From the Editor

Friends of Mongolia (FOM) experienced a very active summer and fall. In the spring FOM announced the “Gobi-to-Ohio” Project which sent 12 students from a town in the Gobi Desert and 14 students from the Washington, DC area to perform traditional Mongolian music and dance in Middfest International in Middletown, OH. The project and the students’ experiences participating in the program are presented in this issue of the FOM Newsletter. There are also several pictures, selected from dozens of great pictures, taken during the trip to Ohio, and the picture above is of two of the Gobi students between performances in Middletown.

In addition to the “Gobi-to-Ohio” project, FOM completed several other activities. FOM selected 18 scholars to receive funding through the FOM Scholarship Program for the 2008-2009 academic year. FOM funded a handful of projects through the FOM Community Development Grant Program. It also organized several community outreach activities in the Washington, DC area. More about all these activities is included in this newsletter.

This year was significant for FOM in terms of the projects it initiated and completed. The coming year will mark the 10th anniversary of FOM’s establishment, and FOM has strong momentum to sustain the activities planned to celebrate this milestone.

I hope everyone reading this issue shares my pride in what FOM has accomplished this year. Much of it was due to members and other supporters like yourself, so as always thank you very much for your support.

—Brian M. White
Gobi-to-Ohio Project Sends Performing Arts Students to Middfest International

Each year Middletown, Ohio organizes an international festival to celebrate the culture and arts of a particular country. This year the festival showcased Mongolia, and October 3-5 this small Midwestern town experienced a dramatic increase in its Mongolian population. Performers, artisans, businessmen, and others from Mongolia and around the United States descended on Middletown to share the Mongolian experience.

Friends of Mongolia played an active role in the festival by organizing two groups of performing arts students to perform dance and music numbers at the festival and area public schools. The first group was students from the Khankhongor School of Performing Arts in the Gobi Desert, and the second group was students from the Mongolian School of the National Capital Area in Washington, DC. In total, 12 students from the Gobi and 14 students from Washington performed at Middfest.

Planning for the festival began in the spring, and Friends of Mongolia sent out general appeals to its members and other donors for support in raising the estimated $30,000 it would take to send all the students to Ohio for the festival. The project was named the “Gobi-to-Ohio” project. As the spring turned into summer the fundraising initiative gained momentum as countless Friends of Mongolia members and supporters came forward donating $20, $50, $100, and up to $2,000 to the project. Organizations also began to follow suit, providing donations up to $3,500 (full list of donors on page 8). By September with a last contribution of $1,500 from the Gobi students’ families and the Khankhongor school, the project had accumulated approximately $27,000, which was just about enough funding after receiving a group discount on the international plane tickets for the Gobi students to support both groups.

The Gobi students arrived in Middletown about a week before Middfest International. The organizers of the festival arranged home stays for the students with local families, and after a very long but exciting flight to the United States, the students began their first experience of cultural and linguistic immersion.

It is important to point out that Khankhongor is nearly as small as one can imagine a town can be and still be called a town. On drives to the provincial capital of Omnogovi, if one happens to pass through the town it takes only a blink of the eye to miss it. Approximately 500-800 people live in the town, a number which is dependent on the season. If one speaks of isolation or remoteness, one is probably picturing a place not unlike Khankhongor.

Friends of Mongolia Co-Director Sadie Munson was a volunteer in Khankhongor from 2002 to 2004. She and the volunteer that followed her were the only exposure to native speakers of English most of the students had ever had. Needless to say, although the students’ ability to dance, sing, and play musical instruments was well developed, their ability to communicate in any language other than Mongolian was obviously in dire need of improvement once they were thrown into a world in which everyone speaks English.

When the students met their host families the late Friday night they arrived in America, they were dependent on the Friends of Mongolia chaperones to communicate, but the following Monday morning after a weekend of visiting exciting and exotic locations such as the aquarium, the Wright-Patterson Air Museum, and gigantic super markets
and participating in normal family activities, the students had lost all their reticence.

The organizers of Middfest International had arranged for the Gobi students to perform at local area schools the week leading up to the festival. The students had their first performance in front of the entire eighth grade class of a nearby middle school. The eighth grade class was bigger than the entire Khankhongor school, including both the primary and secondary schools combined. It was one of the largest audiences the students had ever performed in front of, and they did a great job of demonstrating a mix of traditional dances and music.

