Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: Missouri State University is home to more than 1,500 international students from around the globe. One program on campus that is helping them connect with American families and engage in cultural exchange is International Friends.

Since it began in 2012, the program has matched almost 1,000 international students with more than 690 local families. I’m Emily Yeap.

Joyce Eddy, program coordinator, and Chun Lu, a Missouri State graduate student from Ningxia, China, are my guests today. They are here to share more about the program and its benefits for both students and families.

Eddy.

Joyce Eddy: What International Friends does is we find American families and individuals to be friends to our international students while they're studying here at Missouri State. For the students, it's a way for them to learn about the American culture while they're studying here and also helps them not to be so lonely while they're here away from their family and friends. Statistics show that 90% of international students have never been inside of an American family, so they have no idea how American families live, so this is a way for them to experience the culture.

Emily Yeap: Families who get involved in International Friends gain a rich cultural experience.

Joyce Eddy: The families get to learn about different cultures from around the world without even leaving their home. It's just a way for them to show their hospitality and to welcome the students here and provide a little support to them.

Emily Yeap: What types of things do families do with the international students?

Joyce Eddy: Invite them home for a home-cooked meal, introduce them to their family and friends, take them hiking, camping, picnics, barbecues, community events, sporting events, shopping, students like to shop, just show them what our community is like and what the Ozarks is about.

Emily Yeap: Eddy and her husband have been part of the program for eight years. She shares one particular memorable experience with a Japanese student.

Joyce Eddy: Our second student that we had was from Isesaki, Japan, Rica, and she wasn't going home for Christmas like her roommates were, so she was going to be alone in her dorm, so she asked us if she could stay with us during Christmas break, so we picked her up on Christmas Eve at her dorm, and we asked her if she had ever experienced an American Christmas, and she said no. So we stopped by Home Depot and we picked up a live Christmas tree, took it home, got down all of our Christmas decorations and let her decorate the tree.

She would pull out the decorations and say, "What is this one for? What's that one for?" and a lot of them were homemade decorations our daughter had made, so she got to hear the stories behind all the decorations and, that evening, we took her to candlelight services at our church, took her to dinner and, the next day, we got up early and we went to our church and helped prepare meals and packed meals. Our church delivered Christmas meals to the community. She wanted to be the one that knocked on the door and be the first one to say, "Merry Christmas," and thoroughly enjoyed that. She stayed with us five days, and she was just a delightful person and a lot of fun.

Emily Yeap: Lu has participated in International Friends since January this year.

Chun Lu: My host family, his name is Michael, and I have a very good friendship with him, and we have a lot of very valuable time. I also enjoy to cook some very delicious traditional Chinese food for him.

Emily Yeap: He cherishes the relationships he has formed through this experience.

Chun Lu: He seems like my brother now. We have very good emotional communication with each other. The friendship is like you just throw a little petal and it begins to triple, and I can know other friends through my host family.

Emily Yeap: He also enjoys sharing with Michael their common interest in horticulture.

Chun Lu: My major is horticulture. I already started my business in China as well, so I came to United States and I go through the international program. I know Michael. Michael, actually, he ran his business in Springfield for horticulture and landscaping. I think it's like God's plan, and it's a very great match, and we enjoy talking about horticulture and the agriculture area.

Emily Yeap: Eddy is expecting to match about 100 students with American families this fall semester. To participate in International Friends as a family, complete an online registration form at international.missouristate.edu/friends and attend an orientation session on August 18th. It will take place from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Karls Hall, room 101.

I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.