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**St. Cloud State University**

Once again this Thanksgiving, Central Minnesota families will open their homes to St. Cloud State University international students to share turkey and traditions.

Through this singular gesture, participating hosts will offer 41 young adults, continents away from home and family, a touch of the warmth and spirit of a Minnesota home at holiday time. This may be international relations at its best.

National statistics suggest that only about 25 percent of international students are given the opportunity to visit an American home. St. Cloud State’s 20-year-old Thanksgiving Program and other outreach efforts by our community add an important dimension to the study-abroad experiences of those who come here to study from more than 80 countries.

Each one of our international students is a potential ambassador for St. Cloud, Minnesota and the United States. Like all students, they go home and tell friends and family about their St. Cloud experience. The interactions these students have with our local folks and the friendships they form likely have an impact on the impressions and attitudes that color those interactions.

Since the 1970s more than 7,000 residents of countries around the world have come to our campus for studies that prepared them to succeed in a broad range of fields here and abroad.

According to the annual “Open Doors Fact Sheet” that the Institute of International Education made public last week, St. Cloud State ranked second in the state for the number of international students hosted during the past year. St. Cloud State University welcomed 1,215 students from more than 80 countries, ranking 18th among master’s level institutions in the United States.

In another study reported this month NAFSA--the Association of International Educators found that St. Cloud State’s international students contributed $23 million to the state economy during 2012-2013. On campus our international students add vibrancy to our campus community. They are all leaders who have demonstrated great courage in choosing to pursue their studies in a “foreign” culture. Their presence in our classes brings important insights into global economics and culture. St. Cloud State is truly a better university because of the international students who have joined our learning community.

Our international students also contribute to the community in a variety of ways, including the sharing their own cultures and traditions. Many of you reading this will have attended one of the more than 20 cultural nights hosted each year by various international and cultural groups on campus. Last night, for example, our Ethiopian students offered a glimpse into their music, food, art and thriving youth culture at Ethiopian Night hosted in Atwood Center. Coming up are African Night December 7, Ebony Night January 18, Vietnamese Night February 1, Liberian Night February 8, Nepal Night March 1, Japan Night March 22, Korean Night April 4, Hmong Night April 12, Somali Night April 19, and April 26 will be the International Student Association’s Spring Festival and Bangladesh Night. Earlier this year events were hosted by our Chinese, Saudi Arabian, Sri Lankan and Malaysian students.

Besides these cultural nights, international students engage in outreach programs in the public schools and other institutions to enlighten Central Minnesotans about their homelands.

St. Cloud State is building a global reputation as a leader in international education. In the past year St. Cloud State University’s international education programs have garnered two national honors – the Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive internationalization from NAFSA and the Andrew Heiskell Award for innovation in international Higher Education from the Institute of International Education in New York.

Both awards are testaments to the commitment and hard work of creative faculty and staff members who lead our international education programs and the intellectually adventurous students who benefit from them. Since St. Cloud State University launched its first study-abroad program in Aalborg, Denmark, in 1973, 10,000 students, faculty and staff have been transformed through education abroad.

The internationalization of St. Cloud State is an ongoing process with an in-place strategy, strong foundations of international activity and broad community support. Dedicated faculty and staff members have helped build deep and rich partnerships with universities across the globe. They have created transformative activities that lead to global and cultural understanding and a respect for different perspectives, religions and cultures.

The results of all this hard work are graduates who are prepared to take their place as leaders in the 21st century, leaders prepared help Minnesota take its place on the world stage.