

The CIVIC Citizen

The Council for International Visitors to Iowa Cities

One could reasonably expect that a person who lived his whole life in rural Kyrgystan, and who was educated in religious schools, might experience a little culture shock followed by homesickness on his first trip to a Western country. And that is what happened to five imams from Kyrgystan. Here to study the depth of religious diversity and tolerance in this country, they wanted to return home after only one week of their scheduled two week visit. CIVIC was able to alleviate that homesickness, however temporarily, by making our visitors feel more comfortable at a potluck luncheon at Remi and Jeanne Cadoret's house. The feeling of welcome was increased by the diversity of guests from other cultures who have had to adjust to life in the U.S. – particularly an Uzbek who, in response to their questions, spoke about his own adjustments during his year in Iowa City and elsewhere in the West. Before the Kyrgyz left the Cadoret's there was a speech by their senior imam that embraced multiculturalism, dialogue and understanding, expressed gratitude to the hostess, and offered a prayer for the well-being of all of us. There was, also, at least one hug and many handshakes. We were encouraged that our international visitors may have carried those feelings with them as they completed their tour of America. Shortly before their departure on July 4th, each imam was handed a three foot sparkler to light. They seemed to enjoy the novel experience except for one who backed away and refused to ignite the questionable device until he saw what happened to his companions. It was clear that with that particular imam we had come up a little short in the trust department.

Homesickness was not an issue with other visitors in June. Mr. Niresh Bhagwandin, from South Africa, was in Iowa City to discuss HIV/AIDS, with the specific purpose of developing and implementing a national disease prevention program in his country. He wrote, "I came to Iowa City as a skeptic – my perception was based on comments made by people I met in the East and West, which were that Iowa didn't have much to offer. I was pleasantly surprised. Keep up the good work. CIVIC is doing America proud. You are great ambassadors for your country". He also enjoyed an evening of home hospitality provided by Newman and Kristi Abuissa.

And from Thailand, Mr. Prachaya Chimvises came to explore the U.S. experience with multiculturalism, including its effects on education, business, civil society and all levels of government. Mr. Chimvises is a Muslim and expressed his appreciation to CIVIC for accommodating his Friday prayer request.. He also wrote, with reference to Drs. Adel and Larry Afifi who invited him to dinner in their home, "Drs. Afifi are wonderful and I enjoyed their company. He recited a verse from the Koran, in Arabic, much to my amazement. The dinner conversation was an educational experience for both sides".

Editorial staff
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