Picnic in the Park, Warm Wisconsin Welcome!

The annual “Welcome to Wisconsin” picnic for UW and Madison College international students was held on August 25 at Rennebohm Park. More than 250 students and 50 volunteers enjoyed the beautiful day. Coordinator Anisha Akula made sure everything ran smoothly, from prize drawings to a sing-along with Wynn Davies, Bucky Badger and the UW Spirit Squad. UW Associate Dean of Students Argyle Wade gave a warm welcome to the community. Then it was time to eat burgers, brats, and other picnic fare.

After enjoying yummy waffle cones filled with Culver’s frozen custard, students mingled and played games outside the park shelter. “I liked the Wisconsin song and playing American football. This is my first time playing it,” said Niyanta from India. Her friend Nitya added, “We watch it on TV.” Of the picnic overall, Niyanta said, “It’s been awesome!”

MFIS extends a special thank you to 2012 picnic sponsors: UW Credit Union, First Business Bank, and Susan Bulgrin of Culver’s on Todd Drive. Sincere thanks to the table hosts, the many food and game volunteers and on site donors who contributed to the day’s success!

Volunteers Needed

Temporary Home Stay Coordinator
Publicity Coordinator
Volunteer Recruiter
Conversation Partners
ESL Program volunteers
Capitol Reception Event Planner (Jan. or Feb. 2013)
Annual Dinner and Meeting Coordinator (April 2013)

Contact the MFIS office at 608-263-4010 or info@mfismadison.org to offer your time and talents!

www.iss.wisc.edu/mfis
MFIS ESL Program: 40+ Years and Going Strong

When MFIS member Liba Daub moved to Madison in 1971, MFIS was providing English classes twice per week. Liba, who had taught English in Japan, envisioned an even bigger program with a centralized classroom location near the UW campus. She hoped for a site that was on a bus line, close to student housing, and had a nursery for little ones. She found it at First Baptist Church. MFIS ESL classes have been held there ever since.

During Liba's twenty-year tenure as the coordinator, the ESL program added more course offerings, including mother-child English classes held within the nursery. She also began hosting “Cooking in America” classes (which she still does today!). Program duties eventually transitioned to Bea Dewey, Norma Hove, and then coordinator Coe Williams, another fabulous MFIS supporter, who brought a wealth of experience and taught in the program for 15 years.

Today, volunteer Anna Biermeier coordinates the program that now offers five skill levels plus a parent-child class. Anna prepares curriculum materials, schedules volunteer teachers, handles the church rental agreement, and works with student organizations and the UW International Student Services office to spread the word about the program. Any international student or family member is welcome to register for the MFIS classes. While most registrants are affiliated with the UW or Madison College, Edgewood students/family members are welcome, too, and if space allows, community members may also register.

“Spouses (of international college students) can feel afloat,” says Anna, “and this program becomes an anchor for them. It’s a place where they feel welcome.” This close connection with other ESL students and volunteers forms during class time and is strengthened at after-class socials and when discussing issues of daily life in a new country. Students often have questions about renting homes, getting phone service, finding community activities for children, and navigating the healthcare system. As Anna describes, “Our teachers are very dedicated. They are very good at finding resources. Some even take the students on field trips. We’re hoping to do more.”

Volunteer teachers aren’t the only ones who make a difference. The program always needs conversation partners to match with ESL students for language practice outside of the classroom, and “baby rockers” to spend time in the nursery while parents are in class. If interested in volunteering, contact Anna at 608-836-7211 or e-mail EnglishClasses@mfismadison.org

MFIS ESL Program by the Numbers:
70 spring 2012 registrants
26 countries represented by registrants last year
100 registrants in a record-breaking semester
$1 cost to students for one-hour of class (a full semester of instruction is $60)
10 teachers volunteering this semester
50 years of program success and friendship… just around the corner!
Temporary Home Stay: Giving is Receiving

“I receive much more from this program than I give. We have friends throughout the world because of it.”

Why do MFIS members volunteer with our Temporary Home Stay program? The above quote from one of this year’s hosts answers the question eloquently. As the school year starts, we celebrate another busy summer of hosting. Our Temporary Home Stay committee (Karen Carlson, Nyaisha Craigwell, Karen LaValley, Kathryn Lederhause and Joanne Lenburg) spent many hours matching students and hosts. As a result, MFIS members have hosted 66 students since early summer, with students coming from around the world—from China to Uzbekistan, Denmark to Brazil.

Thanks to all who helped with this effort. We’re always looking for new hosts; if you’re interested in hosting or in serving as a coordinator in the future, please contact the MFIS office at info@mfisoffice.org.

Next: Share Your Thanksgiving with International Students

The annual Thanksgiving Hospitality program is a cherished tradition of cultural exchange within MFIS. You can provide a special glimpse into this American holiday by sharing a meal with international students! To volunteer as a host, call the MFIS office at 608-263-4010 and leave a message, or e-mail info@mfismadison.org with “Thanksgiving host” in the subject line. The deadline is November 8. Hosts must complete a volunteer application if there is not one already on file. You will be contacted if an application is needed. MFIS gives thanks to Ellen Burleigh, the new coordinator of this program.

Many thanks! Grazie mille!

to Mike von Schneidemesser and Giovanna Jeffries, coordinators of the MFIS Furniture Program. From July through the beginning of September this year, more than 50 families, couples, or roommate groups took advantage of this program. Donations of furniture in good condition are always welcome!

Special thanks to Kathryn Lederhause and team for meeting with students at both the UW and Madison College and spreading the word about MFIS!
MFIS Supports Students because Members Support Us

Good will and volunteer hours are the heart and soul of MFIS, but we also need the support of a skeletal structure, circulatory system, musculature… you get the idea. Our funding stands on 3 important legs and would teeter without each of them. They are: donations from businesses, the proceeds from the hard work of our Furniture Program, and most important? YOU. This November you will be invited to remember MFIS with a check or by using our online donation button. Donations are tax-deductible and may be made online via www.iss.wisc.edu/mfis or via mail to MFIS, Room 223, 716 Langdon Street, Madison, WI 53706-1400. Thank you, in advance.

(Donations can be made any time.)