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Fulbright Scholars Come to Lamorinda

By Cathy Tyson



A group of Fulbright scholars meet at a Moraga home for a potluck dinner with one of their hosts, Mary Brennan. Photo Cathy Tyson

host families. One Muslim attendee got an eyeful of scantily clad teenagers queuing up for a dance at the Rheem Theater. Her host assured her they usually don't dress that way.

"They were absolutely charming and good house guests. I enjoyed it and would do it again," said Margaret Stithem of Moraga, who has travelled extensively in the past. She hosted two students, one from Indonesia and one from Burma.

Mary Brennan was grateful for the experience, "I don't know who gained more from this International Exchange experience, the Fulbright Scholars or their host families. Bill and I made quite a connection with our scholar and only wished we had more time to spend together. We tried to learn as much as possible about each other's cultures in our limited time together. We shed a few tears as we dropped her off at St. Mary's on her last day and vowed that we'd stay in touch and someday see each other again."

Firuz Akhtar Mohamad Bohari from Malaysia is getting her Masters at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She was impressed with our area, "I was so amazed to see the Moraga neighborhood. You are all rich!"

"I feel so blessed to be a Fulbrighter," she said. "The scholarship not only helps me with the school funding, it also gives me a lot of valuable experience and knowledge through enrichment seminars. Being a representative of Malaysia to an event attended by people from all over the world is an unbelievable experience. Automatically the confidence level boosts up and I feel somehow important and responsible to the people in my country as I am rewarded with rare opportunities."

Susie Miller-Reid, Director of the Center for International Programs at Saint Mary's College, said that the seminar met its main goal, building bridges around the world through person-to-person interactions.

Founded in 1946 by U.S. Senator William Fulbright, the Fulbright Program has competitive merit-based grants for international exchange students, scholars, scientists, teachers and professionals to increase mutual understanding. The program goes both ways, U.S. citizens go abroad and non-U.S. citizens are eligible to come here. Established in the aftermath of World War II, the program is meant to promote peace through educational exchange. Funded through the State Department, 155 countries are currently involved in the program.

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