60, 40 and 20: International anniversaries

By Kathryn Burden and Rachel Gravel

On March 3-4, the international community at Tufts will have plenty to celebrate. That weekend, international students and alumni will gather on campus to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the International Center, the 40th anniversary of the International House and the 20th anniversary of the Oliver Chapman Leadership Award. Each has done a great deal to support the international community and Americans’ connection to it at Tufts; the legacy of each is certainly worth celebrating.

Founded in 1952 with the aim of supporting the growing international community at Tufts with administrative issues, mostly connected to immigration visas, the International Center has expanded in 60 years to serve the nearly 1,100 international students, faculty and scholars at Tufts academically, socially and professionally. No longer simply a space to resolve visa issues, the I-Center sponsors social events to promote intercultural understanding — bringing foreign and American students together — and fosters a broad community of support for international students and scholars on campus.

In the 1970s, students and staff recognized that even more could be done to help cultivate international students and to acquaint American students with foreign cultures. To that end, Mary Hecht, then the International Student & Faculty Advisor at the I-Center — at the time known as the Office to the Advisor to Foreign Students — American students like Beth Collins Barton (A’74) and international students like Mehrdad Toofanian (Iran, E’73) collaborated to form the International House. Since its founding 40 years ago, a mix of half international and half American students has occupied the I-House, which has always been in the historic Davies House. The I-House has consistently fostered intercultural experiences that result in lifetime friendships.

The Oliver Chapman Leadership Award, started in 1993 in honor of an international student from Panama who passed away in 1982, is awarded annually to a deserving student at the Parade of Nations sponsored by the International Club. This award serves to reinforce the aims of the I-House and I-Center by celebrating activism that seeks to bridge the multi-cultural divide in the international community at Tufts and in the local area. It is yet another example of the lasting mark international students have left on Tufts.

In preparation for these anniversaries, we as interns at the I-Center and our predecessor Laura Tillery (GSAS ’10) have investigated, mainly through archival research at Tufts’ Digital Collections and Archives, the history of the I-Center, I-House and international community at Tufts itself. Additionally, we have interviewed international alumni about their own memories of Tufts and how their four years on the Hill left a lifelong impression. The legacy of the foreign students who studied at Tufts is noteworthy and we urge you to visit the “Our Legacy” section of the International Center’s site to learn about it by reading international alumni profiles, which are accompanied by slideshows of historical photographs and by checking out some of the myriad articles and pictures we found in the archives on our website.

Additionally, we hope that you will be able to celebrate Tufts’ wonderful international legacy at the Parade of Nations event on Saturday, March 3 at 8 p.m. in Cohen Auditorium. Tickets are available at the Cohen Auditorium box office.

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