

Gala is a high point of Command and General Staff College officer program

By DAVID BOYCE

Special sections
contributing writer

For more than a century, thousands of international military officers around the world have traveled to Fort Leavenworth and studied along with U.S. military officers at the Command and General Staff College.

The 10-month Command and General Staff Officer Course program educates mid-career officers in military art and science at the master's degree level. The course introduces officers from the United States and all parts of the world to a broader way of thinking.

"We don't teach them what to think but rather how to think," said Doug Tystad, CEO, CGSC Foundation, Inc., and a 1985 CGSC graduate.



Left to right are Susanne Larsson, Benny Lee, Edith Lee and Farshid Ovji. Mr. Lee is a noted entrepreneur in the Kansas City area, owner of DuraComm and one of the main sponsors of the 2015 Celebration of International Friendship.

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Since 1895, international officers have learned valuable lessons from this program and used them to make their country better. Remarkably, 27 international military officers who graduated from CGSC have gone on to be leaders of their country, including the current King of Bahrain and the Prime Minister of Singapore.

The officers are taught in small groups of 10 to 12 Army officers, one to two international officers, an Air Force officer and one sea service - Navy, Marine or Coast Guard.

"Your staff group of 16 officers is where you spend the majority of your time," Tystad said. "Those become your lifelong friends. That is part of the value of coming to the course, spending your 10 months here. We call it the best year of your life."

The 2017 class at CGSC arrived at Fort Leavenworth



The West Point Glee club performed on stage at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts during the 2015 Celebration of International Friendship.

in late July and includes 112 international officers from 88 countries. This year there are 87 officers that were able to bring their families with them for the year of study. Each officer is provided three sponsors to help them with arrival and to give them a taste of life in the United States. These sponsor relations often last decades, as stated by the Prime Minister of Singapore in a state dinner on Aug. 2 at the White House.

As part of their experience, the sponsor organizations and the CGSC Foundation will play host to an event to introduce the international officers and spouses to the people of Kansas City in what promises to be a special evening.

The third annual "Celebration of International

Friendship" at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Kansas City will take place on Sept. 16.

The gala event starts at 6:30 p.m. with a reception in the Grand Hall. After the reception, each international officer is introduced by country inside Helzberg Hall.

"My wife and I love to attend because you get to see the officers introduced, and they are in their country's dress uniform," Tystad said. "If their spouses come, they oftentimes are in the traditional native dress of their country. It is an opportunity to see the uniforms and see the native dress of all these different countries in one place and time."

After a break, the West Point Glee Club will perform. They performed last year,

and Tystad said they were spectacular.

"They are world renowned," he said. "They have been on some of the great stages in the world. They will do about an hour-long performance ending with the songs of the different services. West Point alumni will also be invited on stage to sing the alma mater with the cadets - that's very special."

The program is also recognizing the 60-year anniversary of People to People International, which is headquartered in Kansas City.

"People to People is our partner in this," Tystad said. "People to People was started by General Dwight Eisenhower, a 1926 graduate of CGSC. We are going to recognize People to People for the good things they do.

Mary Eisenhower, the granddaughter of President Eisenhower, will say a few words."

The event is a way to introduce the officers to Kansas City and give them another taste of the Midwest.

"They get to meet people on an individual basis so they see the deep-seated goodness of the American people," Tystad said.

Ticket prices for the "Celebration of International Friendship" are \$55, \$45 and \$35 and are now on sale at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

Any proceeds above the costs for the event will go to support international officer programs through the foundation.

"There is a huge wow factor," Tystad said of the reaction from the audience. "They say, 'This is great. I never imagined this could be this great.' We have people who are planning to come back a third year because they really enjoy getting to see and meet the officers, and the music is pretty good, too."

For more information:
Contact Ann Soby,
director of operations,
CGSC Foundation
at 913-651-0624;
email,
ann@cgscf.org.