

Northbrook's Cultural Fair draws large attendance 'Education is the key'



Performers appear from (TCFAI) The Thai Cultural and Fine Arts Institute of Chicago at the Cultural Fair on Feb. 25, 2024 at the North Suburban NSYMCA (2705 Techny Road). (Karie Angell Luc/for Pioneer Press)



By [KARIE ANGELL LUC](#) | Chicago Tribune

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More than 1,000 people attended the Cultural Fair on Sunday, Feb. 25 at the North Suburban YMCA (NSYMCA) in Northbrook (2705 Techny Road).

The free two-hour late afternoon event was presented by the Village of Northbrook's Community Commission with the collaboration of event partner, the NSYMCA. This year was the second year of the annual Cultural Fair.

The fair featured entertainment, crafting activities, a buffet of food samples plus community tables staffed by local organizations.



David Chelak, 14, of Chicago is airborne with a leap with fellow performers from the Vyshyvanka School of Dance at the Cultural Fair on Feb. 25, 2024 at the North Suburban NSYMCA (2705 Techny Road). (Karie Angell Luc/Pioneer Press)

The gym accommodated performance entertainment, resource tables and a long buffet line. Rooms across from the gym were used for amenities including an author book reading and tabletop activities.

"We're very happy," said Jennifer Saperstein of Northbrook, Community Commission chair. "We had additional performers this year."

Saperstein noted commission members were also happy, "very much with the turnout.

"All of the informational tables, the groups really seemed to up their game this year," Saperstein added. "We're very pleased with these beautiful tables."

Education, "helps to understand different cultures," Saperstein said.

Kathy Fielding of Wheeling, chief executive officer of the NSYMCA, said, "We love partnering with the village to do this for the community because that's what we do, we serve the community and by representing, showing all these wonderful different cultures we have and what a great melting pot that Northbrook is.

"Education is the key," Fielding said.

Bringing a community table and presence was Congregation Beth Shalom of Northbrook. Beth Shalom's Selah Choir also performed.

"We're the only synagogue that's here at the Cultural Fair," said Rabbi David Chapman of Congregation Beth Shalom. "We are so thrilled to be representing the Jewish community here in Northbrook."



A hand wave. Andrii Dzhuravets, 13, an eighth-grader from Wheeling, shows footwork with a challenging dance move among fellow performers from the Vyshyvanka School of Dance at the Cultural Fair on Feb. 25, 2024 at the North Suburban NSYMCA (2705 Techny Road). (Karie Angell Luc/for Pioneer Press)

Head Rabbi Aaron Melman, also of Congregation Beth Shalom, said, "It's important for us to be part of the community, to be part of this Cultural Fair as a synagogue, as a Jewish institution, as a place where many in our community come together.

"It's really an honor for us to be part of this communal gathering where lots of our cultural neighbors are here."

Approximately 1,000 households belong to Congregation Beth Shalom, Melman said. The NSYMCA also draws members from many of the same municipalities familiar with Congregation Beth Shalom.

"The majority of our congregation comes from Northbrook but we do draw from surrounding communities," Melman said, adding members come from Glenview, Wheeling, Buffalo Grove, Highland Park and Deerfield as examples.

"I think that events like this throughout the Village of Northbrook are the way for us to foster relationships with one another," Melman said. "We can't have relationships if we don't understand the other, if we don't meet one another, and if we don't take the time to get to know each other, and that breaks down walls and barriers and allows us to be together as a village.



Facing, third from left, Bell Khemchom, 17, a high school senior from Bartlett, waits backstage with performers from the (TCFAI) The Thai Cultural and Fine Arts Institute of Chicago at the Cultural Fair on Feb. 25, 2024 at the North Suburban NSYMCA (2705 Techny Road). (Karie Angell Luc/for Pioneer Press)

"Education is everything," Melman said.

Gail Bley of Northfield who grew up in Northbrook and is of the Glenbrook North High School Class of 1971, attended with family.

"We're just having a nice family day together," Bley said.

Bley noted the message of kindness often promoted as part of the curriculum in schools seems to be working to instill acceptance locally.

"I think it is," Bley said, adding, "Yes," that Bley sees the positive trend.

Bell Khemchom, 17, a high school senior from Bartlett, performed with (TCFAI) The Thai Cultural and Fine Arts Institute of Chicago.

"It's important for us," to perform, Khemchom said, "because we want to be able to spread our culture since not a lot of people know about it (Thai culture)."

The Vyshyvanka School of Dance featured dance traditions and vibrant costumes representative of Ukraine.

Oksana Fedkiv of Buffalo Grove, artistic director and teacher, said the Vyshyvanka School of Dance offers spectators the opportunity to learn about Ukrainian "culture and dress."

Dancer Solomia Khudyk, 15, a high school freshman from Arlington Heights, has relatives in Ukraine and was here, "to support my country and family there."

Diana Pylypyak, 15, a high school freshman from Norridge, dances with the Vyshyvanka School of Dance and has grandparents living in Ukraine during what is now entering the third year of the war in Ukraine.



Third from left, in gold headwear, Marisa Kaenkumjorn, 14, of Chicago is here to

perform as part of the (TCFAI) The Thai Cultural and Fine Arts Institute of Chicago at the Cultural Fair on Feb. 25, 2024 at the North Suburban NSYMCA (2705 Techny Road). (Karie Angell Luc/for Pioneer Press)

"I feel devastated, like, it's hard," Pylypyak said about fears for family members overseas.

"I always give my grandparents a call, ask how are they doing, are they safe, if they need anything, like we're always here to help.

"Like, it's just been hard," the teen said.

"I just want it to end, personally," Pylypyak added about the war in Ukraine.

"I just want it to be over and done."

Karie Angell Luc is a freelancer for Pioneer Press.