Picnic sees changes & a great turnout

August 30 saw this year's installment of the MFIS “Welcome to Wisconsin!” Picnic for students, held in a new location and on an earlier date. We're happy to report that attendance was high and provided a wonderful afternoon for all!

In our second year of testing a location that does not require students and volunteers to travel far from campus (and allows MFIS to avoid renting buses), the picnic this year was held in Rennebohm Park, located just SW of Hilldale Mall. Students were able to easily get to the park via bike or bus, and it was a short distance for volunteers to travel as well.

We also chose an earlier weekend, opting for the Sunday before classes started. This, combined with the beautiful weather and the easy-to-reach location, resulted in the highest picnic turnout we have had in several years.

Of course, the most significant contribution came from all the wonderful volunteers who supported the event. We thank you all for helping make this year's picnic such a great success!

Bucky, the UW Band, 150+ energetic students, and 100+ friendly volunteers all combined for a fun-filled fall picnic.

Thanksgiving hosts needed now

MFIS is once again offering international students the opportunity to celebrate Thanksgiving day with a local family through our Thanksgiving Hospitality program. It is a wonderful opportunity to share American Thanksgiving traditions and food with people from around the world.

If you have room for an extra person or two around your Thanksgiving table, please consider hosting an international student, a family, or more than one student. It creates an exceptionally memorable experience for them, as well as for your own family.

To host a student or for more information, please contact Janet Wood at 277-7959 or woodjanetk@aol.com, or contact MFIS at 263-4010 or info@mfismadison.org (our new email address!).

Thank you in advance to all those who host this year!
Temporary Home Stays

MFIS' Temporary Home Stay program placed nearly 100 students from 22 different countries this past August. The program not only gives students a place to stay upon their arrival in the U.S., but also helps them make lasting connections while in Madison. Temporary host Justin Brumbaugh had this to say about his experience with the program: “The experience was very rewarding. The students are always so grateful, and it is a fantastic way to introduce them to our country and culture.”

This program is one of MFIS' cornerstone offerings and is always in need of additional volunteer hosts. New students will again arrive in January. If you’d be interested in hosting, please contact us at temphomestay@mfismadison.org or 263-4010. We look forward to the continued success of this wonderful program!

Furniture Loan

So far this year, MFIS' Furniture Loan has provided gently used furniture to 71 students and families! Program coordinator Mike Von Schneidemesser has also made about 40 pick-ups of furniture returned by students, and of course numerous pick-ups of furniture being donated by MFIS members and the public.

Mike would like to thank Ann Sowaske, Helene Demont, Don Kind, and Wynn Davies for their help during the busy August season and for helping cover the program when he is out of town. Also exceptionally important is the space we are able to rent at Dale Heights Presbyterian Church, with thanks going in particular to Richard Corey and Lise Skofronick.

Mike is currently looking for added storage. If you have any leads on this, please contact MFIS at info@mfismadison.org or 263-4010.

Exciting news!

As Madison’s international student population grows beyond the borders of UW-Madison, MFIS has decided to expand its outreach as well. International students at MATC and Edgewood College will now also be invited to take advantage of the opportunities offered through MFIS.

Both MATC and Edgewood support significantly smaller international student populations than UW-Madison. MATC’s international student initiative is quite young, with a population that has grown from 7 to 45 students within the last 18 months. In contrast, Edgewood College has welcomed international students on their campus for over 50 years, although its number of internationals is still very small relative to UW.

By expanding outreach to these campuses, the MFIS Board anticipates that MFIS will become better known by the community and staff members affiliated with these colleges, which will lead to increased participation in our volunteer opportunities. Please join us in welcoming the students of MATC and Edgewood College to MFIS and promoting our volunteer needs to your neighbors within these campus communities!

The incoming internationals

This fall's UW-Madison international student population totals 4,115, up from 4,042 last year (a 1.7% increase). The students this year are from 105 countries/areas, with 55% of them being graduate students.

