



## From Afghanistan to Hinsdale, student network relationships



By Bridget Doyle Tribune reporter at 11:08 a.m.



Workshop students cook an Afghan feast for the group Friday night at Tom Casten's Hinsdale home. Photo by [unreadable]

Nearly 60 Fulbright students from Afghanistan traveled to the western suburbs this weekend to social entrepreneurship and enhancing relationships between American and Afghan people.

Tom Casten, Hinsdale resident and founder of Recycled Energy Development, began hosting them and said he has watched the program progress since.

“At first, the forum was a little more academic, but in its second year, we began to talk more about said.

Casten said families from communities around the western suburbs, such as Clarendon Hills, West Grove and Naperville, offered to host the students Sept. 22 to 26 while they attended the conference.

The students are all currently on Fulbright scholarships studying at universities across the United States.

“These are the best and the brightest of their country, and it strengthens them to come together said. “We want to help plant the idea that they can implement change.”



Tom Casten, center, talks with two Afghan students.

Homa, a 32-year-old woman, attended Casten’s first conference in 2006, and traveled back to tl workshop and share her experiences after traveling back home. Organizers would only allow pu students for security purposes.

“I wanted to speak with the other Fulbrighters and remind them of the power and the opportunity know each other,” Homa said. “Building a strong network in the United States leads to a strong

Homa, like the other workshop attendees, boasts an impressive resume. She received a master’s concentration in socio-economic development at New School University in New York.

Mustafa, a 22-year-old master’s student studying structural and earthquake engineering at the he is currently working on his thesis and hopes this experience will help him reunite with old fri

“We’re promoting mutual understanding between Americans and Afghans, and everyone has be families are so kind.”

Alina Romanowski, deputy assistant for academic programs at the bureau of educational and cu Afghan students together in the U.S. is to focus on how to apply what they’ve learned to their fu

“We hope over the course of their time spent here the students will have built these enduring relationships,” Romanowski said. “Many of these students could end up being future leaders in the re Afghanistan, and this will help us keep strong ties between the U.S. and their home country.”

Haroon, a 24-year-old theater major at California State University in East Bay, said he and othe from their host families in the suburbs, especially when it comes to American culture.

“We’re trying to increase understanding and peace between different people,” Casten said. “It m seeing it happen and it feels good.”

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