

GRSP CONNECT



Above: Class of 2026-2027 at the Hue Thomas, Jr. Weekend in Savannah 2026

CELEBRATING TRADITIONS. CREATING MEMORIES. BRINGING NATIONS TOGETHER.

As the holidays approach, we have a wonderful opportunity to celebrate what makes the Georgia Rotary Student Program so special: people from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds coming together through friendship and understanding.

This season offers countless opportunities to learn something new, share a little of home, and create memories that last long after the decorations come down. However you celebrate, we hope this season brings you connection, joy, and a reminder that friendship has no borders.



From left to right:
GRSP Alumna Karoline Petersen (21-22),
Grandad Søren and Sofie

Student Spotlight

SOFIE

Name: Sofie Gadegaard Petersen

Country: Denmark

College: Valdosta State University

Sponsoring Club(s): Thomasville



Sofie with host parents Wilson
and Jill Carraway

Despite differences in cultures and traditions, what common holiday value do you think unites people everywhere across the globe?

Despite differences in cultures and traditions, I think the holiday value that unites people most is love. For me holidays are less about specific traditions and more about spending quality time with people you care about. Even though people around the world celebrate in different ways, most holidays bring people together and is a reminder to appreciate each other. I think that feeling of love and belonging is something everyone can understand, no matter what country they are from.

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Alumni Spotlight

ROLO

Name: Rolando Alegria

GRSP Year: 2023-2024

Country: EL Salvador

College: Georgia Gwinnett College

Sponsoring Club(s): Gwinnett Mosaic, Buford/North Gwinnett, Lawrenceville and South Hall, District 6910

Now Living In: El Salvador

Attending: Escuela Superior de Economía y Negocios (ESEN), a highly competitive, private, non-profit university in La Libertad, El Salvador.

“

There is no higher purpose than spreading love and friendship within our communities, for they form the foundation of everything truly worth having.

”

“ *For me, nothing compares to the warmth and energy of the Christmas season in El Salvador. Our main celebration truly comes alive on December 24th with the cherished tradition of wearing our estreno, a brand-new outfit bought specifically for Christmas Eve dinner. Families gather around tables filled with traditional food, savoring the meal and each other's company while anticipating the midnight hour.*

The real magic happens as the countdown hits zero and December 25th officially begins. The entire country erupts in celebration...the people spill into the streets to light up all types of handheld fireworks, and music plays well into the night...We spend the daytime hours of December 25th heading out to the beach with family and friends, taking advantage of the bright tropical sunshine to relax or keep the party going. ”



Rolo joined Rotaract El Salvador after his GRSP year and gaining an appreciation for what Rotary does during that time through his involvement with his sponsoring clubs. He is in charge of recruitment for his Rotaract Club and regularly gets to network with the other 8 Rotaract clubs in El Salvador. Rolo won Rookie of the Year for El Salvador Rotaract 2026.



@Rolo_Alegria

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HOST FAMILY CORNER

THE GIFT OF BELONGING

The holidays are a wonderful opportunity to help your GRSP student feel at home in Georgia! These shared moments can create lasting memories and strengthen the friendships at the heart of GRSP.

A few ways to make the season special:

- **Include them:** Invite your student to family gatherings, holiday activities, and Rotary club events.
- **Share traditions:** Explain your family's customs and invite your student to share traditions from home.
- **Make time together:** A shared meal, baking cookies, or enjoying holiday lights can mean more than you realize.
- **Check in:** The holidays can bring homesickness. Ask how your student is feeling and how you can help them feel connected.

Your Next Step

Your next step: Sit down with your student to discuss your holiday plans, invite them to join your family traditions, and coordinate opportunities to participate in upcoming Rotary club activities.

Thank you for opening your homes and hearts and helping GRSP continue bringing nations together through friendship and understanding.

MORE GOOD THINGS AHEAD

The next chapter is already taking shape, and we'd love for you to be part of it.

Student Weekends

Be sure to communicate your student's travel to and from the weekend with the GRSP Office. GRSP Bus available for some.



Coming Up

Nov 5-8

Larry Frosteg Pelham
International Student Weekend



Attend something cool or see our students in action? Send us photos for the newsletter!
Email us at grsp@grsp.org

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thank you

Savannah Area Rotary Clubs
for hosting the students
October 16-18!



A FEW TRADITIONS TO EXPLORE

Dates and customs can vary by region, faith, and calendar. These activities are examples, and not everyone from a particular country or community celebrates the same way.



October 31 — Halloween

United States and other countries –
Popular activity: Carving pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns, dressing in costumes, and trick-or-treating. **Try it together:** Invite your student to decorate a pumpkin inspired by their home country or a favorite tradition.



