

# The Legendary International Military Students Sponsorship Program: **CGSC's Best Kept Secret**

*by Dr. Bill Raymond, Department of Command and Leadership*

MR. JIM FAIN, DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY STUDENT (IMS) DIVISION (IMSD) AT THE U.S. ARMY'S COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE (CGSC), IS FOND OF SAYING IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT WHEN SWISS ARMY LIEUTENANT HENRI Lecomte, the first International Military Student, stepped off the steamboat or train in downtown Leavenworth in 1894, some helpful soul directed him to the fort and perhaps even offered him a ride in their wagon. Since then, the citizens of Leavenworth and the Greater Kansas City area have continued to give willingly of their time and affection to support and befriend the thousands of International Military Students and their families who travel from all over the world to live in our community and study at Fort Leavenworth.

This year, 122 IMS arrived from 93 countries from around the world to attend the Command and General Staff Officer Course and three different types of sponsors warmly welcomed them to Kansas. Indeed, the IMS Sponsorship Program is one of CGSC's best kept secrets. This article explains the sponsorship program and hopefully motivates you and your family to consider sponsoring an IMS and his or her family next summer.

Each IMS has three sponsors: one each from Fort Leavenworth (IMSD's Field Studies Program), the Leavenworth-Lansing area (Operation International), and the Greater Kansas City area (People to People International). All sponsors voluntarily give their time and effort to welcome and support the new arrivals.

The formal aspects of the program are quite simple and consist of a Sponsor-IMS Integration Icebreaker dinner that all attend to meet everyone before classes start and a Sponsor Appreciation dinner and award ceremony that all attend at the end of the schoolyear to say farewell and bemoan the fact of how quickly the year has flown by.

Then, each sponsor attends one of the three other IMSD events: the fall or spring cultural culinary exchange, more commonly known as the "food fair" dinner, or the formal holiday dinner dance in December.

Other optional events include the Flag Ceremony signifying the official start of CGSOC, the International Graduate Badge Ceremony, and the CGSOC Graduation at the end of the schoolyear. There are also monthly "Know Your World" cultural presentations where an IMS discusses all aspects of his or her country then serves samplings of host nation food. Other than these scheduled events, the sky is the limit on what you can do with your IMS and their family: having them over for dinner, hosting fun game nights, going trick or treating together, celebrating



Maj. Bakhtiyar Suleimenov, Kazakhstan, and his family with the author at the CGSOC Flag Day Ceremony.

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Thanksgiving dinner, enjoying a concert, sightseeing around Kansas City, and attending a Royals, Chiefs, Wizards, or even a high school game.

Why should you sponsor? In the words of Mrs. Ann Soby, president, Operational International, says the answer is simple.

"It is an opportunity to show the International Officers and their families 'Heartland America' here in Kansas and our local community," Soby said. "For me personally, sponsoring an International Officer has been a learning, rewarding, and at times, an emotional experience. It is an opportunity to learn about their country's culture, customs, and traditions. Rewarding to know that in some small ways, you are introducing them to our country."

Soby also emphasized that "you start off as strangers and end up as family."

Mrs. Toni Jackson, who currently sponsors the Estonian officer and his family, echoed similar sentiments.

"It's a great way to learn about another country and culture," Jackson said. "We lived in Germany, but now my kids get to learn about Estonia. And by learning about other



Maj. Slava Senin, Estonia, (2nd from right) hosting his sponsors at his quarters on Fort Leavenworth.

cultures, we discover we have way more in common than our differences.”

It’s a common sentiment that sponsoring an IMS is a terrific learning experience for everyone involved and allows you to become one of our nation’s goodwill ambassadors every time you volunteer. While the sponsorship only lasts a year, you make friendships that will last a lifetime. Sponsoring provides you and your family an international experience like no other that builds long and lasting relationships.

Danish Brig. Gen. Thorsten Jorgensen, a 2008 CGSOC graduate who now serves as the deputy at NATO’s Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia, said, “the sponsor program turned into everlasting friendships which continue to impact the lives of both our daughters, my wife, and myself.”

Jorgensen’s wife, Hanne, added that “the sense of security, the feeling of having extended family locally, the sharing of culture, humor, food and drink, the guiding hand and kind advice and the risk of gaining a lifelong friendship, are just a few of the reasons why having a sponsor family to meet and greet you as you arrive in Leavenworth is invaluable for an incoming family from abroad.”

Besides becoming friends with your international family, sponsors have the added benefit of becoming friends with all the other IMS sponsors, especially the ones sponsoring the same officer as you. A final reason to sponsor is because it is just a lot of fun. I also like to tell potential sponsors that if you ever decide to travel abroad in the future, it is amazing to have family all over the world and you don’t have to worry about any hotel reservations.

In the words of Danish Lieutenant Colonel Kristian Kold, a 2010 CGSOC graduate: “If you have a big heart, you can make this experience a much richer one for a student or a family from another part of the world. And you may learn something about the world in return and strengthen your local network, too. A big Thank You to all that have



Maj. Bakhtiyar Suleimenov, Kazakhstan, meets with his Fort Leavenworth sponsor, Lt. Col. John Leming, from the Department of Joint, Interagency and Multinational Operations in the Lewis and Clark Center.

sponsored in the past as well as to all, who may try this in the future.”

If you are interested in becoming a part of CGSC’s best kept secret and want to sponsor an IMS and his or her family in the next CGSOC class, please contact Mr. Dave Bornn, Field Studies Program Chair in IMSD, at 913-684-7323 or david.m.bornn.civ@army.mil. CGSOC is having larger cohorts of IMS attending each year which means more opportunities for families seeking to make a difference by sponsoring. He eagerly awaits hearing from you. 🍷