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Cultural crossroads

Festival sheds light on Naperville's lush diversity

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By **SUSAN FRICK CARLMAN** Staff writer

The variety of languages being spoken Sunday afternoon at Merner Field House was really no different from those used every day throughout Naperville. They were just more spatially condensed.

North Central College hosted its 12th annual International Festival in the field house Sunday, drawing a record crowd of some 700 visitors who were undeterred by the brutal sub-zero weather conditions and eager to learn about people with ties to other cultures. Forty-two national flags were suspended overhead across one end of the room and dancers in colorful native attire milled about, rubbing elbows with Girl Scouts, families, students and others who turned out for the event.

The popular festival raises funds for scholarships granted to NCC students headed abroad for study, and to international students who come to the downtown campus for course work.

"(Attendance) has been coming up every year," said Jack Shindler, director of international programs at the college and a key coordinator of the event.

He said the multicultural expo was begun by the YMCA, which hosted the festival for its first four years, as a way to raise awareness by spotlighting the array of ethnic backgrounds reflected in the city's rapidly growing population.

"They felt that people really weren't aware of that as much as they needed to be," Shindler said.