Similar to 2008, the number of Chinese students has increased and remains UW's highest international population, comprising 27% of UW's internationals. This is due in part to the growing “middle class” in China and the continued value placed there on high-quality education.

The top ten represented countries remains fairly similar to last year, with China, Korea, India, and Taiwan in the top four spots. Japanese and Korean numbers have fallen a bit, while Malaysian numbers have increased substantially. 58% of UW's international students come from East Asia, with 11% from Europe, 11% from South and Central Asia, 11% from Southeast Asia, and smaller numbers from Latin America, North America, Middle East, Africa, Caribbean, and Oceania.
As yet another holiday season approaches, we are reminded of the spirit of giving and receiving. It's highly debatable who benefits more from MFIS' programs: our students or our volunteers. And that is a wonderful thing!

MFIS has been giving back to our community by connecting UW's international visitors with local individuals and families for more than 50 years, helping to ease the often difficult transition our visitors face upon arriving in the US. While our activities are helpful to our visiting students in the obvious ways, they generate so much more by generating international goodwill, cross-cultural understanding, and meaningful friendships in both directions.

Fortunately, we have managed to continue operating all of our programs completely with volunteers, so our budget is relatively modest. However, yearly MFIS budget needs do indeed exist, and without the help of our friends, we would not be able to continue accomplishing the many benefits our organization delivers.

Between now and when the students head back to class in January, we are in a holiday campaign to raise the funds we need to operate MFIS' numerous 2010 activities. We ask you to please consider making a tax-deductible contribution that will help us keep our programs financially viable and sustainable far into the future.

In the spirit of holiday goodwill, we thank you for considering a generous gift this season (an envelope is provided). Your support of our work, at any level, is extremely important to the international visitors we serve! Thank you!

With our very best wishes for the holidays,
MFIS Board of Directors

For many in MFIS, Kay Newton needs no introduction. Kay’s 54 years with MFIS began in 1955, when she moved to Madison with her family from Green Lake. Her friend, Irene Ilgen, had moved here a bit earlier and invited Kay to join her at MFIS' Fall Picnic, held on the north shore of Lake Mendota. Soon after, Kay and her husband, Baxter, began inviting international students for meals at their home.

When she noticed there were quite a few international elementary school students at Spring Harbor School, she and Bunny Wikening formed International Wives (later Women) to help the international moms adjust. They formed 10 groups in 10 neighborhoods to bring together local and international women.

Kay and others also organized an orientation meeting each fall for international wives, providing a booklet on shopping locations, Good Will and other resale options, and products for cleaning. They even offered tours of grocery and department stores, and information on US clothes sizing and dressing for the cold weather. Kay was also involved in the coat loan and worked in the office, and even attended a NAFSA regional meeting in Houston.

After their six children left home, Kay and Baxter often provided students with temporary hosting, and this fall hosted a Vietnamese student. She also helped at this fall's picnic, so Kay's work with MFIS is very much in the present. Thank you, Kay! We so appreciate your contributions!

Needed: A new MFIS Treasurer

With the end of Board terms in March 2010, MFIS will sadly lose our wonderful Treasurer, Heidi Boyce, as she prepares to move out of state. This important role cannot go unfilled, so we are actively searching for an individual to take her place in handling MFIS' bookkeeping, reporting, and banking. If you or someone you know might be interested, please contact MFIS at info@mfismadison.org or 263-4010. Thank you!
Four ways to help MFIS now!

1. Sign up to be a Thanksgiving Host! See first page of this newsletter for more information.

2. Help us reduce our environmental impact and keep more of our money for programming by emailing us your current email address. We aim to deliver as many of these newsletters as possible via email over the coming months, so please email us today at info@mfismadison.org so we can add your email address to our database.

3. Save the date for our upcoming Capitol Reception: Sunday, January 31, from 1-3pm.

4. Consider making a tax-deductible donation to help pay for MFIS’ 2010 activities. See inside of this newsletter for details, and send your contribution in the enclosed envelope or in your own envelope to MFIS, Rm 223, 716 Langdon St., Madison, WI 53706-1400.

Thank you very much from all of us at MFIS!