Parade of Nations celebrates founding anniversaries of International Center, Club, House

2017 marks the 65th anniversary of the International Center (I-Center), 60th anniversary of the International Club (I-Club), 45th year anniversary of the International House (I-House) as well as the 25th Oliver Chapman Leadership and Community Service Award.

A weekend-long celebration of these anniversaries has been planned, leading up to the I-Club’s culture show, the 33rd annual Parade of Nations on March 4 at 7 p.m., at Cohen Auditorium, where the Chapman Award will also be presented to a senior who has been active in the international community.

Parade of Nations

I-Club President Akshat Rajan, a sophomore, expressed excitement at the opportunity for Parade of Nations to celebrate the anniversaries of the international community this year.

“It’s a lot of pressure, but this year we’re making it more like a Parade of Nations weekend, rather than just the show itself,” he said. “There will also be a Parade of Nations after-party on Saturday night in Hotung Café, featuring DJ Eli Soul Clap.”

DJ Eli, or Eli Levin-Goldstein (LA ’04), is one half of the Boston-based production duo Soul Clap. His performance will include a set that features music he discovered in his experiences with the international community at Tufts.

“I really like reggae and soca, so I’ll get those in there … I may hit some Bollywood music, African music and also Latin music. I’ll be mixing in more of the obscure genres that [are] simply fun to dance to,” he said.

Goldstein, who was the president of I-Club during his junior year, said he discovered the power of music and dance to bridge cultures while DJing at Tufts.

“I was already on the path of house music … So to see all my peers embrace it, it made me realize that this is actually something that could touch people beyond just the underground house music scene,” he said.

According to Rajan, the performances at this year’s Parade of Nations will continue to showcase a broad range of cultural traditions. These performances include Spirit of Color, TURBO, Pulse, Wuzee, La Salsa, Caribbean Dance Team, Bhangra, Kiniwe and spoken word by junior Jessica Mar. Rajan added that the audience will also get to enjoy a photo booth and a selection of food from all over the world during intermission.

I-Club Co-Vice President Martha Rimniceanu, a senior, felt that Parade of Nations has greatly expanded in its reach and its size since her first year.

“I remember in my first year, Parade of Nations seemed like a cool cultural show, but it was just friends of the people who were performing who came to watch,” she said.

According to Rajan, 2016 was the first time in recent memory that tickets to Parade of Nations sold out, surprising many in the organizing team and Cohen Auditorium staff.

“[The Cohen staff] were used to it not being sold out. They were used to it being this small show that happens every
year,” he said. “Last year, [Cohen Scheduling and Production Manager] Mark Sullivan was shocked, because we had 400 seats, we had people trying to sneak in, we had to fill people upstairs and there was no room to sit.”

Previous years’ Parade of Nations have always featured a flag show in which members of the international community walk on stage in their respective national costumes, waving their countries’ flags. Rimniceanu said that this year’s will be no different, with 45 countries represented in the flag show.

“A lot of people … know about [the flag show], and they have been getting really pumped,” she said. “They have been sending us emails during winter break, saying that they are so excited to bring their traditional dress from home and to walk on stage with their flags.”

International Club

For Rajan and Rimniceanu, however, I-Club is more than just about organizing Parade of Nations. In its 60th year, I-Club wants to do more to foster a close-knit international community on campus.

“What happens a lot after [the pre-orientation] Global Orientation is that … everyone starts doing their own thing with courses and all, so during the fall we tried to keep those connections alive, have people see each other at these social events and feel a part of the community, while at the same time complementing that with more discussion-gearied events that address people’s adjustment to the U.S. culture and to college,” Rimniceanu said.

Rajan felt that a student-led space for these discussions was something that international students have always wanted but had lacked.

“When we did our first discussion event in spring 2016, there were seniors who said, ‘We wish we had this during our first few years at Tufts,’” he said.

