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Culture, Partnerships Take Center Stage with Return of International Day

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Javier Chagoya | May 11, 2022



The Ukrainian delegation sings their national anthem during International Day, returning after a two-year hiatus to the NPS campus, May 7. The event provided an opportunity for the school's community of international students and their families to share their unique cultures through a day of food, family and friendship.

Following two agonizing years of wrestling with the pandemic and its varied restrictions, the return to a 'new normal' has opened possibilities for finally coming together as a community. The Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) international students and their families, eager to share their unique and varied cultures, proudly welcomed the return of International Day.

The long-standing annual tradition of NPS' international students hosting International Day was revived enthusiastically May 7 in the school's academic quadrangle. Students from 28-nations came together, along with their U.S. counterparts to buoy the festival as an event that unites all countries.

The International Day Festival has been around since the 1960s, and this festival serves both as celebration for its return and turning the page on the pandemic. And despite the limited audience and entertainment venues, visitors were only too excited to join in with the festivities.

This year's festival was only open to the NPS community, as well as DOD access card holders, military retirees, and their families. However, the enthusiasm and excitement found at the food booths and performances at International Center Stage couldn't have been better. The day seemed more intimate as friends and families had a chance for longer conversations and activities to share with their children.

Ultimately, it was the food, the music, and the colorful, cultural backdrop that drew crowds who were transported to parts unknown. They were not disappointed. The transformation of scholar turned cook is astonishing as well, with help from spouses and fellow countrymen living in the area, the international students brought rich, authentic recipes that can only be had from the country's family kitchen.

Each spoonful of food and drink was served with pride and joy as visitors traded purchased, red tickets for scrumptious dishes from an ensemble of menus, tempting taste buds, from savory to spicy to sweet, and sweet and sour – one could walk the length of Root Hall and have criss-crossed the palate of the world. Root Hall was bedecked brilliant with national flags and regional fauna, as one could get a cultural tour from country experts at each booth.

According to International Executive Committee Co-Chair Lt. Col. Kristof Trier of Germany, says it's one of the greatest blessings of his stay in the U.S. that all the delegations can join their American friends, in the day-to-day work in exchange of ideas, opinions and laughter, and culture.

"Those common [everyday] things make for greater trust and friendships ...the direct contact, face-to face conversations, are invaluable," said Trier.

Another fact is that NPS' international reach continues to grow. Recently, Grenada has been added to the member of countries represented on campus. Assistant Superintendent of Police Vah Hercules-Lambert is a student in the National Security Affairs program and is grateful for the opportunity to share foods from Grenada and surrounding region – coconut bakes and saltfish souse, which are popular in her country. She represents leadership from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and is proud to be the first representative from Grenada.

Besides food being at the center of the festival, the Yamamoto Hula Ohana Dance Troupe performed with colorful, delicate Hawaiian story telling in dance. The Monterey Bay Taekwondo Demo Team kicked and chopped away at stacked cement slabs as kids watched

in amazement at the focused power of a trained hand or foot. There was also the bounce house, arts and crafts tables, Henna hand painting and face painting – The Ukrainian flag being the most popular to be stroked onto a cheek.

The Ukrainian delegation was in force not only with the borscht and cakes, but the entire delegation also played on center stage draped in blue and yellow singing contemporary songs with a finale of the Ukrainian national anthem, “Ukraine Has Not Yet Perished,” bringing the audience to their feet, expressing solidarity.

“I consider having places and events like International Day, where we all can come together and share a beautiful afternoon, as equal human beings, of vital importance, and I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to contribute to this event,” added Trier.

For more sights from the event, check out the [**2022 International Day**](#) photo gallery. (U.S. Navy photos by Javier Chagoya)