

Ecumenical Center
& International Residence



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Imagining the Future

Appreciating ECIR's Volunteers

Living at ECIR

I applied to the Ecumenical Center & International Residence while I was still in Nigeria and was furiously wondering where I was going to stay, having been offered admission by the University of Michigan. A friend had suggested I take a look at ECIR's website and a look indeed was enough to get me intrigued.



Jide Adebayo-Begun

And since I moved in three months ago, my stay in the residence has been very enjoyable, right from the welcome I got from the Residence Life Manager, Rosana Lee. I find the staff members, Kay Penix, Bruce Martin and Mark Pilarski to be very friendly and eager to make the residents feel at ease. I have also benefitted from various programs put in place by ECIR to make life more comfortable for the students: the weekly grocery ride, the global village events, the picnic and the fall retreats. These events contribute to making ECIR a fun and dynamic environment. (Continued on Page 2)

On October 28, 2011, over fifty people attended our Volunteer Appreciation Brunch. This annual event is held to thank our volunteers for their continued service and support. Residents, Egor Lazarev from Russia and Lijun Huang from China shared their experience about living in the ECIR and developing cross-cultural friendship. The event continued with a musical performance by Kimberly Grambo, member of the AIESEC student group at the University of Michigan, who entertained our audience with tunes in



ECIR residents welcome volunteers: from left, Vineeth Vijaykumar, Luna Liu (ECIR Intern), Oguzhan Kirikbas, Natty Chutichetpong, and Nico Ravanilla

English, as well as in French.



John and Carolyn Wiseman

Special guest speaker, Terry Gallagher presented his *Sacred Stories of Cultural and Religious Diversity*. He is the Communications Director of the Ecology Center in Ann Arbor and a Board Member of the Interfaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit. This year, the Volunteer of the Year Award went to John Wiseman. He was introduced to ECIR by his minister, and it was a good fit for him since he has always been interested in other cultures and gained exposure to them through his Chemistry graduate school teaching experience. Since then, he has served as the president of the board of directors for two consecutive terms; he has chaired a number of committees, and was also instrumental in the renovations of the Dotson wing kitchens. He is currently a member of both the Property and Finance Committees.

Why I live at ECIR.....



Huang Lijun

I'm Huang Lijun from China. I'm a visiting scholar at the University of Michigan's Center for Chinese Studies. I've been living at the ECIR for about 2 months. When I first arrived, I saw a small tag on the door of my apartment. It stated: "This apartment is created by a gift from Nile and Judith Harper." How sweet! The apartment I'm going to stay in is not just an apartment, but also a place of love and benevolence.

I have made some lovely and sweet memories living here. I still remember the International Picnic at Island Park. ECIR staff and friends jointly presented us a wonderful gathering under the sunshine by the river. I also like the grocery shopping facilitated by ECIR volunteers. It's a happy and convenient journey that saves me a lot of time.

There are still plenty of happy moments in my memory: camping at a YMCA Camp in Jackson, visiting Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, appreciating English poems in Global Village Voices, and enjoying a fantastic Traverse City trip. I have experienced many wonderful things since I arrived here at ECIR. All of these are due to ECIR staff and friends' help and effort. I do owe them a 'thank you' for bringing me a home away from home here at ECIR. I hope that in the future more and more people will join in ECIR programs to make it a better home for international students and scholars, and a better community for cultural exchange and lifelong friendship.

Director's Message



Bruce D. Martin

New Mission Statement?

The mission of ECIR is to be a welcoming community for students/scholars of all nationalities; to provide residential and educational programs fostering understanding and respect for all cultures and spiritual traditions; to promote lifelong friendships and leadership skills that contribute to harmony and peace between communities and nations around the world.

The recent approval of the above statement by our Board of Directors attempts to imagine and express our mission in new language. It answers three basic questions: Who are we?, What do we do?, and Why do we do it? And it attempts to be faithful to the past while expressing confidence in the promise of the future.

In recent months, our thoughts have turned to the important task of imagining the future of ECIR. Throughout this *Center Report*, you'll find our imaginations at work on new projects, new programs, and new challenges. We have restructured our Global Village Square Program, re-imagined our Global Friendship Program, and introduced the new Traverse City Retreat Program as well as the Bay Mills Cultural Engagement Program. Volunteers have worked hard to provide new kitchens for our residents and residents have worked to create a new and brightly colored café. Additionally, two brightly colored diversity panels will be added to the front of our Center to let the AA community know that we are here to serve a culturally and spiritually diverse global community. We have also expanded our graduate intern program with the UM School of Social Work and added graduate-level work-study students to our exceptional staff.

Our new mission statement points to the future of ECIR as a living learning community striving to build global relationships of understanding, justice, and peace at home and around the world. But what does it mean when every week we reluctantly tell applicants knocking on our doors that there is no room in the Inn? With the world on our doorstep, can we release our imaginations to expand our program to meet more of our world's need? Imagine expanding our residential and educational program to accommodate 100 rather than 50 residents.

