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Niskayuna NEIGHBORS



The Beltramo Family
—Out and About

 Best Version Media

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RESIDENT FEATURE

BY JENNA CAPUTO | PHOTOS BY MIA ERTAS PHOTOGRAPHY & CONTRIBUTED BY THE BELTRAMO FAMILY



Beltramo family in Venice

The Beltramo Family —Out and About

The Beltramos like to see kids out and about. Whether it's through local programs at our area's businesses or all the way overseas through exchange programs, they're ready to support any way they can.

Katie and her husband Wade are not native to Niskayuna, but after Katie grew up in New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas and Wade in Colorado, Missouri, and Iowa, Niskayuna has been the place they've called home the longest. It's the only home their two daughters have ever known.

As one of six siblings, Katie always had built-in entertainment and enjoyed gymnastics and ballet as well as climbing trees and playing in the nature preserve in Katonah when she was young. Katie and Wade met when they started their first year at Grinnell College in IA. After

graduation, they moved to New York City while Wade went to law school and Katie attended graduate school. Wade worked for the City of New York and Katie accepted a position at the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum—the only farmhouse left on the island of Manhattan—spending her days spinning wool into yarn and churning butter.

Eventually, Wade's job brought them to the Capital District where he now serves as General Counsel for the New York Conference of Mayors, advising city and village mayors and officials. He enjoys soccer, e-biking to work in downtown Albany, and he has a talent for being a #1 parent fan. "Wade is hands-down the best parent sports fan around," says Katie. "He cheers for good sportsmanship and great plays from *both* teams."



Beltramo family in Trento Italy



Josie in Venice

After Katie had their first child, she stayed home and eventually began Capital District Fun, a personal blog aimed at local parents looking for something to do. “I started my blog because I know how isolated new parents can feel, especially if their parenting partner works outside the home or if they’re single,” she says. “For me, my days as a parent of young kids were better if we had something fun to do.”

Shortly after, Debra Ross, publisher of KidsOutAndAbout in Rochester, and her colleague June Santini, contacted Katie. They were looking to expand their website’s reach into the Capital District and found Katie through her blog. They thought Katie would be the perfect person for their expansion. KidsOutAndAbout.com is a website where organizations like libraries, businesses, museums, parenting groups, etc. can list their activities for free. Parents and families can visit the site or subscribe for the free weekly emails for a list of activities in their area. They currently run 45 regional sites with weekly newsletters and are soon expanding to even more.

Katie and Wade now have two children: Maddie (21), a junior at Grinnell College, and Josie (18), starting her first year at Smith College, along with their two cats adopted from Kitten Angels, Ruth and Dave. Maddie majors in Spanish and sociology and plays soccer at school. This past summer, she worked for Americorps in Mankato, MN. Josie played volleyball and track in school and has been working at Viva Empanada since returning from a year studying abroad in Trento, Italy.

Niskayuna High School (NHS) works with the Rotary International Youth Exchange Program as well as running their own International Scholars Program to provide immersion experiences for both American and international students. The students are placed with families at high schools throughout the world in either a short-term exchange or the full academic year long-term exchange. In return, families here can host a student from abroad. Ideally, they like families to be available for the entire academic year, but to offer students the fullest experience, they prefer to have them stay with 2-3 families during their time here, splitting the time for about 3-4 months apiece. Host families do not need to be a part of the Rotary. The only requirement is a bed and a desk in addition to a willingness to open up their homes to share their lives with an international student.

Potential host families are interviewed and screened to find the best “match” for the incoming student. Host families for students on an F-1 visa through the International Scholars Program receive a monthly stipend

for their services. The students in the Rotary program receive a monthly stipend from the Rotary for use as spending money. The clubs also help families with additional activities and support.

“The International Scholars Program is designed to provide an opportunity for J-1 and F-1 students to earn academic credit studying at Niskayuna High School while also providing them an authentic and immersive experience of what it’s like to live in the United States,” says Bryan Mattice, Coordinator for the International Scholars Program at Niskayuna Central Schools. “Student applicants are accepted after evaluating their past academic merit and English language proficiency. Students live with a local host family, spend a full academic year taking classes, and learn about American life and culture by immersing themselves in our community. They are provided the opportunity to participate in sports and clubs in addition to their coursework. In the program’s history, we’ve hosted students from sixteen different countries.”

