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## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Abdulmajed Aloqail and Kasem Kasem, professor of chemistry, participated in the Saudi National Day celebration at IU Kokomo.

## IU Kokomo Saudi students share cultural celebration

**KOKOMO, Ind.** — The smells of henna, cardamom, and other spices filled Alumni Hall as Saudi students at Indiana University Kokomo shared their ethnicity to bridge cultural gaps during Saudi National Day celebration on campus.

Students, faculty, and staff sampled mint tea and Arabic coffee, received henna tattoos, tried on Saudi clothing, and saw falcons – the Middle Eastern country’s national symbol. They also tasted traditional foods such as rice, lamb, unleavened bread, and spicy vegetable dishes.

“We want to build good relationships with our classmates,” said Talal Al-Hammad, a student in the Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) program. “We are pleased to be part of this community. The best part of IU Kokomo is not just the high

academic standards, but the faculty and students. They are very friendly and welcome us every day. They have made this a very good experience for us.”

The spices, clothing, and food were somewhat familiar to Breanna Santucci, Kokomo, whose mother is part Syrian. She was excited to have her name written in Arabic, and to see a large crowd participating in the event.

“It’s important to meet real people, and find we have so much in common,” she said. “That helps move past stereotypes some people have about the Middle East.”

As a member of the U.S. Army Reserves, Larry Lawson knows he could be stationed in the Middle East, so he welcomed the opportunity to learn more about Saudi culture. He plans to meet with several of the international students to learn some pointers about the Arabic and Farsi languages.

“Every bit of familiarity I can gain will help me fulfill my job when I am deployed,” Lawson said. “It’s nice to get a taste and an understanding of another culture.”

Lawson, a student in the Transition to Teaching program, called the event a great opportunity, especially for those who have not had the chance to travel overseas.

“It broadens the horizons of the students who have never left the borders of Indiana, or who haven’t been able to travel to other continents,” he said. “It gives you a better understanding of being a world citizen.”

The day honored the 83<sup>rd</sup> Saudi National Day, a holiday celebrating the nation’s identity and unification. It is traditionally celebrated on Sept. 23 each year.

Al-Hammad was the first of the 30 Saudi students to enroll, arriving in 2012. He’s encouraged others to follow him to IU Kokomo. He said there are approximately 70,000 Saudi students studying in the United States.

“We study in the United States for its high-quality education and because of its friendly people,” he said. “Since we are here in Kokomo, we wanted to show our culture, our celebrations, and our food. We are so happy for the support we have received. It really means a lot to us.”

Interim Chancellor Susan Sciame-Giesecke thanked the Saudi Student Club for hosting the event, and was pleased to see a large crowd participating.

“It was fantastic to watch our American students and our Saudi students interacting with one another, sharing the food, and learning about their cultural activities,” she said. “We’re very appreciative to them for bringing their culture to our campus, to expand our horizons. I know IU Kokomo is better because they are here, and we will continue to learn from one another.”

*Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.*

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