Kenneth Rogers, who directed the IU Office of International Services from 1977 to 2002, began his career in the embassy in Rangoon, Burma, during the 1960s. Since then, Rogers has been a strong advocate for that country and was largely responsible for IU’s role in the Burmese Refugee Program, which brought young men and women who had to leave their homeland after the military coup to the United States for academic study. As Myanmar (the only name of that country that many have known) opened up to the world in recent years, IU has again become active in assisting with the education of the country’s rising generation.

Last spring, 20 Burmese visitors, most of them college students who had never been out of their home country before, spent several weeks in Bloomington. They were part of the U.S. State Department Youth Leadership Program. The purpose of the visit was to improve their leadership skills while they got to know American culture better. The Office of International Development arranged for host families and put together an intense schedule of activities around the themes of leadership and volunteerism.
The group began with three days of leadership activities at Bradford Woods, IU’s outdoor education camp. They then met their host families, with whom they lived for the rest of their stay in Bloomington. The students valued time with families, sharing home, friends, and activities, as among the most memorable parts of the visit. Daily activities included visits to community organizations and lectures from community and campus leaders. The itinerary also included visits to Indianapolis and Washington, D.C. In Washington, they assisted in community breakfast programs and went in small groups to visit homes of those served by the programs.

There were too many activities during the four weeks to mention them all here. Although the students learned a great deal in a short period, the enduring impact was personal. There were tears when parting with host families. Volunteering brought them into close individual contact with people of all ages. Many students took ideas and the intention to implement them home to Myanmar, including recycling materials to build playgrounds, collecting clothing for the homeless, and setting up community gardens. Some of their comments about the experience touched upon these new missions:

- _I got so many new ideas to help communities._
- _I came to know the value of teamwork. Though we faced unexpected things, we overcame with teamwork and flexibility._
- _I liked so much the volunteer project, and I decided to do that volunteering in my country._

Members of the IU team responsible for the program in the United States will travel to Myanmar to be part of a reunion of the group this winter. They will report on the outcomes of the projects they took home, successes, and lessons learned. And, led by Jonathan Racek of Play360, they will build a community play area out of recycled materials at one of the local centers.

One memorable volunteer event was a project with Bloomington preschool children. Genevieve Pritchard, project manager and associate director of the IU Office of International Development, describes the experience:

_Students created small planters made from recycled materials (no cost other than some glue and a seed packet). They took the planters to the school and planted seeds together with the children. They spent the remainder of the afternoon in smaller groups with the kids, leading different activities such as teaching a song in Burmese, counting in Burmese, playing ball games, playing tag, etc. The school loved having them that afternoon, and for most of the participants this was one of their favorite activities. We feel they truly took away the lessons of assessing and responding to the needs of the target audience, the importance of advance planning, and maintaining flexibility—critical concepts for any project._