

SGA sponsors Smoking Forum

Utsav Gandhi
CAMPUS EDITOR

Immediately following the SGA Executive Board Debates, Sonia Kamdar, current Senator from the Lewis College of Human Sciences and candidate for VP of Student Life, hosted a forum debating a hotly contested and passionately debated topic on the IIT campus: smoking regulations and enforcement policies.

Second hand smoke and dirty sidewalks do impact others' health and the workplace. A question-answer and suggestions session followed the panelist presentations for students and faculty to share concerns or offer

suggestions.

Rather than be a one-sided discussion against campus smokers, the purpose of the forum was to raise awareness of issues regarding smoking on campus, cigarette butts and smoking near entrances.

The issue was first brought up on SGA's online suggestion box page, VoteBox. Around 150 votes were received on turning IIT into a smoke free campus, as students were fed up with violations of the 15 feet rule and problems because of secondhand smoke and cigarette butts lying around everywhere, making our surroundings look unappealing and unsanitary.

This introduction was followed up by two speakers, who had their own unique

perspective to share on the issue of campus smoking.

The first was Kirsten Pelka from Health and Wellness Center; and the second was IIT alumni, Steve Falk, who graduated in 2011 with a degree in materials science and engineering.

LEED certification recommends 25 feet around all buildings, not just entrances to be smoke-free to ensure that any building air intake areas and operable windows are more environmentally friendly.

Discussing the possible next steps, markers around campus and designated "smoking-zones" away from entrances were offered as suggestions, along with discussing/working with facilities.



Photo by Sonia Kamdar

Better Together Day returns to campus

Lynne Meyer

DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF
SPIRITUAL LIFE & SERVICE LEARNING

People across the country will wear blue on Better Together Day to raise awareness about the importance of interfaith cooperation, on April 10, 2014. People of different religious and non-religious backgrounds will mobilize their campuses, communities, and companies to show the world we are better together, and here at IIT, we will too.

The Office of Spiritual Life and Service Learning and IIT's Better Together student organization are hosting a three-day long Better Together Day celebration.

Better Together Day was created in 2013 by the Interfaith Youth Core, a Chicago-based organization that has, since its incorporation in 2002, worked on five continents and with over 200 college and university campuses, trained thousands in the principles of interfaith leadership, and reached millions through the media. IFYC has worked with partners including the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, the White House, and the Office of Her Majesty Queen Rania of Jordan. The IFYC's goal is both simple and profound; "To change the public discourse about religion from one of inevitable conflict to one of cooperation."

IIT participated in that first Better Together Day last year, and I am proud to say that out of 235 campuses to take part, we were one of only six schools to have more than 50 students, staff and faculty take the Better Together pledge! Think about that – IIT had more participation than at least 229 other schools in the United States. You should all be extremely proud. I know that I am. As someone whose life and work are all about building bridges between people of diverse beliefs, and about making the world a better place through respectful cooperation for the greater good, being part of the IIT family is a dream come true. Clearly, our diversity is something that we as a community value.

Better Together Day is not really just a day. It's a way of looking at the world, of choosing hope over despair. It's the belief that

we as the human race can be enriched by our differences, rather than destroyed by them. We have a long way to go, but we're getting there. How do we begin to build these bridges of understanding? By talking to each other. By telling our stories, and respectfully listening to the stories that others tell us.

According to Eboo Patel, founder and executive director of the IFYC, in "Storytelling and Social Change" published in Sojourners "Stories are the way human beings understand and communicate our deepest values." Storytelling is at the heart of IFYC's approach to building interfaith cooperation, and for good reason. Stories have power. The narratives that we tell about ourselves and each other can divide us, or inspire and unite us.

And so, to explain why I am such a strong supporter of Better Together Day, I need to tell you a story. On July 4, 1976, the 200th birthday of the United States, a Laotian family of Hmong refugees arrived in Chicago, after a grueling 13 months in refugee camps in Thailand. Mr. and Mrs. Xiong and their six young daughters (who ranged in age from 2 to 12) were fleeing a devastating Civil War and it's even more devastating aftermath, one which would end up claiming the lives of approximately 25% of the Hmong population in Laos. We were introduced to the weary and homeless Xiongs by my mother's aunt, my Great-Aunt Esther, a Baptist missionary whose work was dedicated to resettling and supporting refugees from around the world. Through her work, I would come to know people from India, from China, and more. But I remember the Xiongs because I met them first, and knew them at the best.

"Your church's parsonage is currently vacant, correct?" Aunt Esther asked my mother in a phone call out of the blue one day. My Congregationalist Christian mother said yes, and soon the Xiongs had a safe, if small and simple, place to stay at the United Church of Christ church that she attended. This began a two-year-long relationship between my family, the Xiongs, and my Aunt, during that time my mother moved heaven and earth to help in any way she could as they strove to make a

new home for themselves in a land with very different customs, and a very different language. I was just four years old when the saga began, but I remember two things very clearly; my mother never asked why she should help, and she cared not one bit that the Xiongs weren't Christian. In her view, she and my Baptist aunt were simply doing what human beings are called to do, and that's to help one another.

