



## York gears up to welcome seasonal workers

*Potluck social slated for Monday, June 21*



FILE PHOTO Ilma Katiliute, 21, of Utena, Lithuania, left, and Alexandra Mirchevska, 21, of Tetovo, Macedonia, shared a moment at an ice cream social for seasonal workers at the York Beach Fire Station in August 2009. Katiliute was working at Wild Kingdom and Mirchevska was at Pizza by Paras. The town will welcome seasonal workers this year at a potluck social on Monday, June 21 at Inn on the Blues.

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June 16, 2010

YORK — The York Diversity Forum (YDF) will initiate its 2010 Seasonal Worker Program with a potluck social from 5 to 7 p.m. Monday, June 21, held for the second year at the Inn on the Blues restaurant, 7 Ocean Ave. in York Beach.

All who would like to meet and welcome some interesting young people from abroad to York are invited to come and bring prepared entrées. Joe Lipton, owner of Inn on the Blues, is offering his restaurant free of charge and is supplying non-alcoholic beverages. Carol Rholl of the York Diversity Forum is overseeing the potluck social.

The YDF Seasonal Worker Program is a nonprofit, charitable activity conducted by volunteers to welcome foreign, seasonal workers to the York community.

If past years are a guide, this season's program will provide assistance to about 35 visiting workers who will have come to York because they want to experience America. They have come primarily from eastern European countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, and Macedonia, as well as from Russia and Uzbekistan, from Bosnia, Serbia and Turkey. Some workers have come from Jamaica, from South American countries, and from China and Thailand.

Employers in York obtain the foreign workers through agencies that supply workers who have temporary J-1 visas.

The York Diversity Forum views its mission as helping to ensure that York is a community that is integrated and accepting, where everyone feels safe, welcome and at home. Within the context of this mission, the YDF Seasonal

Worker Program aims to welcome young people who are far away from home and may need some help with important day-to-day personal needs.

"These young people from abroad have been welcomed so kindly by people in the community that they really can feel more at home in their new surroundings," commented Susan Mullens, president of the York Diversity Forum and co-chairman of the Seasonal Worker Program.

"The potluck on June 21 is the first time that many of these workers get to meet each other and to enjoy being together," she said. "It may also be their first opportunity to eat home-cooked American food."

Carol Davis, co-chairman of the Seasonal Worker Program and former YDF president recalled, "When we discovered these workers from other cultures here, we felt that we wanted to extend a hand of friendship and let them know that even though they may speak with an accent, and may seem different from us, we welcome them."

Galina Kazantseva — her friends call her Galya — is from Kazan, which she describes as the "third capital" of Russia, after Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Kazantseva is a cashier, working for the second year at Fun-O-Rama in York Beach.

"This program helped me, providing a bike for free. I am so thankful for it!" Kazantseva said. "The program gave me a friend, Susan Stanley," she continued. "She keeps helping me even nowadays with shopping and traveling. I got acquainted with a lot of students here who came for the summer, and I attended a lot of dinners where I tried delicious food and ice cream. I loved Thanksgiving Day," she said of the celebration held in August especially for the seasonal workers.

Kazantseva enjoys talking with the people who conduct the Seasonal Worker Program. "I improved my English with them," she said.

For these foreign visitors, learning English is a major objective. When they arrive in York, workers are given information packets with maps and booklets that help them navigate the York community.

Every worker is provided with a "friend" who helps him or her with many personal needs, such as banking and shopping, and obtaining a bike. Because there is no public transportation in York, the Seasonal Worker Program supplies donated bikes, complete with headlights and rear flashers, for a deposit fee of \$25 that is refunded when each bike is returned. Helmets and locks can be purchased for \$10 apiece. Bikes are necessary, if only for getting to work.

During the summer, the Seasonal Worker Program and area churches sponsor social events.

The York Police Department maintains a working relationship with the Seasonal Worker Program. For use by police in an emergency, each worker is asked to carry a card with the name and contact information of his or her assigned friend.

Davis explained the SWP asked for help from the York police when program officials "heard of some instances when workers were stopped because they were out late at night, or were stopped while driving a car.

"Many of the workers come from former Communist-bloc countries and are fearful of police. We let them know that in our country the police are authority figures who let us know the rules but they are helpful and keep us safe," she said.

A particular concern is that some visiting workers may need guidance in understanding the law. For example, if a worker drives, he or she needs a home country driver's license. If it can be obtained, an international driving permit is desirable.

For further information about the YDF Seasonal Worker Program, or if you want to attend the June 21 potluck social, e-mail the program at [swp4bikes@gmail.com](mailto:swp4bikes@gmail.com).