



April 2010

Vision of the World: Ethiopian Connection Day

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Recommended Citation

Rozelle, Jason (2010) "Vision of the World: Ethiopian Connection Day," *Many Voices - One Community*: Vol. 1: Iss. 3, Article 6.
Available at: <http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/mvoc/vol1/iss3/6>

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VISION OF THE WORLD: ETHIOPIAN CONNECTION DAY

by Jason Rozelle, Diversity Fellow

Photos by: Rekiye Sisay (Lily)

The Visions of the World program is the creation of Dr. Carmaletta Williams in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI). Dr. Williams realized that the International Education department and the Intercultural and Immigrant Student Services Center do an excellent job of working with our international students and making them feel a part of this culture, but at the prompting of some of our Ethiopian students and employees, who wanted to share insight into their culture, faiths, language and food with the community at Johnson County Community College, she developed the Visions of the World program. As I am very connected with the Ethiopian community (my wife is Ethiopian), I was designated to spearhead this program. But the “vision” went further than this one program. Dr. Williams’ goal for Visions of the World is to uncover those pockets of communities that go largely unrecognized and allow them to share the rich heritage they bring to the United States with JCCC.

The Ethiopian community is one of the largest immigrant communities in Johnson County. The ODEI wanted to capture the essence of the Ethiopian community and share it with our JCCC community. Ethiopians have made a significant commitment by sending their children to JCCC first and then on to four-year institutions. Ethiopian students are the third-largest student population on campus. Many of them graduate from here, then transfer to the University of Kansas and the University of Missouri-Kansas City. These students bring strong mathematics and science educational backgrounds from their formal schooling in Ethiopia. Many of these students focus on completing degrees in nursing, bio-engineering, medicine, pharmacy and other health care professions.



Common to most of these families are three goals: a strong family, effective education and a devout church association. First-generation immigrant Ethiopian families face many hurdles and have significant needs. Many parents and young adults are looking for opportunities to support their families and to assimilate into American culture as they search for job opportunities, educational funding, health care and child care.

With these objectives in mind, a committee with Ethiopian students, community members and the ODEI created the Visions of the World: Ethiopian Connection Day. The committee felt the need to address the issues facing the Ethiopian community by providing workshops that focused on health care, education and job resources. The committee members worked for months to bring together more than 150 Ethiopians to the morning employment resource workshops, which were facilitated by Workforce Partnership and United Parcel Services; workshops on building a business and entering professional schools and a workshop on community involvement. A children’s center was created which brought together young children of all ethnic backgrounds to learn about Ethiopian culture. Another 350 community members and students attended the “Ethiopian Cultural Night” a dinner, music and fashion show event.

Our goals were met. We provided a powerful forum for our Ethiopian community to come together, to share with our larger community their lives and cultures, and for our Ethiopian students to feel a real part of Johnson County Community College. This year we will showcase another part of the world and let other people share their lives, their culture and their communities with JCCC.