November 1–2 — Día de los Muertos

Mexico and communities worldwide –
Popular activity: Creating an ofrenda, or altar, with photographs, marigolds, candles, and favorite foods to honor deceased loved ones. **Try it together:** Share stories and memories of loved ones while learning about the importance of remembrance in different cultures.

November 8 — Diwali – Celebrated by many Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and some Buddhist communities. – Popular activity: Lighting traditional lamps called diyas, decorating with colorful rangoli designs, and sharing sweets. **Try it together:** Create a colorful rangoli-inspired design or exchange favorite sweets while discussing the meaning of light and new beginnings.

November 26 — Thanksgiving – United States

Popular activity: Gathering for a shared meal, watching parades or football, and expressing gratitude. **Try it together:** Have everyone share one thing they are grateful for and one person or experience that has made their year special.

December 8 — Bodhi Day

Observed by some Buddhist traditions. Popular activity: Meditation, reading Buddhist teachings, and reflecting on the Buddha's enlightenment. **Try it together:** Set aside a few quiet minutes for reflection on wisdom, kindness, and how we can better understand others.



December 13 St. Lucia Day Celebrated primarily in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Popular activity: Processing in white robes with candle crowns, singing traditional songs, and baking spiced saffron buns (lussekatter). **Try it together:** Turn off all the lights in your home, light a few candles safely, and enjoy a warm treat together to experience the Scandinavian tradition of bringing light into the winter darkness.



December 16–24 Las Posadas – Mexico and parts of Latin America Popular activity: Participating in processions, singing traditional songs, visiting homes, and sharing food. **Try it together:** Host an international potluck where everyone brings a dish connected to their family's holiday traditions.



December 4–12 — Hanukkah Jewish communities worldwide – Popular activity: Lighting the menorah, playing dreidel, and enjoying foods such as latkes and sufganiyot. **Try it together:** Learn how to play dreidel or explore the stories and symbolism behind Hanukkah traditions.



December 25 — Christmas – Celebrated by Christians and culturally by many others – Popular activity: Decorating Christmas trees, exchanging gifts, attending church services, and sharing special meals. **Try it together:** Let your student choose an ornament that represents their country or culture and explain its meaning.



December 26–January 1 — Kwanzaa

African American cultural celebration – Popular activity: Lighting the kinara, discussing the seven principles (Nguzo Saba), and sharing food and cultural traditions. **Try it together:** Discuss one principle—such as unity, creativity, or cooperative work—and how it can strengthen a community.



December 31–January 1

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day
Celebrated around the world – Popular activity: Counting down to midnight, watching fireworks, making resolutions, and sharing traditional good-luck foods. **Try it together:** Ask everyone to share one hope for the new year and one thing they learned from a friendship across cultures.



The GRSP Holiday Traditions Challenge

Invite your student or host family to try one holiday activity from another culture this season. Cook a traditional dish, learn a holiday game, decorate together, or exchange stories about how your families celebrate.

Then share a photo (tagging GRSP) and a few sentences about what you learned! What better way to celebrate 80 years of bringing nations together than by learning, laughing, and making



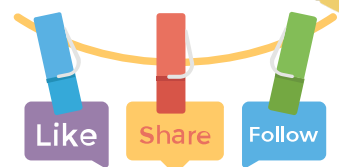
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Foundation Focus

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

GRSP's impact lasts far beyond one academic year through lifelong friendships, shared perspectives, and connections across generations. This season of giving, we thank the Rotarians, clubs, host families, alumni, donors, and friends who make GRSP possible.

Help the next generation experience GRSP: Support the Foundation, share our mission, or encourage alumni to give back.



**DONATE
NOW**

[**grsp.org/donate/**](https://grsp.org/donate/)

For U.S. tax-year eligibility, online donations must be completed by midnight on December 31 (donor's time zone), with a dated transaction record. Checks must be postmarked by USPS no later than December 31. Please be sure to designate a Rotary Club.



DINNER WITH THE DEAN

GRSP alumna and Dean Anna Stenport (Franklin College of Arts and Sciences at UGA, who originally joined us as a scholar from Sweden in 1993–94) hosted our current UGA scholars alongside Trustees and Vice Chair James McCoy. With five countries gathered around the table, Dean Stenport shared her inspiring journey and encouraged students to embrace the profound privilege of the GRSP experience.

GIVE A LITTLE GRSP SPIRIT

**SHOP
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Looking for a gift for a fellow Rotarian, host family member, GRSP alumnus, or student? Or perhaps you want to show your own GRSP pride wherever you go!

Visit the official GRSP online shop to explore branded gear and find something for the GRSP supporter on your holiday list.

Whether you're shopping for yourself or choosing a gift for someone who believes in bringing nations together, every opportunity to share the GRSP name helps spread awareness of our mission.

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