



Pittsburg State University

International Programs and Services

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Friendship Family reunited after 8 years

Pittsburg State University prides itself on the lifelong connections made throughout one's experience at Pitt State, whether that be as a student or community member involved in campus life.

Zhaolong “Arthur” Zhang and the Benson family are an example of bond that began at Pitt State and has proved to be a long-lasting friendship. Arthur was paired with the Bensons through the Friendship Family Program while on exchange in 2010.

After his exchange, Arthur went on to pursue a Masters in Mechanical Engineering. Throughout that time, the connection between the Family became strong as Arthur bonded with the whole family through regular meals and traditional American activities such as Trick-or-Treating, fishing, attending American football games, and celebrating Thanksgiving.

Throughout the years, following his graduation in 2012, Arthur and the Benson family have stayed in contact. Arthur visited the whole family once in 2013 and was able to meet with Christel Benson in Boston in 2014.

Last month, the whole Family was reunited after almost eight years having gone without seeing everyone together. Arthur and his wife passed through Pittsburg and took the opportunity to visit the Bensons and members of the Office of International Programs and Services.

“It was really exciting to see him,” Christel said. “It was kind of fun to see... where his life ended up as an adult and as a graduate...”

Arthur shared the excitement.

“I feel so excited to see the family and boys in person,” he said. “Though we had never lost contact... it's been a while since I last saw them in person, especially the boys! They were only three and six but now grown up!”

The Friendship Family Program, sponsored by the International Friends of Pittsburg (IFP), is a volunteer program aimed at providing friendship and hospitality to international students and assist them in adjusting to life in a new, unfamiliar culture through monthly activities. Arthur was the Bensons first friendship family experience, which they think is beneficial for everyone involved.

“It's beneficial for the student, but it's also beneficial for the family,” Christel Benson said. “It exposed us to things... we wouldn't normally have been exposed to. It helped us expand our comfort zone of being respectful to other culture's traditions and other culture's expectations.”



Arthur and the Benson family. Photo Credit: Christel Benson