As the week continued they performed many more times in front of audiences large and small. The highlight of the week came when the University of Cincinnati Center for the Performing Arts hosted the students for a day. During the visit to the center, the students had an opportunity to experience movement class, dance the Macarena, and test their agility and speed on the football field at the university stadium. The performing arts center students also put on a special play written for the Gobi students and only performed that day.

Of course, the Gobi students have their own individual memories about the many exciting things they experienced during the week (see their own words on page 4). It was clear to the chaperones that the week was full of stimulating and exciting new experiences.

Middfest began on October 3rd with an opening ceremony in which the Gobi students led the singing of the Mongolian national anthem with representatives of the Mongolian business community in the United States. The students then performed their set of dance and music pieces to the large crowd.

Pop musician Degi was on hand for the festival, and she graciously dedicated her first violin solo to the Gobi students, wishing them great luck in their futures. Other professional performers were also on hand for the event, and the Gobi students had a once in a life time opportunity to share the stage with some of the best performers of traditional dance and music Mongolia has to offer.

The students from Washington also arrived for the opening ceremony. Friends of Mongolia provided the funds to rent the bus that brought them just in time to perform several elaborate dances. It was also the first time for the Gobi students to meet their American compatriots. It was an interesting study in culture as the Gobi students processed the interesting phenomenon of Mongolian kids who spoke and acted differently than any Mongolian kids they had met before.

The Gobi and Washington students performed numerous times over the festival days, and they also had a chance to sample not only Mongolia cuisine but also cuisine from other countries such as Cuba at the festival food stands. The festival included an exhibit of Mongolian artifacts and numerous lectures from experts from the Smithsonian to former Peace Corps volunteers.

Friends of Mongolia shared a ger with the Mongolian School of the National Capital Area, and RPCVs Jenny Cole, John Kinsella, Adam Brown, Sadie Munson, and Brian White manned the ger answering the many questions people had about life in Mongolia and the work that Friends of Mongolia does to promote educational and cultural exchange between the two countries.

The weekend was exhausting but fun, and the following Monday morning the students bid farewell to their host families in Middletown. There were a lot of tears that morning, and it was evident that the students and their families and bonded quickly. The trip back to Mongolia was long, but the students remained in high spirits. Sadie Munson noticed that when the students took a group photo before leaving for the United States they all had fairly nondescript expressions on their faces. However, when they returned, each person was smiling ear-to-ear. It was an amazing experience for them all, and they’ll never forget it.
Gobi Students Share their Impressions of Life in America

A few weeks after returning to Mongolia Friends of Mongolia Co-Director Sadie Munson made a trip to Khankhongor School for the Performing Arts to interview the students about their impressions of life in America and what participating in Middfest International had meant to them.

Sadie was not alone in interviewing the students. They were also interviewed by the local television station, and their representative in parliament also met with them after they returned to learn about the experience.

In a town of only a few hundred people, it goes without saying that a trip to someplace as far off and exotic as the United States instantly propels a person into celebrity status.

The students seemed to be taking their newfound status in stride when Sadie visited them. She asked them a series of questions that are presented below.

1. What did you think was interesting during our trips to and from America?
   - The airport and everything else was very clean. We flew for 30 minutes from one city to another but the lights on the ground never stopped.—Tumendemberel
   - Whenever I looked out the window over America there was a city below.—Shinekhuu
   - I saw lots of different kinds of airplanes and forest.—Otgonbayar
   - I had never been on an airplane before and it was very interesting and comfortable.—Ankhbold

2. What was your American host family's house like? What was your host family like? What kinds of activities did you do with them?
   - My host family was very nice and treated us like their own children. My real parents are both deceased so now I am very happy to have American parents. We visited an aquarium together.—Lkhagvasuren.
   - I made food for them and they taught me how to play golf. I hung out with my host family's son.—Tumendemberel.
   - American people truly are wonderful. They treated us like family.—Erbold
   - I went shopping with my host family.—Shinekhuu
   - We played basketball.—Bolor-Erdene
   - We played sports including tennis, golf, basketball, and soccer, and played on the computer.—Ankhbold
   - Erbold and I visited stores, a restaurant and an airplane museum with my host family.—Bilguun

