

The CIVIC Citizen

The Council for International Visitors to Iowa Cities

Fall, unfortunately (except for the skiers among us), is gone but it created many warm memories for the cold winter months ahead. We held our annual luncheon at which Paula Morris from New Zealand was the keynote speaker. Her speech about a New Zealander's big and small adventures in the Midwest was light-hearted and included an entertaining description of her attempt to grate Velveeta.

We also hosted two large groups from the Middle East and from Africa. Eleven from the African continent were interested in the mechanisms used by citizen action groups to affect political, social and economic change. Their hosts were Richard and Joyce Oberman, Marianne Weiss, Alan and Kristin Nagel, and Ed and Ethel Barker. The visitors opinions about their experiences here were similar and were epitomized by Thierney Raveloson from Madagascar, director of a non-governmental organization and former governor of the province of Tulear. He wrote:

“In general, my overall experience in Iowa City was positive because it completed all what we have already learned about the way people are very concerned about elections and elected people. If in the other states we had only the theory, in Iowa we had the practice. I can say that we enjoyed all our professional appointments though I give a small advantage to my visit to the West High School because as we visited many universities, at least we could also, in Iowa City, visit a high school and share some times with its students. Special thanks to volunteers. The works done by the volunteers in the USA is very amazing. In Iowa City we could see it by the direct contacts we had with them in and outside the program. If I can rate the home hospitality during my visit, I'll say (on a scale of 1-10) Iowa: 9-10.”

A few other comments are worth noting. Two visitors, referring to CIVIC volunteers, wrote: “May God bless them”, and “Showers of blessing on them.” If they had a complaint, it was only that they were exhausted when they left.

CIVIC also entertained student leaders from the Middle East with a potluck dinner in the lounge of the International Center attended by Cherie Mobasher, a member of the CIVIC board of directors and a counselor in the Career Center at the University. She wrote:

“After a rousing bus tour of the campus (I hear that students burst spontaneously into song), 16 students from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, India, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Tunisia, the West Bank, Yemen and United Arab Emirates along with their interpreters joined CIVIC members, guests and UI students for a potluck. It was particularly delightful for this CIVIC member to have the chance to use her French with the student leaders from North Africa! Students were almost overwhelmed with the loaded food table - new things to try, familiar things to enjoy and lots of home-baked dessert goodies. There was a toddler guest (2 y.o.) who got lots of attention from the international visitors. One of the women from India confessed to being terribly homesick, and seeing a baby helped. A University of Iowa graduate student from Tunisia was thrilled to meet her compatriot – she had not had a chance to chat in the Tunisian Arabic dialect since arriving in Iowa City. It was a warm, wonderful good time for all. It was made particularly special because of the support from UI students.”

Diana Davies, Director of International Programs and member of the CIVIC board of directors, was one of two individuals who received the Catalyst Award from the UI Office of Affirmative Action. The Catalyst program recognizes departments and individuals who have developed innovative programs, policies or activities that have improved diversity within the university community. Diana suggests that her compassion and understanding for international students and scholars stems from her own life experiences that include study in Russia. “They hardly knew me and yet they would bring out their very best for me – in one case, the chocolate and champagne they were saving for a child's wedding. I think that was the first time when I was absolutely struck by the importance of what might seem to be, on the surface, a fairly trite concept: hospitality”. (*This paragraph was excerpted from the University of Iowa publication, International Accents.*)