

# 4-H welcomes Japan to Oxford

By LAURA GREEN  
For the Ingersoll Times

A year ago, Laurence and Mary MacKay and their family of Erin, Davina, Blair and Carmen of Embro had read about the LABO programme in one of the 4-H publications and started asking questions.

Last January, they decided to accept the challenge and host a young person from Japan. Paperwork began with application forms, reference checks and police checks. Both the MacKay family and the exchange student prepared portfolios to introduce themselves and begin the learning process. All correspondence was done by mail and in English.

LABO is short for Language Laboratory and is one of the largest non-formal education organizations. It is a volunteer-based youth development organization with 30,000 members throughout Japan. LABO is similar to 4-H in Ontario. It is an organization with small groups meeting all over Japan where youth ages 8 to 18 are taught how to speak English through difference activities and learn about different cultures through the exchange experience.

The LABO Exchange program, with support in Ontario from 4-H, helps approximately 1,000 Japanese students come to North America for a month every summer. The participants range in age from 12 to 18 years and male and female students have the opportunity to apply. This year Ontario is hosting 16 students.

"These Japanese students look forward to experiencing daily life in Ontario and becoming a member of the family, not a tourist or special guest. No special trips or entertainment are

needed, just a willingness to share your family's customs and culture and in turn learn about your student's life back home" as quoted from the 4-H website.

On Sat., July 23, 13-year-old Riona Nakona of Kogoshima, Japan arrived in Ontario and will be staying with the MacKay family until Aug. 12.

Right from day one, Riona became part of the MacKay family and their busy lifestyle on a dairy farm in the northeast section of Zorra.

He eats everything except tomatoes, but my boys don't like them either."

- Mary MacKay

Besides chores, he attended ball games to watch Carmen and Blair play, attended Oxford County's "Go

for the Gold competition," swam in the family pool, golfed with boys at Stone Haven Golf Course more than once (a very expensive sport in Japan) and visited the water park in Tillsonburg during his first week in Oxford county.

Mary MacKay commented, "that Riona is a very easy guest to have and so far eats everything except tomatoes, but my boys don't like them either."

His English is limited, so they use a lot of sign language and the dictionary but kids can communicate in any language.

The family hopes to take a day trips to Niagara Falls, the Sand Hills and Stratford. The ball season is wrapping up but fair season is around the corner and 4-H calves have to be trained - never a quiet moment on the farm.