

Tuesday, February 17, 2009

ISSO takes cultures of the world to local school

By Amanda Benjamin, student writer

As part of its new Learn About Me Program, Oakland University's International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) recently had student representatives of Yemen, Saudi Arabia, India, Vietnam and Kuwait give cultural presentations to youngsters at Auburn Elementary School in Auburn Hills.

"Can anyone tell me anything about dates?" Hadi Alzawad from Damman, Saudi Arabia, asked a group of students at the end of his presentation. "If you eat seven, you will have energy for the whole day," a first-grade boy replied.

"Correct. Give him a hand," Alzawad said as he handed the boy a prize amid the applause.

Last year, Auburn Elementary had a diversity festival, but since staff members weren't planning on having one this year, parent Bonnie Kakuda called Knoche and organized the event. "I at least wanted a diversity day where they get some culture," Kakuda said.

Knoche said many international students at Oakland get homesick, especially when they first arrive, and that it takes a while for them to get adjusted to American culture.

"By speaking about their home country, it brings joy to them, and they want to share it with others," she said. "This is a great experience for them to practice public speaking as well as to educate and open minds of young children," Knoche said.

Giving a presentation about his country for the third or fourth time, Hamed Al Tairi of Mukalla, Yemen, spoke to fourth-graders. "It's a good experience for me to educate children about my culture," he said.

Al Tairi asked students questions throughout his presentation, having them repeat the answers and give each other applause. "You were really, really good," Kakuda told Al Tairi. "You got them engaged."

Alzawad presented for his first time to a group of first-graders in the library. He said the best thing about the presentation was the kids' excitement and the fact that they would go home and share what they learned with their parents. "I think they were interested in knowing how the children lived in my country," he noted.

Rahul Sukhani, Gargi Chokshi and Palak Shah, all of India, visited a kindergarten classroom. "It was my first experience sharing my culture to such young kids," Chokshi said. She added that it was a nice experience and that the kids were excited about the presentation.

"The main aim was to let them know how diverse our country is," Sukhani said, explaining that India has many states and languages, but that Hindi is the official language.

Much of the presentation focused on wedding ceremonies, which are unique in each region of the country. Auburn students learned that the events typically last five to seven days. "We wanted to let them know how important the occasion is in someone's life," Chokshi said.

Presenting to third-graders, Ayoub AlQallaf of Kuwait wanted to promote a positive image of his country and its culture. "I hope they learn new things about the world and the different cultures around the world," he said.

AlQallaf added that it's better for students to have a presentation than a lecture in class because it's more memorable and they're more interested. ISSO provides support for international students and is committed to building an international campus through service, support and advocacy to nurture global citizenship and multicultural appreciation.

For more information on the organization, visit the [ISSO Web site](#).



Rahul Sukhani (left), Gargi Chokshi (in back at center), and Palak Shah (right) from India sit with a kindergarten class at Auburn Elementary School in Auburn Hills.

SUMMARY

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