Host Families Make Tufts Seem Like Home

Ever wonder what it's like to be a student in a foreign country, far away from home, far away from people who speak your own language and having to study in a foreign language? The host family experience is one way for Americans to satisfy their curiosity or to just enrich their cultural knowledge.

There are over 700 international students and research scholars currently attending Tufts, and the International Center is looking for host families for Thanksgiving Day and/or Christmas Day.

The International Center, Director Jane Etish-Andrews said, is appealing to anyone in the Tufts community who would like to host one or two students or even a whole family with kids. "The host family doesn't have to be a family in the traditional sense. It can be a single person, a divorced family, or anyone interested in hosting," Etish-Andrews said.

Many students like to go out in pairs, Etish-Andrews said, because it's less intimidating. Tufts' international students represent over 90 countries, including Malaysia and Iceland. Etish-Andrews believes it will "broaden the host family's experience a bit" to entertain a student from China, Taiwan or some other off-the-beaten-track country.

The host family program has existed since the early 1970s, but "we don't assign students to a family for a whole year any more," Etish-Andrews said. She said the present system of finding host families for holidays and special occasions is less of a commitment and more accommodating for both the American family and the student.

Margie Siszman, a native Honduran who is a senior, participated in the program as a freshman, when students were still assigned to a family for a year.

"When I came here freshman year, I was very depressed. It was partly because of culture shock, partly because I had never studied in the American system and I still felt doubtful of my own capabilities," she said. Her hosts were Audrey Hale, secretary to the provost, and Hale's husband. Siszman said Hale gave her the encouragement she needed. "I needed someone to tell me, 'Margie you can do it,' and Mrs. Hale did just that," Siszman said.

Audrey Hale "was willing to listen to my problems," Siszman said, and through Audrey Hale, she was introduced to other people, including Provost Sol Gittleman.

"Having a host family gave me a feeling that I wasn't alone," Siszman said.

Anyone wishing to host an international student for the holidays should contact the International Center at 381-3458.

— Lena Vanier, '87

MARGIE SISZMAN