To describe the many things that my mother and my aunt did in those years would require far more time. I will simply say that as a result of it, our families became extremely close, and we stayed in touch even after the Xiongs became financially independent and moved to another state. The family prospered and the girls went on, one by one, to graduate from college.

Twelve years after we had first met, one of the Xiong girls got married, and my mother and I were invited to attend the wedding. It was a beautiful, traditional Laotian ceremony, and not the least bit Christian. To my recollection, we were the only non-Laotians present, and we were humbled to have been included.

My Aunt may not have lived to see that day, but she was there in spirit. The Xiongs remembered my aunt and my mother and their kindness and sacrifices, and honored them as they would a family member. For me, it was a profound experience; my first true interfaith encounter, it represented the culmination of a lengthy collaboration of efforts between two distinct cultures, and multiple spiritual identities.

I don't just believe that we're Better Together. I know it. And others do too.

Since IIT is a diverse community so we asked them to tell us why they believe we are Better Together: Rachael Affenit said, "when we come together and discuss our differences in values and beliefs, we can begin to accept each other for our differences as well as our similarities."

Another student Christine Kwak said, "like the ways of nature, evolution, and progress, it is in difference, diversity, and change that brings us to moving forward!"

Vanya Yorgova, who is a resident

advisor said, "peace can only be accomplished if we accept each other and work together to manage our disputes."

Utsav Gandhi said, "there is always something to learn from someone who's different than you."

If you believe, like we do, that we're Better Together, come and tell us! Come over to the MTCC Bridge between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday of this week and sign the #BeBlue pledge.

You can also enter to win free stuff such as; two books autographed by Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, Mirembe Kawomera dark roast coffee from the Peace Kawomera Cooperative, an interfaith coffee co-op in Uganda, and three bars of Divine Chocolate (one each of white chocolate with strawberries, milk chocolate with toffee and sea salt, and dark chocolate with raspberries.)

We'll even include Better Together swag, so you can strut your stuff and show the world your support for interfaith cooperation. How do you enter?

There are two ways to enter: come to our table on the MTCC Bridge and take a picture telling us why you believe that we're Better Together or anytime between now and 11:59pm on Thursday, April 10, put your selfie skills to work in the name of interfaith cooperation!

Take a photo of yourself WEARING BLUE and show us how you're "going blue" in support of Better Together Day!

Share your photo on Facebook or Twitter and include the hashtag #IITgoesBlue so we can track your entry (yes, Facebook lets you track hashtags!).

There are some rules to enter this swag: photos must be of, or include, yourself, you must be wearing blue, and photos must be interfaith-friendly and appropriate for public viewing.

In other words, they cannot include religiously offensive content, nudity, intoxication, illegal activity or any activity prohibited by IIT's Code of Conduct. Lastly, photos must be uploaded to either Facebook or Twitter, using #IITgoesBlue no later than 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, April 10, 2014.

Last Sharing Table of semester welcomes leadership program

Shireen Gul
COPY EDITOR

IIT Student Center for Diversity and Inclusion (SCDI) organized the final "The Sharing Table" for this academic year last Thursday.

The Sharing Table is held on the first Thursday of every month during the academic term. It is a special program to help foster personal interaction between undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty.

You can engage yourself in spirited conversation about hobbies, culture, sports, or current events while dining at The Commons.

A small group of students are given the chance to learn a great deal about their instructors in this type of social setting.

This time the event was made full of joy and knowledge by our leaders from the Pan-Africa Youth Leadership Program. There were 24 high school students from eight African countries: Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Illinois Institute of Technology is a partner with World Chicago and FHI 360 (a Washington, D.C. partner organization) to host participants in the Pan-Africa Youth Leadership Program under the auspices of the State Department's Office of Citizen Exchanges.

During the students' 10-day visit to Chicago, IIT has been instrumental in providing an entrepreneurial experience where they learned to develop solutions to problems they

face at home.

It is a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, which aims to develop a network of young adults with strong leadership skills, an understanding of participatory democracy, and a commitment to fostering mutual understanding between different ethnic, religious, and national groups.

After their stay in D.C. and Chicago, their next stop is Portland. In Portland, the students will stay with host families and meet with local youth leaders, attend workshops on entrepreneurship and civic engagement, and participate in service projects.

As the group's final stop, the Portland program will focus on planning social impact projects that the participants will implement in their home communities.

The student participants were 15 to

17 years old, English-speaking, and selected by 38 U.S. embassies across sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to the 20 high school students, four adult mentors from Africa will be selected to travel with and support the students. They were very enthusiastic and happy to be a part of this program.

They had wonderful projects which they shared with the audience that show they will bring a change in their country.

The main issues that they highlighted were: sanitation problems, problems in educational systems, women's rights, domestic violence, and economic issues.

On behalf of IIT first of all I would like to thank them for coming here and sharing their wonderful ideas with us and wish them best of luck for their future and hope that they will achieve their dreams.