

The Sagemont School's International Club Promotes Cultural Awareness and Appreciation

BY STACEY BOMSER

The student body at The Sagemont School is a reflection of the communities it serves: vibrant and culturally diverse. This is even more evident at the Upper School Campus, which welcomes students from around the world through its International Program. With over 60 countries represented on campus, this school promotes cultural awareness and appreciation.

The International Program welcomes students from all 'corners' of the globe. Over the years, it has accepted students from as far away as China, Japan, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, Croatia, Israel, Serbia and Suriname. One thing these students all have in common is a desire to learn and become part of their new community, both on campus and through Sagemont's unique Home-Stay Program in which international students are housed with local families.

Many of these global students are members of Sagemont's International Club. This high school club is committed to the understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural heritages. "Our goal is to provide students the opportunity to interact with other students within the student body from diverse cultures, promote cultural sensitivity and understanding, and an appreciation of one another," states Ayishah Dennis, ESOL/Spanish Instructor and International Club Advisor. "The club also serves as a strong support group for international students, enabling them to have the opportunity to share their culture with other students."

During its weekly meetings, International Club members take part in various activities such as discussion sessions on cultural topics, participating in culinary lessons, making native crafts, and playing traditional games. In addition, club members take excursions to local museums, theaters, special libraries and other cultural events in the community.

Last year, members of the International Club took a special field trip to Sagemont's Lower School Campus, where they shared their cultures with younger students studying the "Exploring the World" theme.

"Several students from the International Club were invited to present their country of origin to third graders," explained Ms. Dennis. "Students delivered an engaging presentation representing Venezuela, Japan, Austria, China and Russia." This included story time sessions, reading bilingual books. A Chinese student read *Splash* by Flora McDonnell, which the young Sagemont students now know as "Shui hua fei jian."

Ms. Dennis says the goal of the activity was to introduce the students at the Lower School Campus to the diversity that

exists within the Sagemont community. "We wanted to expose students to world languages and discuss cultural similarities and differences supporting the 'Exploring the World' theme."

The program was so successful, the third grade team is hoping to make it an annual event. "Thank you, Gracias, Xie Xie, Spasiba, Danke, and Arigatou for this wonderful experience," they wrote to the International Club members. "The presentations were beyond amazing! The 'I' (International) students were full of life and extremely engaging with our third graders. Our students loved their energy and wealth of knowledge and pride for their country."

Pilar Valdes, Assistant Principal at the Lower School Campus, was also impressed with the cultural exchange. "Our kindergarten and second grade students were truly captivated by the International students. They loved hearing the different stories in the students' native languages and learning more about a different culture."

Assistant Principal Valdes noted that visit was especially meaningful to one new student. "We had a student in kindergarten from China that had just started that week. I saw her face light up when she saw another Chinese student, especially when they had a conversation in Chinese."

Ms. Dennis says the International Club has big plans for this year. It plans to expand the Lower Campus Book Program with monthly visits during which International students will read bilingual books to students in grades three and four. At the Upper School Campus, the club will collaborate with the National Honor Society to create a school-wide Buddy Program. International students will be paired with NHS members to establish friendships and organize local social events.

Outside of school, International Club members engage in community service projects. "We will continue our support of the Weston Miracle League, a non-profit organization that organizes a ten-week baseball program for physically and mentally challenged children," states Ms. Dennis. "Members of the International Club volunteer as buddies for the disabled children."

To learn more about The Sagemont School's International Program visit www.Sagemont.com. If you are interested in hosting an international student at Sagemont, please email Stephen McMahon with Homestay Florida at homestay.florida@hotmail.com.