Supporters and donors are people of the future, not merely people of the past or present. When we receive your gifts in support of our residential and educational program, you are helping us to imagine a future for ECIR. You are helping us to better meet our world's need. Every act of support is an act of faith, of imagining not only what has been but what ECIR can yet become. Thank you for stepping out of the wake of history to join us in imagining a future that will enable us to better fulfill our mission.

Director's Challenge

Shhhh! ECIR may be one of Ann Arbor's best kept secrets, known to only a small circle of highly committed and involved people. We have discovered that few know where our Center is located. Others think we are just another rental property.

We hope you agree that this needs to change. To increase visibility, we would like to install two brightly colored 8' x 9' panels over the entrance to our Center. Through color and design, these "diversity panels" will let all Ann Arbor know that ECIR is a unique place with an amazing mission to serve the international community. *Shhhh, no more!*

As director, I will donate \$1.00 for every \$3.00 donated toward the cost (\$2200) of these diversity panels. If you would like to join me in this effort to increase the visibility of our Center, please

send a designated donation marked Director's Challenge. Thank you for your generous support.



Wash Clothes

Wish List Pots and Pans

Tableware

Computer: Harddrive and Monitor Kitchen Blender
Coffee/Espresso Machine

Van for Programming and Building Needs- Donation Towards or Donated

Living at ECIR

Continued From Page 1

I have also enjoyed very stimulating conversations with co-residents including Yegor Lazarev from Russia and Mert Turkol from Turkey, Endru, Gary and Rachna. It's always a pleasure to be among young, dynamic people from different parts of the world.

Living in ECIR has provided an avenue to easily acclimatize myself to college life in America, and also get to meet various people from different cultural backgrounds, with different worldviews and outlook, united by a common quest for knowledge, happiness and personal fulfillment.

I am glad to be living in a genuinely international environment, powered by professionals with the experience and understanding of the problems and challenges faced by international students. It's a great pleasure to be a part of the ECIR dream.

New Employees

Welcome....



Jenna I'm a part time program assistant at ECIR from Portland, Oregon. I recently moved to Ann Arbor to attend the University of Michigan's graduate social work program. I'm passionate about social justice, human rights, and building strong communities. ECIR's mission is in alignment with my interests, and I have really enjoyed being a part of the vibrant community here so

far. My other interests include camping, long distance backpacking and almost anything outdoors. I also love traveling, playing guitar, cooking, and going down the rabbit hole in philosophical conversations. I look forward to getting to know more of the ECIR and Ann Arbor community this year.

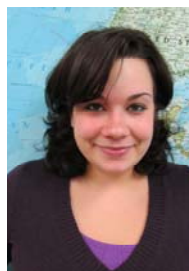


Luna I am from China. I am in my second year at the U of M's graduate social work program. I like travelling, playing piano, playing basketball, reading, dancing, and making new friends! As an intern at the ECIR, my main responsibility is co-developing the Global Friendship program with Rebecca, the other intern. I am also responsible for organizing events for interna-

tional students, which I love! I am very excited to work here because all the staff members are very nice and helpful, and the residents at the ECIR are wonderful! The residents are from all over the world so this is a great chance for me to learn new things and practice my cultural competence. ECIR rocks!



Wafaa I am a graduate student, working on my MSW at the University of Michigan, concentrating on Interpersonal Practice in Health. I spend most of my free time with my 7 younger siblings. I also enjoy exercising, cooking, and reading. I am an office assistant at the ECIR working on development. I look forward to getting to know and learning from the residents at the ECIR.



Rebecca I currently am a first year Advance Standing MSW student studying Community Organization. I am interested in Immigration Policy. At ECIR, I am responsible for recruiting for the Global Friendship Program and organizing additional activities. I enjoy working at ECIR because I have a sense that all are welcome here. It's a place of learning and growth. This is what I want to be involved with.



Arielle This is my last semester as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan. I am pursuing a degree in Anthropology, with a minor in Medical Anthropology, and plan to work in the future. I enjoy reading, listening to music traveling, and learning about other cultures. I have a work-study position at ECIR doing light-cleaning.

Committed to Making a Difference



**Debbie Rough's home,
Traverse City, MI**

There is a poster in the ECIR office that reads: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." This quote from Margaret Mead reminds me everyday of why our work at ECIR is important. Some people look at our mission statement and say: "Isn't it a little too unrealistic?" I answer with a definite no because I believe we can bring about change, one person at a time. People just need to have a vision for the future to realize that this is possible. Indeed, thousands of students and scholars have graced our residence, leaving an impact many times as large.

