson and Leia Swanson, friendship came in the form of the volunteer program Amigos de las Americas - in English, Friends of the Americas. AMIGOS exposes students to Latin American culture and allows them to help the communities they visit. After spending time there, the volunteers decide how they should help their community with money from the AMIGOS grant.

"[In Honduran culture] you can be sitting with a family, even if you just met them, and there won't be any forced conversation," Erickson said. "Sometimes we would just sit there for 15 minutes not saying anything. It's something I really came to love and appreciate."

But adjusting to their culture was more than an easy dinner. The students chose their summer volunteer country with a much more difficult meal. They had to ravage through a foggy Jello cup, eating and

digging to get through the copious layers of whip cream. But the slippery fingers and the momentary loss of dignity came with a satisfying reward at the bottom of the cup: a flag representing the country, and the community, where the volunteers would be serving that summer.

Erickson found the blue and white stripes of Honduras, and Swanson scooped out the red and blue bars of Paraguay. They knew they would be on their way to challenges, hardships and poverty, but they were also ready to embrace friendship.

"During training they told us we would have to purify our water," Swanson said. "I was expecting them to have a well, but my family had their own purified water in a water tank."

As their time away drew to a close, the volunteers reflected on their experiences there. Though all of the experiences were new to them, the most meaningful dealt with the lessons they learned.

"I realized that you don't need to be doing something all the time," Swanson said. "It was nice to relax." Story by Mallory Fisher and Tim Shedor.