Josie’s experience in Italy was invaluable, and she highly recommends it to anyone considering studying abroad. For her, the decision to go was an easy one. “I’ve lived in Niskayuna my whole life but have always been interested in other languages and cultures,” says Josie. “Once COVID had calmed down, I was eager to finally travel again, and, remembering that a girl at Niskayuna a couple years ahead of me had gone abroad, I immediately went to my counselors to ask how I could make it happen.”

Being fluent in the language of your destination is not a prerequisite—you just need a willingness to learn. “When I arrived in Italy, I knew hardly any Italian, although I had studied a bit over the summer and had taken Spanish and Latin at NHS, which was very helpful,” says Josie. “Luckily, I had a host family and classmates that spoke English well, and after a few months of being helped along, I was able to understand and speak much more easily.”

Her experience wasn’t restricted just to her “hometown” in Italy. During her time there, Josie was able to explore the country with the Rotary Exchange Coordinators and the other exchange students in the district throughout northeastern Italy. “We would take a trip almost every month to see the region’s nature and culture and share our experiences with the other exchange students. I also went on a few farther trips with my host families to places like Milan, Naples, and Rome,” she says. In addition, she traveled with her school to Barcelona as well as on a Rotary-organized whirlwind trip throughout Europe and visited places like Paris, Geneva, Amsterdam, and Berlin, among others.

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Rotary Inbound Exchange students in the Dolomites

"I met a lot of other exchange students from all over the world," says Josie. "Many came from Europe or the Americas, but there were also people from Taiwan and South Africa. Everyone is able to bond pretty quickly since we're all in the same exciting and sometimes challenging situation. While everyone saw each other at the monthly meetings, a girl from Argentina was placed in a very nearby city, and we were able to see each other more often and grow particularly close."

After Josie's great experience last year, the Beltramos are looking forward to hosting a student in their home for the coming year. NHS is also still looking for a couple more host families for two incoming Spanish girls. Anyone interested in the opportunity to host can contact Bryan Mattice at bmattice@niskyschools.org for more information. "The shared experience between both the family and the student can be very enriching and the beginning of a relationship that lasts a lifetime," says Mattice.

NHS will also be hosting the Rotary Exchange's student from Brazil this year. She is jointly hosted by the Niskayuna and Schenectady Rotary Clubs, providing support to both her and her host families. Since they try to give their student multiple homes to visit for 3-4 months at a time, they are also looking for one or two other families to host her for this academic year. Anyone interested in hosting or going abroad with the Rotary Exchange can contact Ellen McHale at emchale2031@gmail.com.

In addition to her family's experience with the exchange program, Katie continues to connect Capital Region residents with activities throughout the community. She is now the Communications Director for EntertainmentCalendar.com, which encompasses KidsOutAndAbout and its sister site for adults, BeyondTheNest. She has volunteered her time for the Niskayuna PTO as well as at Working Group on Girls of Schenectady among other volunteering. Lately, she's been converting her lawn and garden to all native plants with help from Wild Ones of the Capital Region. When she isn't growing flowers, she's embroidering them.

As a family, the Beltramos love to travel and experience different foods. They visited Josie in Italy this past March and have also taken family trips to France and Spain as well as a hiking trip with Wade's family to Colorado and to Moab, UT, which they all loved. "At one point we were canyoneering, climbing around between steep walls, and Maddie took a step that turned out to be a steep drop, and she plunged under the water, scaring us and her guide," says Katie. "But she popped back up and thought it was great." Katie has written a lot of articles about their adventures on albany.kidsoutandabout.com as well as on her personal blog, CapitalDistrictFun.com.

When at home here in the Capital District, Katie and Wade love to bike over to Central Park to explore the rose garden or to check out Music Haven concerts and the other free summer events. ♪



Josie and Rotary Inbounds trekking

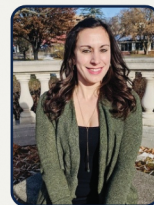
For more information on local family events or the foreign exchange program, please visit:

kidsoutandabout.com

CapitalDistrictFun.com

Ellen McHale, Rotary Youth Exchange Officer—emchale2031@gmail.com

Bryan Mattice, International Scholars Program Coordinator, Niskayuna Central Schools—bmattice@niskyschools.org



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