

Group needs friendly hosts

By Kirsten Nielsen

If foreign travel is too expensive, foreign friendships can still be enjoyed without leaving the city limits. The Lincoln Friends of Foreign Students is an independent community organization that matches foreign students and American hosts.

"The purpose of the organization is to give the foreign students a chance to experience a little more of American life," said Linda Becker, board member of LFFS, and student adviser for International Educational Services. "They're only exposed to one segment on campus."

"The program is not a live-in arrangement, nor is the host family expected to incur any major expense," she said. "It's simply a friend relationship. The student is invited over occasionally for meals or any other family activity."

The greatest period of involvement, she said would probably be at the beginning, when the student has more needs and is still adjusting.

Students often apply for the program before arriving in the country, Becker said. They give information about themselves and their interests on the application. A placement co-ordinator then talks to a family or an individual who has applied to be a host, to see if a match is feasible, she said.

Becker said at least 50 percent of the foreign students coming to the university apply for an American host.

"Right now we have a 75 student backlog, dating back to January," she said.

The organization, started around 1962 as the Host Family Organization, includes about 300 families, some hosting more than one student.

Becker thinks the program is successful.

"I get very good feedback on it, and I've seen the development of some lifetime friendships," she said.

Barbara Wright, president of LFFS, and a host herself, agreed. "It's really a learning experience, too," she said.

"My young son has grown up around foreign students. He feels at ease with anyone now, and we've really enjoyed the cultural exchange."

In the past, Wright has sponsored students from Hong Kong and Iran. Presently she is hosting two students, Nana Ato-mensah from Ghana, and Ole Gronli from Norway, a sophomore in journalism.

Wright said in addition to meals and family activities, the foreign students have stayed with them over the holidays and sometimes accompanied them on vacations.

"LFFS itself also has three group activities a year for the students and their hosts," she said. "We have a picnic in the fall, a square dance in January and an international potluck dinner in May, for which the students cook a dish from their home country."

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