

## Hosting players provides memories, lifelong friends

Bryce Reid lives in Lake Elsinore, Calif., while Jack Winters is from Oradell, N.J. Combined, they live 2,845 miles away from Cheyenne, where they will be playing baseball this summer. For Reid, Winters and the rest of the Cheyenne Grizzlies baseball team, their focus this summer is furthering their baseball skills, not worrying about where to live.

This is entirely because of their host families, who play an intricate role in the success of the ballclub each summer.

Host families are synonymous with their name, hosting a player during the two-month season and playing the role of the player's family while they are away from home.

While the only requirement for a host family is to provide housing for the player they are paired up with, many families take their role to another level.

"They treated me like their own children," Reid said of his host family from last summer, Doreen and Chuck Farmer. "Not only did they have a room for me to stay but when I was home we'd eat meals together, too. We'd do things like play card games, play Scrabble and cook together. Since I was gone around dinnertime for games most nights, whatever they were cooking for dinner, they'd make it early so I could have it for lunch before I left."

Added Chuck, "we didn't have to go out of our way, we just would go about our day and he would join us. And it turns out Bryce is also an expert cook, often times preparing meals for us."

The experience for Reid was so positive that he will be staying with the Farmers again this summer.

"It (living with the Farmers) was one of the best experiences I've ever had in my entire life," Reid said. "They're one of the main reasons why I'm coming back again this season."

For Winters, the experience was similar.

"The whole reason I wanted to go to Cheyenne to play in a collegiate league was to see baseball in a different part of the country," Winters said. "I lived with Brian and Sheri Belmonte. They were very friendly and provided great Western hospitality."

Coming from New Jersey, Winters wasn't sure what to expect, but having a room ready for him and a family to take care of him made him feel more comfortable.

"On my birthday they made me a birthday cake and sang me happy birthday," he said. "They took away the stresses of being away from home and we got along real well."

"Brian, he's a practical joker. Me and the other player staying with the Belmontes were New York City sports fans but Brian's a Phillies fan. When the Phillies beat the Yankees he cut the newspaper clipping out and hung it on the refrigerator to make sure we knew the Phillies beat up on the Yankees. We got him back on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, though, buying him sarcastic cards to make him feel old."

The positive experiences were mutual, as the Farmers said hosting was something they “thoroughly enjoyed.”

“It was a very positive arrangement,” Chuck said. “We didn’t know what we were getting into; he (Reid) didn’t, either. We’re excited to follow up with him and see how he’s been doing and learn more about his aspirations.”

Before Reid, who had never traveled east of the Rocky Mountains, went home after the season he and Chuck were able to go on a road trip throughout Wyoming and South Dakota.

I took him through the Black Hills and to Mount Rushmore,” Chuck said. “He got to experience some history of a new side of the country and we got to spend some time together on a more personal level.”

Mary Chris and Mikey Farr, who will be hosting for the fourth season this summer, say the greatest reward is the relationships built.

“You meet lifelong friends,” Mary Chris said. “As you get to know them they practically become your own kids.”

The Farris still keep in touch with each player they have hosted through the years and recently returned from one’s college graduation.

“Hosting builds a lot of great memories,” Mikey said. “For families with small children, these kids are like role models moving into their house. Their kids look up to the players like Major League Baseball stars. For parents without children or children who have moved out of the house, it’s a neat experience opening up your home to, at the time, complete strangers, and by the end of the summer having relationships for life.”

The Grizzlies are still looking for host families to house players for the 2011 season. In return for your commitment for the months of June and July, host families will receive collectable season tickets to all Grizzlies home games.

“I have no negative remarks about the experience,” Chuck said. “I’d recommend it to anybody, anybody at all. They are all nice young men who are looking to keep in tune with baseball as they go through school. It’s a great program and a really good experience.”

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