NEWS RELEASE
June 12, 2013

ESL students share immigration experiences

MEDFORD — The English as a Second Language program at Rogue Community College has partnered with Southern Oregon Historical Society to produce “Stories of Home.”

A travelling exhibition that highlights ESL students’ experiences since immigrating to southern Oregon, the exhibit is currently on the first floor of the Rogue Valley Mall (near elevator) through July 10. It’s part of the SOHS’s community-focused “History: Made by You” series.

In the exhibit, RCC students who come from countries ranging from Iran to Indonesia to Guatemala describe their contributions to the community, advice for newcomers, and why they chose to move here.

The display features students’ writings, portraits of the students photographed by Greg Zurbrugg, and articles from the students’ native countries such as musical instruments and clothing. The project involved a high intermediate/advanced English ESL class, according to Kiersta Fricke-Gostnell, RCC instructor and ESL faculty coordinator. She collaborated with Amy Drake, the society’s curator.

“The underlying theme of the exhibit is how we are more alike than different, and how as Americans we all share an immigrant past,” Fricke-Gostnell said. “But it’s not only about their cultures. They also want to be role models for other students, and they’re proud of what they’ve done. Many of our students juggle two jobs, families and school.”

Recently Fricke-Gostnell was joined at the mall by students Lin Cong of China, Kathy Pourkhomami of Iran, and Rocio Jimenez of Mexico to view the display. All three praised the ESL program and its instructors for helping them make major strides and said they hope the project will inspire other new arrivals.

Pourkhomami immigrated in 2011. Like the other students, she and her family came to the U.S. for safer lives and greater opportunities. Along with language skills, Fricke-Gostnell has helped her gained self-confidence, Pourkhomami said. Her daughter attends RCC and her son is at Ashland High School. “I wanted to share information about Iran and its culture,” Pourkhomami said. “My goal is to open a restaurant someday.”

Jimenez, who arrived from Mexico in 2001, has taken ESL classes for two years and works in childcare. Her objective is to improve her English speaking, reading and writing skills and gain a job as an office assistant. For a number of years, Jimenez was a volunteer reader at a Medford elementary school; she also helps with her neighborhood’s cleanup campaign.

When Cong’s family moved to the United States four years ago, he knew very little English. “My English is much better than before,” he said, acknowledging English is not an easy language. “You have to take the time to learn it. Rome wasn’t build in a day,” said Cong, who plans to continue at RCC in an apprenticeship program. “Everything is progressing in my new life.”

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ESL instructor Kiersta Fricke-Gostnell (left) poses with Lin Cong, Rocio Jimenez and Kathy Pourkhomami, who contributed to the “Stories from Home” project.