



Book marks: Ricky Donahue, who is in the IBM class, celebrates the collaboration on the book with English as Second Language student Junaid Shammami.

Language of collaboration produces heartfelt book

Farmington-area teens and people from other countries literally wrote the book on how to gain better perspective about each other.

The not-for-public-sale book, "International Chicken Soup: Stories from the Heart," is the laminated result of a collaboration between the Advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) and high school completion programs at Farmington Community School. What started as a project to improve grammar, sentence structure and spelling skills wound up being cathartic — and spiral bound.

The final product was unveiled and celebrated during a luncheon held last week, featuring international dishes — but no chicken soup. The luncheon was a way to "bring the two programs face to face," said Terry Leland, Farmington Community School supervisor.

Students from the ESL class taught by Janet Cheney and from the IBM computer course taught by Pat Karas were paired off during the lunch, enjoying each other's company and the worldly cuisine while discussing the tangible evidence of their work.

"We really want to get better communication between these teenagers and people from other countries," said Cheney, about the benefit of the collaboration. "And learn from each other."

Students in Karas' class couldn't help but do that. They typed into their computers hand-written essays that were generated by adults now living in America after growing up in Japan, Mexico, Iraq, Germany and other countries. Some essays were corrected and rewritten, because some of the cultural meaning was lost in the first attempt.

Later, those stories were turned into elaborately produced spiral books complete with clip art. Some of their topics included leaving home, coming to America, thoughts about dying and what being a teenager in those countries was like.

One essayist from Japan wrote: "In Japan there are severe rules when you join a sports team. We have to respect the grade older than us as 'venerable people.' We have to study them always like an army."

"It's good to share your experiences with everybody because sometimes you feel alone," said 21-year-old Marcela Segura, who came to the U.S. in 1986 from Mexico. "Sometimes, you have things inside and you want to get them out" but there's no available outlet.

"This book helped (do that). We made the stories."

Birthe Knuepfer, 24, who moved here from Germany six months ago, called the book "something special to everybody who wrote their own stories."

The book, added Knuepfer, is proof that people from all over the world have the same feelings, frustrations and experiences.

Her essay was "The Day I Had To Leave My Home" about her family and friends who live there. Following is an excerpt:

"My parents and a friend came with me to the airport. We had more than an hour until my flight, so we sat together, had a cup of coffee, and talked about everything. I always thought that in a moment like this, you have to talk about important things, but this was not so, but it was okay. Now it was time for me to go on the airport. My parents hugged me several times and my friend did it also. We all cried. When I walked through the gates, I thought, 'Don't look back!' But I did. I looked back and waved."

Another German native involved with the project, 37-year-old Catrin Paetzel, said the stories in "International Chicken Soup" summed up that people everywhere have similar feelings. "These stories ... I can't read without tears in my eyes."

Putting the book together was also a learning experience for young Americans in the high school completion class, such as 18-year-old Alissa Metoff.

She and others in the class read the ESL students' essays in order to type them at the computer ... and couldn't help but get into the stories.

"I learned how different things are fearful to other people," Metoff said.

The book was only distributed to those who worked on it.

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Elks host 'home' rummage sale

The Farmington Elks - Branch 1986 is hosting a rummage sale later this month to help defray building costs of the facility on 10 Mile east of Orchard Lake, said Elks spokesman Donald Perkins. The rummage sale will take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, May 28-30, at a private residence, 23755 Haynes in Farmington Hills, since the new building won't be completed by then.

For details, call 476-4576 or 476-1986.

Bottle drive Sunday

Farmington High School Music Patrons is having a spring bottle and can drive 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, May 17.

All music program students will go around neighborhoods collecting bottles and cans. Residents are asked to place their empties on the front porch. Or, they can drop them off at the parking area behind Farmer Jack in downtown Farmington.

Proceeds will be used to help all of the FHS music programs.