I-Club Co-Vice President Antonio Bertolino, a sophomore, said that through these discussions, tighter bonds were formed within the international community.

“Our last discussion event in the fall happened a couple of days after the results of the [presidential] election, so we made sure that the space of discussion lent itself to also being a space of understanding, where internationals can surround themselves with people whom they felt safe around,” Bertolino said. “In that occasion, the I-Club became a resource for international students … it was definitely our responsibility to do that.”

Rajan said that the I-Center is the only Group of Six center that does not have peer leaders, and that in the future, the I-Club could fill that gap in their support for international students.

“We are the I-Center’s ears to the international community,” he said. “If there are people in the community that want to reach out to us, we want to be there for them in a non-exclusive, for-everyone way … so we’re finding a way for people to sign up for one-on-ones with members of the I-Club.”

Tufts Community Union International Community Senator Celeste Teng expressed a similar desire to see organizations like the I-Center and I-Club cater more to the disparate needs of the international community, particularly in the current hostile political climate.

“Before coming to Tufts, I didn’t think of ‘international’ as a political identity, but now more than ever I believe that international students are deeply connected to political issues, whether or not we want to be,” Teng, a sophomore, told the Daily in an electronic message.

Rimniceanu echoed this pressing need for greater support for the international community.

“Even though we are not a political or an activist group, we really want to make sure that people have a space to express their feelings on whatever is happening, to have somebody to talk to, to be around people who feel similarly
and get support. That I’m sure we will all need,” she said.

International Center

I-Center Director Jane Etish-Andrews said that unlike at many other colleges, the Tufts I-Center has prided itself in providing sound advice and support beyond just visa and immigration matters throughout its 65-year history.

“We view ourselves in terms of offering not only immigration services but student services,” she said. “We believe in the whole picture and in being very holistic in our approach.”

However, Etish-Andrews thinks that the I-Center still has room to grow in its prominence and in supporting international students and scholars on campus.

“We are still a quiet office, people don't always know what we do. We don't give credit, we are not flashy,” she said. “We’re bigger and we do more servicing, but we still aren’t able to connect enough people.”

With current immigration policies causing anxieties and even disrupting the lives of international members of the Tufts community, the I-Center’s ability to provide emotional and personal support for current students remains an imperative for Etish-Andrews.

“It is challenging and over the years we have had our ups and downs. We are in a down period right now, where it’s very stressful for students when you think about what’s happening with the executive order,” she said. “I hope my staff … care about the students and scholars, so that they will not just do the immigration work but also listen to your personal issues.”

Etish-Andrews, who has been director of the I-Center since 1983, said she also deeply values the relationships forged with many international alumni.

“I have grown up with a lot of the students,” she said. “Now they are older, and I see them coming back with their families. It’s very meaningful to me that I’m able to celebrate with them their Tufts memories, of which I’m a part of.”

International alumnus Hamid Salamipour (LA ’92, M ’97) praised Etish-Andrews’ dedication in leading the I-Center and in building connections with international alumni.

“As much as I say we were a family and a community, the pastor of that community, the rock of that community has been Jane [Etish-Andrews],” he said. “All the hard work that Jane [Etish-Andrews] has put in for all the international students – I can’t tell you enough how amazing it’s been.”

Moving forward

Beyond the work of the I-Center, Etish-Andrews credited student energy for many of the initiatives introduced to benefit the international community and wants to support more of such initiatives.

“When the I-House was founded in 1972, that was a student initiative that was supported by the I-Center,” she said. “The year 1999 was the first time international students received financial aid, and it was very exciting because that also came from a student initiative.”

Teng hoped that the occasion of the anniversaries will prompt further introspection in the different organizations about how to cater to the needs of the diverse international community.

“Many international students have put in time and energy to carve out our own spaces on campus, often intentionally staying outside of the reach of these organizations, which tells us that there are real gaps in accessibility and inclusivity,” she said. “We should keep reflecting on how we can better support the community we claim to engage with.”