3. What was the most interesting thing about America? Did any of the ideas that you had about America before you went change after your visit?
   - I knew that America was developed but not as much as what I saw. I also did not know that the schools were so big with 300-500 students.—Lkhagvasuren
   - The air and environment was very, very clean.—Tumendemberel
   - Everything was nicer than I thought it would be.—Bilguun
   - I had heard that everyone had their own car and home, but I didn’t believe it until I went there. I had also seen American schools and classrooms in movies but did not really think they were as nice as they were in real life.—Ankhbold
   - Everything was modern and new and I saw lots of construction and airplanes.—Bolor-Erdene
   - The horses were really big!—Otgonbayar
   - My house was 200 years old. Americans are very friendly and nice.—Shinekhuu
• The American roads really surprised me with their smoothness and stop lights. People can drive when they are 16 years old.—Erbold

4. **What did you like in America? What didn’t you like?**

• I liked the food and the nature.—Bilguun
• I liked riding four-wheelers.—Ankhbold
• I liked the clothing styles.—Bolor-Erdene
• I liked the stores and the construction.—Shinekhuu
• I enjoyed riding bicycles.—Erbold

5. **What American food did you or did you not like?**

• The fruit was wonderful and I liked all the food except the sweet meat.—Lkhagvasuren
• I liked grapes, all kinds of fruit. I didn’t like the sweet meat.—Bolor-Erdene
• I didn’t like that we had sandwiches for lunch everyday.—Ankhbold
• I really liked all the fruits and vegetables.—Otgonbayar
• The airplane food was interesting.—Erbold

6. **Please write a brief anecdote about something interesting that happened in America.**

• The most interesting thing was one day we went to school with our host brother for 3 classes. We were the smallest people in the class!—Akhbold
• When I took a shower at my host families I didn’t know how to turn on the hot water so I took a cold shower instead.—Lkhagvasuren
• It was also funny sometimes to use the automatic sinks and hand dryers as well as the escalators.—Lkhagvasuren
• We went to a movie in a movie theater that was so big that it made us nauseas like the airplane.—Tumendemberel

7. **When you tell others about America what do you tell them?**

• Americans are very friendly, kind, and open people—Otgonbayar
• I tell people about everything that I saw and did!—Erbold
• America is what Mongolia will look like in the future. Right now Mongolia has many poor people but I believe that it can develop.—Ankhbold
• I talk about my trip to everyone very proudly.—Bilguun
• Americans are very hardworking and driven people.—Tumendemberel

8. **What would you like to tell to the people who donated funds for your trip?**

• Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity to travel to America, to get to know our host families, and to learn about America.—Lkhagvasuren
• My parents want to thank everyone who gave to fund our trip.—Bilguun
• It is important that the donors all know how important this trip was for us.—Erbold
• I want to thank all the individuals and organizations who gave for our trip.—Shinekhuu
• I want to thank everyone who gave but especially Friends of Mongolia who made this happen.—Bolor-Erdene
Friends of Mongolia selected the 2008-2009 academic year cohort for the FOM Scholarship program over the summer. In total 18 students were selected to receive tuition support from the program this year. Nine students from the 2007-2008 cohort reapplied for funding this year, and the other nine students were new scholars.

The FOM scholarship started in 2006 as a way to assist rural males who are often underrepresented in higher education in Mongolia. This year because of the generous support of our members and other donors, FOM was able to expand the program to include disadvantaged females from the countryside as well. The scholarships are for attending a vocational school or college in Mongolia. The maximum award is 800,000 tugriks (approx. $700) per year.

Scholars must submit applications that include an essay describing their academic, career, and life goals, a statement of need, academic transcripts, and proof of residency outside of Ulaanbaatar. A selection committee comprising Mongolian business and civil society professionals then reviews all the applications and ranks them according to academic quality and need. This year representatives from Peace Corps, the American Center for Mongolian Studies, the Education Advisory and Resource Center (EARC), and Khan Bank reviewed the applications and selected the scholars.

Scholars selected in previous years must reapply each year to receive additional funding. The stipulation for continued funding is a grade point average greater than or equal to B. Eroolt Ugtaa (pictured left) has received an FOM scholarship for three years in a row because of his excellent grades. FOM is committed to supporting worthy students until they graduate, and Eroolt and eight other students received scholarships again this year.