Debbie Rough is a person with such a vision: "ECIR home stays made a lasting impression on our family. Then when we were living abroad, we were the visitors/ the foreigners. We saw it from the other perspective. It was easy to gravitate to those with a common language, like traditions or in the same situation with friends and extended family far away. It took more effort to build relationships with those who live locally and have their established routines. We treasured the invitations to a local residence or to join them for an outing. It was a high priority to continue this sharing opportunity when back in the USA. Distance from Ann Arbor, did not deter the desire. An opportunity to share the beauty of the North was a key motivator. House renovations/furnishings were done with ECIR in mind. Once settled in, a phone call was the beginning of renewing the relationship. It was so exciting to be engaged again and to expose others in Traverse City to ECIR. There is definitely community interest and potential for growth!! In this small way of building understanding and respect, one can take action on ECIR's mission to contribute to harmony and peace between communities and nations around the world."

The Traverse City Retreat was a great success thanks to Debbie's hospitality and generosity. This experience got us thinking about the possibility of having our own van. It would basically help us meet needs of our Program: we would be able to expand our educational opportunities, it would lower costs for participants, and it could be used for facility maintenance projects. With a van, we could take as many as fifteen people at any given time to learn about the United States and fifteen people would leave their global mark on this land.

Written by Rosana Lee

Embracing Change at ECIR

Café

The idea of the café came about during the time that we were re-vamping the Global Village Dinners. We wanted the new Global Village Square to have a little more of a café feeling, and the Café space was our way of turning this vision into a concrete reality. What convinced us to move forward with this project was feedback from residents. We strive to relate to them and to address their needs in this fast changing world. We thought that a coffee shop is the place where a lot of students go to work, meet friends, or relax nowadays. This type of set-up would allow multiple people to work in the same room in an atmosphere that is both familiar and comfortable to them.



Resident volunteers painting the Café: From left Jide Adebayo-Begun, Vineeth Vijaykumar, and Antoine Ducoin

Social Work Interns

In order to launch our Global Friendship Program and make it successful, we needed a lot of continuing help. We interviewed two prospective Social Work Interns; one of them was from Michigan and the other one was from China. We thought that having both of them working together could help us reach out to the local community as well as the international community. Their partnership has worked really well so far and the collaboration has blossomed into a global friendship of their own.

Global Friendship Program

The Global Friendship Program concept grew organically from two previous programs called, Dinners in US Homes and Fenton Home stay. These matched hosts and international students and scholars for a meal or a home stay during the holiday season. We noticed that many of the participants had such a wonderful time that they continued meeting afterwards as friends. We wanted to eliminate the limits of the old programs to open the possibility of creating long-lasting friendships in any setting and at any time of the year. We believe that this is a great example of the many programs that ECIR offers to foster its mission.

Dinners in US Homes attracted over 400 international students and scholars while the number of American hosts was close to 50. For the Fenton Home stays, we only were only able to place between 20 to 30 international students and scholars during the Thanksgiving break. In the past, some international students and scholars were not matched because of the lack of hosts. We hope that the new structure will help us recruit more American Friends so that we can serve more international applicants.

Global Village Square

Global Village Dinners (GVD) featured a dinner prepared by residents and a presentation and discussion after the dinner. We re-imagined the GVD because we wanted to provide residents the opportunity to showcase their creativity and their culture in any way they choose. Some do not know how to cook or are not particularly fond of it but possess other skills. The result was the Global Village Square series, which offers residents a space to participate and actively engage in the community with their talents and knowledge.

We Have Always Known.... (A story from a returning ECIR resident)



Mai Ze Vang,
Asian Studies & English

My parents always taught me a belief that is best summarized by author Kalia Yang: "...that we have chosen our lives. That the people who we would become we had inside of us from the beginning, and the people whose worlds we share, whose memories we hold strong inside us, we have always known." My trip to Thailand this summer taught me this belief.

When I landed on Thai soil, the smell, the hot and humid air, the culture and the people looked unfamiliar to me. I stopped for a moment and asked myself, "Is this a dream or am I really here in Thailand?" I was so excited to be in Thailand, but at the same time I was so afraid of failure and disappointment. Will I disappoint my family and the University of Michigan if I don't do well in Thailand? Will the Thais accept me as a Hmong-American? Will I be able to contribute to Thailand and if so, how? Questions constantly running through my little mind. However, I stayed positive and believed that I should keep an open-mind and learn from every person I would encounter during my journey.

During my first two weeks in Thailand, I had the opportunity to visit some of its most beautiful and ancient provinces. In ChiangMai, I visited Doi Suthep, a temple located at the top of a mountain, where I climbed 309 steps to reach the pagodas. On my way up, I, for the first time, met Hmong people, a little boy who was eight years old and his little sister who was three years old. I spoke Hmong with them and it brought so much love to my heart. But I also felt a deep sadness as I realized they were there to beg for money. I began asking myself what if I was one of these children? Will I, too, be begging for money? I was not sure but I like to believe that these children will one day get the opportunity to dream beyond starvation and survival. I hope they will get the chance to dream about their future aspirations. *To read the rest of the article, please visit <http://www.ecir.org/2011/11/23/we-have-always-known/>*

