

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

International students share cultures at local school

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

International students for Oakland University were able to share information about their homelands and their customs and cultures with students from Auburn Elementary School in Auburn Hills as part of the school's "It's a Small World," diversity night on Feb. 29. OU's **International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO)** arranged for the students to participate in the diversity night through the Learn About Me program.

"We had a dozen students from Oakland who dressed up in traditional clothes, create poster boards with information from their countries and share their cultures with the students," said Petra Knoche, assistant director of ISSO.

Knoche said the Auburn Elementary event featured displays with representation from each continent, as well as interactive events like Henna, food, hair braiding, music and live performances at the end of the night.

Alena Vackova, who is from the Czech Republic, tries to tell the students about her country's rich history and culture. She tells them about the castles, chateaus, museums and the many contributions the Czech Republic made to the world, such as soft contact lenses, microwave ovens and the word "robot."

"I think it's important for every person to learn about foreign countries. Today's world is very diverse and globalized, but not always tolerant. By teaching children about countries, I have a chance to promote their knowledge of the world and tolerance toward difference. I also enjoy interacting with children of all ages and this program is a great opportunity to do so," Vackova said.

Vackova participated in the international event at Auburn Elementary, her third Learn About Me event this year, which ISSO students can participate in twice a month. ISSO students have participated in diversity events at schools in Rochester, Utica and Auburn Hills among others in the local districts.

The Auburn Elementary event was Palesa Serunye's first Learn About Me experience.

"I enjoy teaching others about my country," said Serunye, who is from South Africa. "I usually try to correct some of the misconceptions they may have about Africa, such as it being a jungle with dangerous animals roaming around and there is no civilization."

Serunye said while she is teaching the students about her country, she is also learning a lot.

"I am learning how other people have a genuine interest in other cultures. I've also realized that most cultures have the same underlying principles, we just express them differently. I also learn a lot about my own country when I do the research. It's an enriching experience overall," Serunye said.

Akshat Jain also participated in the Auburn Elementary event. He said that while he contributed to the event, he also took something away from it. He said she learned about currencies of the different nations, customary clothing and food.

"Along with the children, it was kind of a world tour for me and I learned so much," Jain said, adding the live performances were one of the best events of the evening.

Other OU students who participated were Jessica Arab, Sanket Gandhi, Taran Dhaliwal, Yuanlin Zhu, Yao Zhange, Zhongying Shi, Charnelle Knock, Aaron Holdsworth and Dat Nguyen.

Knoche said the event was similar to the International Night at Oakland University and it gave the international students a chance to prepare for the annual event. OU's International Night will be held March 28 from 6-9 p.m. in the Oakland Center Pioneer Food Court.

Knoche plans to continue to find ways for the international students to share their cultures and customs in the community.

"I think it's good for the international students to go into the community and open the minds of young children and teach them about the world," Knoche said. "Kids usually just learn about other countries from books, but when we go to them, we can bring a piece of the countries' traditions and cultures with us for them to experience firsthand."

For more information on Oakland University International Students and Scholars events and activities, visit the **ISSO** Web site.



International students from Oakland University shared their cultures and customs with students from Auburn Elementary.

SUMMARY

International students for Oakland University were able to share information about their homelands and their customs and cultures with students from Auburn Elementary School in Auburn Hills as part of the school's "It's a Small World," diversity night on Feb. 29. OU's International Students and Scholars Office arranged for the students to participate in the diversity night through the Learn About Me program.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, March 12, 2008
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, March 12, 2008
Article Start Date: Wednesday, March 12, 2008