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A DAY OF HOPE



Burmese refugee Khine Thein arrived in the United States in May and began her first day of school at Meredith Middle School on Wednesday. One of her obstacles of the morning was getting into her locker.

Across Iowa, kids have started a new school year. Here's how one sixth-grader fared in a program developed to support the newest of Des Moines' new students.

By Ann Hinga Klein
Special to the Register

The bus wasn't due until 7:13 a.m., but Khine Thein was ready by 6:45, waiting in the cool of morning outside her family's apartment on Des Moines' northeast side.

Dressed in a floral print dress over cropped skinny jeans, the sixth-grader looked a lot like thousands of other girls waiting for buses and carpools across the city on their first day back to Des Moines public schools late last month.

But few of the district's students could have had more to hope for and fear than this 12-year-old on her first day in an American school more than 8,300 miles from the farm she and her family left behind in Myanmar, or Burma, in southeast Asia.

Khine's mother, Thein Thein, stepped outside as Sara Matchulat, an intern with the Catholic Charities Refugee Program, arrived. Thein, 33, didn't wake her husband, 36-year-old Khaing, who had worked an extended shift the night before at the Marshalltown packing plant where he cuts meat—a temporary job that, combined with his commute, had kept him on the road or on the plant floor from 1 p.m. the previous day until 3 a.m. that morning.

Thein followed as Matchulat walked with her daughter and another Myanmarian student to the corner, giving the girls ID cards and explaining how they worked.

Khine stepped forward as the city bus arrived, pausing to listen to the driver's instructions. "Do you understand?" Matchulat asked. Khine turned back, smiling. "Yes!" She climbed the stairs and disappeared down the aisle.



"I will be your teacher," Jillea Bueso says as she walks up to Khine for the first time. MARY CHIND/REGISTER PHOTOS

ONLINE: See more photos of Khine Thein's first day of school at DesMoinesRegister.com/Life.

Rising numbers, higher hurdles

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 762 of the state's 2,188 refugee arrivals from 2008 to 2011 were from Burma, like the Thein family, which has been in Iowa since May.

The number of refugees coming from the country began climbing in 2006 and 2007 as the United Nations stepped up its program to resettle individuals displaced by internal and ethnic tensions and the government's human rights violations. In 2011, Iowa accepted 177 Burmese refugees; neighboring Minnesota took in 1,055.

Vinh Nguyen, coordinator for the Des Moines school district's English language learners (ELL) program, points out that the numbers don't factor in movement from state to state. He estimates that more than 500 of the more

than 31,000 students enrolled in Des Moines public schools this fall — more than 5,000 of whom are ELL students — are Burmese, or Myanmarian, refugees.

Nguyen compared that to the fall of 1975, when 275 refugee kids entered Iowa schools at the start of the historic post-Vietnam war migration spearheaded by then-Gov. Robert D. Ray.

Judith Conlin, executive director of the Des Moines-based Iowa International Center, said it's a harder time to be a refugee in Iowa.

"Just over 35 years ago, as Governor Ray was preparing Iowans to welcome refugees, hundreds of churches and thousands of sponsors and volunteers were involved in providing nicely furnished homes and apartments filled with linens, dishes, clothes," she said. "Today, a new refugee is provided one sheet, one blanket, one spoon, one knife, one fork, two plates."



Khine, left, and fellow student Katherine Berber get a tour on the first day at Meredith Middle School.

A safe place

Jillea Bueso pulled out a chair and sat at a table with her students at Meredith Middle School on the city's west side. Three kids, three languages.

She knew the six others on her

class list were likely trying to find their way to school, and that as these newcomers moved up to higher-level ELL classrooms, others would arrive to take their place.

In her three years with the In-

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Demons and monsters snare moviegoers this fall

By Bryan Alexander
USA Today

Avoid the Halloween rush this year. The time to get scared is right now.

The fall movie calendar is so crowded with frightful visions that the spooky season now begins at summer's end, when people are thinking more about final beach activity rather than paranormal activity.

"Just like summer blockbuster season is stretching into April, the horror season is being pushed ever closer to the summer," says Mark Tonderai, director of "House at the End of the Street," a horror-thriller out Sept. 21. "But it's definitely better to see them when there's a little chill in the air and the nights are getting longer."

There will be plenty of opportunity for that. Demon-filled "The Possession" opened last weekend, setting off a string of screen screams that keep



Charlie Tahan voices Victor, who brings his dog, Sparky, back from the dead in "Frankenweenie," coming in October. SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

coming through the nightmare-laden "Silent Hill: Revelation 3D" (Oct. 26).

Even kids are getting into the act, with animated monster flicks continuing to build steam after August's "ParaNorman." The fall sees Tim Burton's "Frankenweenie" (Oct. 5) and Adam Sandler voicing a protective vampire dad in "Hotel Transylvania" (Sept. 28).

The rest of the season is filled with everything from

the undead in a dystopic future ("Resident Evil: Retribution," Sept. 14) to Ethan Hawke's turn as a crime writer trying to solve a gruesome murder ("Sinister," Oct. 5).

"The (horror) holiday season is getting longer and longer," says Sean Decker, correspondent for the fan website Dreadcentral.com. "It's normally a hard sell to tell your friends you're going to see a horror film. But this time

of year, people are open to watching mutilation on the screen."

Paul Dergarabedian, an analyst for Hollywood.com, calls the genre build-up "box-office gridlock."

"You can see why there are so many of these films, because they are a studio bean-counter's dream," he says. "They are cheap to make, and when you get a hit, you can crank sequels out year after year."

The prime example is "Paranormal Activity 4" (Oct. 19). It probably will continue the box-office dominance for the franchise, which began in 2009 when the original "Paranormal Activity" — costing all of \$16,000 to make — took in more than \$100 million.

There's more to this fall's movies than just gore and screaming, though. Here are a few of the next two month's pictures (schedules are subject to change).

Sept. 21

End of Watch: Jake Gyllenhaal and Michael Pena play cops who are marked for death after confiscating money and weapons from a notorious cartel.

Trouble With the Curve: An ailing baseball

scout (Clint Eastwood) takes his daughter along for a final recruiting trip.

Sept. 28

Looper: Set in a future where time travel is possible.

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