The Khan Bank Foundation once again provided support for six students, and a group of M-7 Peace Corps volunteers, the Munson family, and Croft family provided funding for several additional scholarships as well. FOM encourages other RPCV groups or families to follow the lead of the M-7s, Munson family, and Croft family to establish additional scholarship opportunities for the program. Individuals or groups able to raise $700 can make a significant and positive impact on an aspiring young scholar in Mongolia.

Those interested in learning more about the program should contact Sarah Munson at smunson@friendsofmongolia.org. Thank you as always to those who continue to support this program and these students.

FOM Community Development Grant Program

The FOM Community Development Grant Program supported 4 projects over the summer and fall with grants totaling approximately $2,200. The projects included the refurbishment of a Mathematics classroom at Chuluunhoroot Soum School in Dornod Aimag, material support for a summer camp for street children in UB organized by the Equal Steppe program, and support for two tourist websites to inform the public about attractions in Khovd and Zavkhan Aimag.

The Community Development Grant Program was established in spring 2007 as a way to provide small grants to community based projects in Mongolia. Applicants must submit a project proposal with a community contribution of at least 25 percent of the total project budget. The FOM Board of Directors and Officers review applications and select projects on the basis of community support and strength of the proposal.

Grants average about $700, and they generally are used to supplement short falls from other funding sources. More information about the program is on the FOM website at www.friendsofmongolia.org.

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Eroolt (selected again this year) receives a scholarship award for 2007-2008 from Sarah Munson.
FOM Scholars for 2008-2009

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<th>Primary Donor</th>
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<td>FOM Members/Donors</td>
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<td>Eroolt Ugtaa (pictured left)</td>
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<td>FOM Members/Donors</td>
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<td>Battulga Monkbaatar</td>
<td>Mongolian University of Science and Technology</td>
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FOM Outreach Programs in the Washington, DC Metro Area

FOM regularly organizes public lectures and cultural events in the Washington, DC metro area in cooperation with local Mongolian groups such as the Mongolian Cultural Center and Mongolian School of the National Capital Area. Lectures have included lectures by the Country Director for Asia Foundation and the manager for the Buddhism Revival project in Mongolia.

In November, Friends of Mongolia, in cooperation with the Mongolian School of the National Capital Area, held an event entitled 'Preserving our Nomadic Culture, One Song at a Time'. The event featured Meggen Watt, Producer of the "Darhad Songs" project which aims to collect and explore the songs of Mongolia’s Darhad Valley.

During her talk, Meggen presented a slide show of the journeys she has taken in Mongolia’s Darhad Valley, including stories, sights, sounds and songs of the steppe. Meggen noted that the Darhad project was inspired by songs she had heard while riding horseback across the northern Mongolian steppe on vacation with her family. Meggen came to learn that many songs of the Darhad valley had not been recorded, or if they had been, those recordings were now lost. In 2007, she returned to Mongolia and traveled through the countryside with a recording "studio" in her backpack. Meggen completed the recording in the winter of 2008 and shared those songs with the audience during the slide show. The talk was followed by a lively question and answer session which ended with the entire group singing a traditional Mongolian song together.

Meggen is now producing CDs featuring a selection of the 150 songs recorded earlier this year to benefit cultural education in the Darhad Valley. The CD’s will be available in the Spring of 2009. For more information please email Meggen at meggenwatt@yahoo.com.

Anyone interested in organizing a lecture or cultural event in the Washington area should contact Ariel Wyckoff at awyckoff@friendsofmongolia.org.
Nominations for FOM Board of Directors and Officers to serve from March 1, 2009 are being requested after December 1, 2008. Board of Directors Members are elected to their positions by majority vote of the membership to serve three years and Officers for one year. The elections are held in mid-January by electronic ballot, and Directors and Officer-elects have an opportunity to participate in conference calls and communicate with incumbent Directors and Officers a month and half in advance of taking over their positions in order to ensure each Director and Officer is adequately prepared to fulfill their responsibilities.

Service in FOM is challenging and the pay is lousy (we all work for free!). But, it is a great opportunity to learn new skills, experiment with ideas, and experience positive social impacts. Generally Directors and Officers in the past have lived in different states, countries, and regions, a trend we do not anticipate to change any time soon, so service provides an opportunity to experience the bizarre world of modern technology that allows a diffuse organization like FOM to initiate and successfully complete community development projects across vast distances. To date most of FOM’s projects have been conducted predominately with Directors and Officers communicating by phone, instant messaging, and e-mail with each other. Face-to-face meetings are the exception not the rule, which makes teamwork and consensus building a fascinating challenge.

