

Cultural event grabs community attention at St. Max

By **Mikhail Khamissa**

Over 300 people poured into St. Maximillian Kolbe C.H.S Thursday evening for the 3rd Annual International Night, an evening dedicated to celebrating the different cultures and ethnicities that surround us in the community.

Students and teachers collectively transformed the school's cafeteria into an international square featuring over a dozen student-operated food vendors.

For the past three weeks. Grade 12 students from both social science and hospitality classes have been preparing day and night for the annual event.

Students were given the choice to pick the culture they would like to represent and prepare a variety of traditional dishes from the respective cultures.

"We wanted the students to benefit from this opportunity in as many ways as possible," said Melissa Menard, Head of Hospitality at St. Maximillian Kolbe C.H.S, who orchestrated the event along with fellow colleague and English teacher Madeline Brens.

"From the beginning, students were responsible for the budgeting of groceries. Then they began preparing their dishes, while learning and using healthy cooking options."

The idea stretches back five years when both Melissa and Madeline were teaching at a school in Scarborough.

"It was more a showcase because of how much more diverse and multicultural that area is," said Brens. "When we arrived at St. Max three years ago, we felt because there was nothing like that here, we wanted to introduce the idea to the students and it's been nothing but a growing success ever since."

She also emphasizes the growth of the event.

"In our first year of the event, we had roughly 150 people attend, whereas this year over 300 teachers, students and family members came to show their support."

The lively atmosphere had mostly caught the attention of the students themselves, who seemed more in amazement of the work they accomplished than anyone else. Courtney Hawthorne, a Grade 11 student and a vendor from the Greek booth, said happily "International night brings cultures together and it's really cool our school can experience that."

The festive evening also featured musical and dance performances done by students representing other countries and cultures, such as the "Nutcracker Ballet" representing Russia, "La Vie en Rose" representing France, and many more.

Event organizers have also taken the opportunity to not only benefit the students at St. Max but students in a developing country. The proceeds from the event will go towards the construction of a school abroad and this concept has intrigued many local businesses to help support by donating food.

"International Night would not have been possible without the support and generosity of others," said Menard.