Off Runway, Brazilian Beauty Goes Beyond Blond

Mr. Chornak waited for students to leave their high school in Restinga Sta, Brazil, in Rio Grande do Sul State.

Models at home differ from those destined for runways abroad.

up behind a tall girl with a hooded sweatshirt. "Have you ever thought of being a model?" he asked a 13-year-old with light blue eyes and pimply skin. The girl smiled, her metal braces glimmering.

Later, Mr. Chornak pulled up at a school where the director, Liliane Abrao Silva, showed off albums from school beauty contests. She allows scouts to visit during class breaks.

"Since I got to this school, five have left for Sao Paulo to become models," she said. "The girls who do not have money to go to university will have to stay here and work in the fields."

The next morning, Mr. Chornak studied the girls returning with red lollipops from recess. "There is nothing special here, he declared.

At another stop, Mr. Chornak pulled into a school in Paraiso do Sul (population 8,000) with the tools of his trade: business cards, camera, measuring tape and a notebook.

The bell rang and students streamed out. Mr. Chornak stepped a tall, skinny blond girl. Within seconds he was flashing her hair and taking her measurements, directing her to pose against the wall.

Mr. Chornak also drove to Venda do Airel, where a billboard heralded "the land of the Fantastic Girl" alluding to a television show that featured a local girl.

At a small tobacco farm he visited, Michele Meurer, a blue-eyed 16-year-old discovered while riding her bicycle to school. Tired and sullen, she cried profusely the first time she went to Sao Paulo. The next time, she lasted six days before Mr. Chornak sent her home.

Her mother, who grew up speaking German, had never left the town until the Sao Paulo trip. They lived in a four-room house with chickens and dogs. Michele keeps the freezer in her room for lack of space.

Mr. Chornak counsels Michele to use sunscreen while working in the fields and to watch her diet. Bursting with pride, her father enrolled her in English classes in case she went abroad.

"I want to give them a better life," Michele said tearfully of her parents.

Recently, she went to Sao Paulo again, where Mr. Chornak put her in a three-bedroom apartment with 11 other girls. Two weeks before Sao Paulo Fashion Week, Michele packed up and left.

"I am very disappointed that Michele gave up," Mr. Chornak said. "I invested a lot in her."