



International Week 2003

FESTIVE FUN AND SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS AND LECTURES COLORED JMU'S 2003 INTERNATIONAL WEEK ACTIVITIES. STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS LEARNED ABOUT ONE ANOTHER AND THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

By Allison Mall ('04)

For the sixth straight year, JMU hosted a successful International Week celebration in September. Students, faculty members and guests celebrated cultures from around the world, centering on the theme, "Picture This: Envision Yourself in A Connected World."

The week featured many activities, lectures and performances intended to spread awareness of the cultural diversity at JMU. The major activities were hosted by JMU's Center for Multicultural/International Student Services.

Rebecca Stevens, a dance minor who works in the James Madison Center, said "The publicity was really good this year. I like that there are so many events and that people don't have to plan ahead to attend."

An International Festival at Harrisonburg's Hillandale Park kicked off the celebration and included the local community in food and craft stands, booths promoting international causes, international games, face painting and an interactive stage. While both children and adults could participate in the interactive folk dance lessons, juggling and storytelling, those who just came to watch could observe dancers and various musical acts. The park setting allowed Harrisonburg residents to mingle with students from JMU, Bridgewater College and EMU.

Although some students came to enjoy the festival after hearing about it in *The Breeze*, some chose to volunteer their time during the week. Freshman Brittany Conley and sophomore Yen Hwang assisted with an African Kufi hat craft booth. "It is important that we come out and volunteer and help celebrate with the Harrisonburg community because," said Conley, "as students, we don't get an opportunity to do so very often."

Senior Bonnie Saxon, volunteer coordinator of the festival, said that she was expecting about 200 student volunteers from JMU. "The purpose of this community festival is to show and celebrate the diversity in our area because so many people are unaware that it even exists. JMU students can use this festival to see outside the bubble of campus and college life."

Center for Multicultural/International Student Services representatives were pleased with the festival turnout as well as the week's other activities. Mariama S. Boney-Padilla, associate CMISS director, said, "Students responded well. We saw an increase in the number of students who participated in the week's events, and we felt that the campus participation allowed students to experience and gain

knowledge about cultures around the world."

The international events on campus began with a flag parade on the Quad. Student participants carried flags from the dozens of countries represented by JMU students. The procession passed by students who were unaware of the international influence on campus and in Harrisonburg.

"It's great to see people celebrating their nationalities like this in such a public place, I have a lot of respect for those who can stand up for what they believe in," said junior Katie Epstein as smiling students marched by with flags raised high.

The rest of the week was filled with speakers, basic language lessons, music lessons, concerts and dance performances. On Tuesday, Latin musician Pepe Aranda performed on the Commons during lunchtime, causing the already bustling area to explode with rhythm and excitement. The Commons was also the location for Arab/Israeli comedy hour on Wednesday and the Mid-East Interest club event on Friday. During Wednesday's International Bazaar, vendors displayed and sold crafts from around the world.

International events didn't stop when the sun went down. Each night, classes were offered in basic Korean, Hindi/Urdu, Arabic and Farsi. Senior Stephanie Sharpes attended the Arabic class, and said, "They taught the alphabet, and we learned how to write our name."

Festive fun was followed by serious discussions, lectures and panels on issues that affect the international community. On Tuesday, Kuni Xulam spoke in Grafton-Stovall Theatre about the plight of the Kurdish people. Xulam, founder of the American Kurdish Information Network, hopes to educate people about discrimination and show how Kurdistan is not recognized as a nation in the Middle East. He warned, "When you treat a human being like a dog, you should be expected to be bitten by that dog."

Senior Tuna Wemisci, who attended the Kurdish lecture, said, "International week is important because it allows us to exchange information, ideas and perspectives about the world with each other in a safe, organized environment." Wemisci and his friend, freshman Selcuk Koruturk, both asked Xulam questions about Kurdistan and expressed their opinions about Middle East discrimination to him.

Koruturk said, "I really appreciate that a small town like Harrisonburg has joined together to reach out to the international community; I think it's really important to teach people about other cultures."

Wrapping up International Week were a Middle Eastern Buffet in the College Center Ballroom and a concert by Ni Tettey Tehteh and the Kunsun Ensemble from Ghana. The band performed their unique blend of African music and jazz.

David Chase of the JMU academic advising and career development office says, "We're always looking for ways to enrich the JMU community and enhance diversity. I think International Week is getting bigger and better every year."