TO: Campus Community

FROM: Royce C. Engstrom, President

As members of the campus community, we strive to respect, welcome, encourage, and celebrate the differences among us. In recognition of this commitment, we value all members of the campus community, not in spite of, but because of their differences. It has come to our attention that, in the past few years, vandalism has prevented some members of our community from sharing an important cultural and religious tradition. This year we ask your support by taking proactive measures to insure that those who wish to experience this tradition have an opportunity to do so. Whether you partake of this tradition, your support will assure a rich campus climate which celebrates a multiplicity of traditions.

On Sunday September 27, members of the Jewish community on campus will construct a sukkah in the green area between the Forestry Building and the Mansfield Library. The sukkah will remain in that location, in accordance with custom, until October 3rd. Sukkah, a Hebrew word meaning 'booth' or 'hut', refers to a cultural and religious tradition, derived from Sukkot, a harvest holiday of the Jewish tradition. We have provided more information about the holiday and the sukkah below.

With this message, we invite the campus community to support the diversity of all of its members by refusing to tolerate any vandalism of the sukkah this year. Please consider taking part in an effort to monitor the site and to report any disturbance. Those wishing to participate more actively we invite you to visit the sukkah at any time; bring a book, your work, or a snack for however long you feel comfortable.

If you have any questions regarding the sukkah please feel free to email Hillel Vice-President Grace Johnson at august.johnson@umontana.edu.

RCE/rp
Engmem325

Background Facts about Sukkot and the Sukkhas

The Sukkot holiday lasts seven days, providing the occasion for a celebration that harkens back to an agrarian past when people marked the harvest by joining with friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to give thanks for the earth’s bounty.

Sukkot is the plural for the Hebrew word sukkah meaning 'booth' or 'hut'. The sukkah is reminiscent of the type of thatched hut in which the ancient Israelites dwelt during their 40 years of wandering in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt. Throughout the holiday, meals are eaten in the sukkah, and some families sleep there. In fact, tables, chairs, and beds or mattresses are
often moved from the house into the sukkah, which may also be fitted with electric fans, lighting, heaters, bookshelves, or bookcases. The decor of the interior of the sukkah may range from totally unornamented to lavishly decorated with pictures, tapestries, hanging fruits, and ornaments.

According to Jewish practice, the walls of the sukkah can be made from any material, but the roof must be organic. Palm fronds, branches, bamboo, and wood are the most common roofing materials. The amount of shade inside the sukkah must exceed the amount of sunlight that can enter through the roof.

Inside the sukkah you will find what are called the four species representing different aspects of all plant life. The lulav is a ripe green frond from a date palm. It has no smell but the fruit tastes good. An etrog, the fruit from a citron tree, tastes and smells good. Boughs from the myrtle tree have a pleasant scent but no taste, and branches from a willow tree possess neither a pleasant taste nor scent.

There are several interpretations offered for the symbolism found within the four species. One source suggests that they symbolize the parts of the human body. Each of the species or its leaves is similar in shape to various body parts (for example, the spine, the eye, the mouth, the heart). When we bind them together, as we do with the four species, they symbolize the way in which we dedicate our whole being—mouth, eyes, heart, and body—to the service of God. Other interpretations hold that the four species represent the idea of unity. Each one represents a different type of person or different aspects of ourselves. Bringing them all together represents the unification of diverse elements. This reminds us that as individuals our strength, perfection, and goodness can only be realized when we stand together.

We have sent this message to your umontana e-mail address because you are an employee or student at the University of Montana. If this is not correct, please do not reply to this message; contact Human Resource Services to update your status. To contact President Engstrom, please write to prestalk@umontana.edu.