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One Tent. One Community.

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Monday October 2, 2023

I love everything about Culture Fest — it's such a joyous, inclusive celebration that reflects the University of Dayton's welcoming spirit and the rich diversity of our campus. I couldn't swing by this year because of a scheduling conflict, so I asked my colleague, Teri Rizvi, to share observations on my blog.

We're busy building a bigger tent at UD, creating space for every member of our campus community.

That's never more evident than at Culture Fest, where the colorful flags from 75 countries flanked the sides of a massive white tent and flapped in the late-afternoon breeze.

"The flags represent either the countries where our students come from or their heritage," said Brenna Seifried, assistant director for the Global and Intercultural Affairs Center and chair of Culture Fest.

Under the tent stood throngs of students from various ethnicities, nationalities, and backgrounds. They balanced plates filled with spring rolls, steamed dumplings, lamb kofte, chicken haleem, sushi, churros — and, as a nod to American culture, pigs in a blanket. They

washed it all down with chai tea — or Gatorade. For dessert: tiramisu bites.

“Food Service prepared meals for 1,000 people,” said Amy Lee, assistant director of Kennedy Union who’s been involved in the planning of Culture Fest since its beginnings 11 years ago. “This is such a joyful festival.”

Behind her on the stage, emcees Jorge Muñoz and Tierra Freeman ‘24 pumped up the crowd, already in high spirits.

“Culture Fest is back! This is a celebration of culture,” said Jorge, a Puerto Rican native. Looking out over the sea of students, the assistant director of student recruitment and admission pointed to various sections and in trademark Oprah Winfrey style shouted, “You have culture. You have culture. You have culture. We’re here to celebrate you.”

For more than two hours, students immersed themselves in other cultures, took selfies with friends, enjoyed a smorgasbord of food, and swayed to the pulsating music.

A Korean percussion ensemble kicked off the entertainment with traditional folk music played on various gongs and drums. Its strong beat reverberated throughout the Central Plaza. The evening concluded with music professor Sharon Gratto leading the World Music Choir in three rousing South African and African American songs with enthusiastic audience participation.

In between, the crowd was treated to energetic student dance performances — from K-Pop to Bollywood — and tested their cultural knowledge through trivia questions.

Q: The world’s smallest country? A: Vatican City.

Q: Where is the biggest flag in the world? A: Egypt.

And this stumper. Q: In which country would you expect to see students knock on their desks after a particularly good lecture? A: Germany and Austria.

The Culture Fest vibe is decidedly upbeat, but it’s also inspiring.

Every year under one tent, one world family gathers — and a campus community unites.

(Photo by Shravanth Reddy Reddy)