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Governor's Column: Thanksgiving 2005: Home Is Where the Turkey Is

The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:

Of all our major holidays, Thanksgiving invites the most personal reflection and contemplation, offers a time to focus on home and family, and is a bit less frantic than the winter holiday season. We have an opportunity to take stock of where we've been and where we may be headed, and give thanks to God for our blessings.

Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday, and often prompts outreach to people who may not be familiar with our traditions, but welcome being included. Even foreign visitors can find a welcoming home, especially here in Kansas. In fact, for more than 50 years, Kansas families have opened their doors to visitors from around the globe to celebrate the warmth and companionship of Thanksgiving.

In 1954 Betty Grimwood, of Burns, Kansas, which is 40 miles northeast of Wichita, began hosting international students from Kansas colleges and universities who needed a place to stay over the Thanksgiving break.

This tradition has grown over the years, and more than 1,600 foreign students have found a warm welcome with Kansas families. The visits often lead to lasting friendships and help spread a positive image of Kansans around the globe.

For example, a Venezuelan student, who came to the Grimwoods' house for Thanksgiving in the 1950s, sent his granddaughter to dinner there last year. And one of the first students to share Thanksgiving dinner with the Grimwoods returned from Houston to visit the family in 2004.

Kansans have also spread the spirit of Thanksgiving far from home, as they have helped those in desperate circumstances. Last year, after Hurricane Ivan struck the Gulf Coast, forty students from Bishop Miege High School in Roeland Park traveled overnight by bus to Mobile, Alabama, to help families unable to begin the cleanup and repair process in the wake of the devastation.

Whether we celebrate with our own families and friends, invite strangers into our homes, or travel many miles to help those in need, Thanksgiving offers the chance to reflect on our many blessings and how we are truly a community of neighbors, across the street, across the state or across the globe.

May all Kansans reflect and rejoice in our families, our friends, and all our acquaintances old and new, who provide so much of the meaning in our lives.

Happy Thanksgiving.

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