Welcome Picnic

On a hot but breezy Sunday in August, 39 MFIS volunteers welcomed more than 200 international students to Madison at Oscar Rennebohm Park on Madison’s West Side. The events started at 11:30, when MFIS President Tina Hatch greeted students and volunteers and opened the picnic with a raffle. Students won t-shirts, hats, and other UW and Madison souvenirs.

After a picnic lunch of hamburgers, grilled chicken, potato and pasta salads, watermelon, and a dessert buffet, Dean of Students Lori Berquam addressed the crowd, welcoming students to Madison and the university. She also thanked the volunteers of MFIS, informing the students that they are in the lucky position of having community members eager to help them during their time in Madison.

Berquam then introduced seven members of the UW Marching Band; band members strutted into the picnic shelter with a rousing rendition of On Wisconsin and were quickly joined by a boisterous Bucky Badger. The students cheered wildly; for many, this was their first time seeing Bucky in person. After the exhilarating performance, students headed to the fields, playing football, soccer, wiffle ball and volleyball.

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of Lisa Jackson, the Picnic Committee, and countless MFIS volunteers, the Welcome Picnic on August 29th was an unqualified success.

Photos by Judy Miner and Lexy Spry
Volunteer Spotlight: Deb Spry  
By Emil Hoelter

Deb Spry has many fond memories of the international students she has hosted. Among her favorites: Receiving a copy of one student’s doctoral thesis and reading her name in the acknowledgements. Although she might be too modest to say so, his thesis could not have come about without her friendship and help.

Deborah Spry moved to Madison in 1967 to study at UW-Madison; after graduating she remained and raised two daughters. She first became involved with international students through her children: she hosted high school exchange students when her own daughters were in high school. Eventually a family friend, Sherry Caves, convinced her to volunteer with Madison Friends of International Students, and she has been involved with the organization in several capacities for more than 10 years. She hosts a student in her home each fall and Thanksgiving, and has helped with several Welcome Picnics, Capitol Receptions, and the Furniture Loan program. She is always willing to drive her guests to stores for dorm supplies, give them a tour of Madison, or visit with them at the Union Terrace. Deb has made many friends through her volunteer work and enjoys staying in touch with students even after they return to their home countries.

Volunteers help MFIS in a variety of ways and Deb has found several ways to help MFIS, and in turn, many students. Of course, not all tasks are equally fun. Of helping with moving furniture, Deb jokes, “I learned my true calling is not picking up furniture.”

Deb gets a lot out of the volunteer experience. She likes hearing about the students’ lives and their home countries. Students often bring gifts, share favorite foods, and teach Deb some of their language and culture. She says she is always interested in learning how they heard about UW-Madison and why they decided to come here.

Deb hopes that MFIS remains a successful program for international students and receives the funding it needs to continue. She will continue with her volunteer activities, and as long as MFIS has volunteers like Deb Spry, it will remain a great resource for international students and the community. Thanks, Deb Spry!

Give Thanks for International Friendship!

Share Your Thanksgiving with an International Student

MFIS is once again offering international students the opportunity to celebrate Thanksgiving with a local family through the Thanksgiving Hospitality Program. The program is a wonderful opportunity to share American Thanksgiving traditions and food with people from around the world. To make this possible, we rely on local families to host the students. Our community response has been great. In 2009, MFIS placed 77 students from 14 different countries with 40 area families.

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

If you are interested in hosting a student, or to learn more, call MFIS at 608-263-4010 or send an e-mail info@mfismadison.org
Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed to fill the following positions.

Receptions Volunteer Coordinator: Coordinate volunteers to attend receptions for international students (two or three events are typically in August and the other is in January). The position requires recruiting volunteers from the volunteer pool to converse with students and ensuring that printed information about MFIS is up-to-date. The incumbent will not be responsible for planning the receptions. The past Receptions Coordinator will be available to assist if desired.

MFIS Historian: Our venerable volunteer organization needs to have its story told and remembered. There are various avenues for this, including as an oral history project—many of the early members are still active within the community. A fascinating project that needs someone to take it in hand.

Annual Dinner Coordinator: Organize the annual dinner for MFIS volunteers. This annual event offers MFIS volunteers the opportunity to meet other volunteers, celebrate accomplishments, and learn about a new country and culinary tradition. The position requires arranging a venue, managing catering, and promoting the event. The past Annual Meeting Coordinator will be available to assist if desired.

If you’d like to volunteer for one of the positions listed, send an e-mail to info@mfismadison.org or call the MFIS office at 608-263-4010.

Notes from the Board

Throughout the year at MFIS, different volunteer needs arise. Many of these needs fit within our traditional programs (Temporary Home Stay, Thanksgiving Hospitality, etc.), but occasionally additional support is needed to help us coordinate our programs. Oftentimes we cannot wait for the next newsletter to announce a formal call for volunteers.

Therefore, we would like to add you to our ad hoc volunteer list, a special list of MFIS volunteers that we can email or contact when a short-term need arises during the year. Examples of some one-time or short-term needs that arise:

- Deliver our newsletter to the post office;
- Design a flyer;
- Assist Furniture Loan with picking up or delivering a piece of furniture;
- Assist with volunteer recruitment;
- Bring a dessert to the Welcome Picnic;
- Help set up decorations for the Annual Dinner;
- Post an advertisement for MFIS in your neighborhood newsletter;
- Locate a table for the Welcome Picnic.

When a need arises, we will send e-mails to the ad hoc volunteer list. We hope this will give more MFIS volunteers an opportunity to be involved in less time-consuming – yet equally important – ways throughout the year.

Are you willing to become an ad hoc volunteer? If so, simply send an e-mail to info@mfismadison.org with “Ad Hoc Volunteer List” in the subject line or call the MFIS office at 608-263-4010.

Thank you for your support of MFIS.
Global Friends

Get to know an international student and learn about another country and culture by participating in Global Friends, a program that matches you or your family with an international student for conversation, friendship, and cultural exchange. You and your partner determine the frequency, focus and location of meetings. For more information or to sign up, please contact the MFIS office at info@mfismadison.org.

One more less mailing from Madison Friends of International Students

Sign up to receive the newsletter electronically

At MFIS, we care about international students – we want to allot as much of our budget as possible to programs for students. The fewer paper newsletters we send out, the more money we can spend on programs for students – not to mention the positive environmental impact! Please sign up to receive the MFIS Newsletter via e-mail! Simply send an e-mail to info@mfismadison.org with “MFIS Newsletter Delivery” in the subject line.