Nominations should be sent to admin@mongoliacenter.org between December 1 and January 10. Candidates may self-nominate. You may also contact incumbent Directors and Officers to learn about their work, and whether they would like to pass the torch on to you.

Visit the Friends of Mongolia website and click on the “Governance” menu item under “About FOM” to see the list of current Directors and Officers. Officers’ contact information is listed on the site. FOM is dependent on people volunteering their precious time, so please consider joining the effort this year.

Mongolian Embassy Holds Reception for FOM

In November, Mongolian Ambassador to the U.S., Khasbazaryn Bekhbat and his wife, Mrs. Jamsrangiin Gerelmaa hosted a friendly event at the Ambassador’s residence in honor of Friends of Mongolia. Since swearing in as Ambassador in April 2008, H.E. Bekhbat has expressed great admiration for Friends of Mongolia, and was particularly impressed with the recent Gobi-to-Ohio Initiative (more on page 2), as well as its other community development and cultural exchange programs.

The event at Ambassador Bekhbat’s was well attended. It brought together members of the diplomatic community, members of Friends of Mongolia and the Mongolian Cultural Center, and many from the greater Mongolian community including staff from the Mongolian School of the National Capitol Area. It also attracted business representatives with an interest in Mongolia.

As one might expect, attendees were treated to a wide range of delicacies including the traditional Mongolian dish Bansh, which are small meat filled dumplings. Music accompanied dinner as a colorfully dressed musician played the horse head fiddle or morin khuur. There was also a special sculpture exhibit on display by renowned Mongolian sculptor, Amgalan Tsevegmid.

The Washington, DC area is home to one of the largest communities of Mongolians and Mongol enthusiasts in the United States, and everyone in FOM was greatly honored to have the Ambassador’s support in further strengthening the relationship between FOM and the greater Mongolian community by organizing this highly enjoyable event.
Friends of Mongolia Membership and Donation Form

Your Contact Information

Name: 
Address: 
Phone: 
E-mail: 

Why Membership?
Membership Dues are an important source of funds. Your membership dues are what make FOM possible. In addition, membership allows you to stay directly connected to Mongolia and PCVs.

Membership Options

☐ $25 FOM Individual ☐ $45 FOM Family (2 Individuals)
☐ $50 FOM/NPCA Joint Individual ☐ $50 FOM/Mongolia Society Joint Individual

Donation Options

General Donation Community Grant Donation Scholarship Fund Donation
☐ $10 ☐ $20 ☐ $10 ☐ $20 ☐ $10 ☐ $20
☐ $50 ☐ $100 ☐ $50 ☐ $100 ☐ $50 ☐ $100
☐ $250 ☐ $_______ ☐ $250 ☐ $_______ ☐ $250 ☐ $_______

Total Amount Enclosed $_______

Please make checks out to Friends of Mongolia.

US Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 44132, Washington, DC 20026

Email Contacts:
members@friendsofmongolia.org
admin@friendsofmongolia.org

You can also join FOM and donate online at www.friendsofmongolia.org

Thank you for your contribution to Friends of Mongolia!

Friends of Mongolia is a US Registered 501(c)3 not-for-profit, education organization. Donations and membership dues may be tax deductible.
Friends of Mongolia (FOM) is an incorporated 501(c)3 not-for-profit, education organization operating in both Mongolia and the United States. It is an affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association and its membership includes both Americans and Mongolians. It is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, educational and developmental purposes. Friends of Mongolia exists to develop partnerships with the people of Mongolia in furtherance of cultural exchange and human development.

Special Contributors to the Gobi-to-Ohio Project

**Organizations:**

“Energy Resources” LLC  
Khan Bank  
Gobi Youth Development Center  
American Center for Mongolian Studies  
US Embassy in Mongolia  
Pyramid Granite  
Reily Land Management  
Rotary International—Ulaanbaatar Club  
Ganzorig Consulting  
Khankhongor School

**Individuals:**

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Samina Jain  
Vic Norsby  
Richard Munson  
Kristy Welsh

And, of course, all of Friends of Mongolia’s Members,  
Thank You!