IowaLife





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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

he 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 snift 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 refuges 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 spearneaded 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 buildup "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 mil-

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 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 possi-

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SCHOOL

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tensive English Language Center, she has taught up to 25 kids at a time; a total of 120 in a class where students typically stay for 12 to 18 weeks before moving up within the program and eventually, to their neigh-

borhood schools. Bueso was on the ground floor of the IELC, a program Nguyen spearheaded in 2009 after the district began seeing increasing numbers of new students with major educational gaps.

They hadn't been consistently attending school in their home cities or at their refugee camps," she said.

The issues faced by refugee kids add to their need for assistance as they adapt to American schools, Bueso said. "They're coming here mostly because they don't have a choice, because there has been a war or some other major event. Immigrant children have usually had some schooling. They haven't had the disruptions that refugee children have had.'

"I know you are nervous," Bueso said to her students. "It's your first day. I want you to not be nervous."

She held up a printed piece of paper. "This will be vour schedule."

Khine smiled. "Ah, yes, schedule," she said, softly.

Outside, the morning sun made long shadows of the trees on the lawn. An older couple walked past on the sidewalk, but Khine didn't notice as she looked from the paper to her teacher's face and back again. Bueso pointed to the class periods on the sheet.

"Mrs. Bueso, Mrs. Bueso, Mrs. Bueso, Mrs. Bueso," she said. "You will stay here with me."

Learning the territory

The hallway was empty as Bueso and associate teacher Pam McGhee led their students to a bank of lockers. They handed each student a paper bearing numbers and arrows.

Khine, who plans to become a doctor and attended school in Burma and at the refugee camp in Malaysia where her family lived for two years, had never used a combination lock. She watched her teacher turn one of the dials and stepped up to her own locker, smil-

Now she stood inches from the painted metal, confident as she turned the dial and grasped the handle. Nothing. She started over, checking the paper and pulling at the handle which stayed firmly in place. "You have to go past the second number," Bueso said, showing her again. Khine tried a third time and a fourth.

"Ack!" she said, stamping her foot.

"Don't worry," Bueso said. "You're going to be fine. We'll practice again."

The halls were empty as Bueso led her students down them, pointing to doors as they passed. "Gym," she said, pausing to don imaginary sneakers.

"Nurse's office." She faked a cough.

In the empty cafeteria, clerk Geri Walker counted bills as Bueso demonstrated how a line worked, where the milk was, how to enter numbers on a keypad. "Oh no!" Bueso exclaimed, bringing her hands to her face, then hitting a button. "Clear."

"You never have to feel embarrassment," Walker told the students.

When the group returned to the classroom, two new students sat waiting for them. Another teacher arrived with a student from her class a few minutes into the next lesson. Khine grinned when she saw that it was Ahishag, her friend from the apartments.

The cafeteria challenge

Vice Principal Mary Decker walked between tables in the crowded lunchroom.

"This is your social time," she said. "But be respectful to yourself, others and the environment.'

The room burst into conversation as she finished, but Bueso's group stared quietly at the laminated cards she held out: "Zesty pork burger on a bun, cheese pizza, salad."

No one reached to examine them.

'Mrs. McGhee and I will help you," Bueso said. "But first, I had better go make sure lunch is set up for Abishag."

The students said nothing as she left. Wisps of Abishag's bob hid her face as she stared at her lap.

The isolation her students feel in the lunchroom is typical, Bueso said.

"Not many, if any, speak the same language, so there can't be much communication - at least verbally," she said. "Even those who speak the same



Khine Thein waits for instructions with other students in the cafeteria before classes begin on her first day of school late last month. MARY CHIND/THE REGISTER

language usually don't know anyone else in the class and don't talk much to each other unless they are really outgoing.'

She and McGhee aren't required to stay with their students during lunch, but during the early months of the school year, they do.

"The lunchroom is such a big, noisy intimidating place," she said, "and food is a personal thing — and one of the things refugee students don't like about school. We've had kids get sick because they're not used to the richness of the food.'

Within a week, she says. her students begin to relax and open up as they learn the routine and get to know one another.

Starting from square one

Vin Nguyen was a refugee, "a boat person," he said. "And I know. The classroom is culture shock. They have never had a desk to sit at, have never seen a

PILOT PROGRAM

Neighbors Helping Neighbors, a program recently initiated as a personal project by Nguyen and Joe Jongewaard, a school board member and longtime community volunteer, pairs refugee families within the Des Moines school district with local residents, who will help them learn the basics of American life. To learn more, contact joe.jongewaard@q.com.

computer, never had to experience water fountains, bathrooms, line up for lunch. They have to change everything they have done for many years to adapt to this new setting."

School districts get extra money for students whose first language isn't English. The funding is for four years, but most students are in the program longer. "But if they have not met the educational objectives, we cannot just stop providing services. They are now part of a bigger picture that we have, for the school, the city, the state. They live here. We owe them educations."

Meredith Middle School Principal Cindy Flesch cites individuals like Bueso and Nguyen for the pro-

Here Comes the Boom:

A teacher (Kevin James)

turns to mixed martial arts

gram's success. "Once we break through those language barriers we have the opportunity to find out what each of these students brings to us."

After dinner on her first day of school in America, Khine sat down to write in the journal given to her by a reporter to help track her thoughts. She wrote:

In my heart, I have been thanking my mom and dad for bringing me here to the United States. I am grateful to be in the school. It is good for me and for my future to be able to go to school in the United States. I hope that I will be able to get the best future and more happiness in my life. I will set my priorities and try to succeed. I will try my best to achieve my goals.

FILMS

Continued from Page 1E

ble, Joseph Gordon-Levitt is Joe, a hit man with a mission to kill the older version of himself.

Won't Back Down: Two mothers (Viola Davis and Maggie Gyllenhaal) look to transform their kids' bleak inner-city school.

Oct. 5

WOI

KCC

Butter: When the champ (Ty Burrell) of a butter-

sculpting competition in Iowa quits, the field gets clogged up between his gogetter wife (Jennifer Garner), a gifted orphan girl (Yara Shahidi) and a stripper (Olivia Wilde).

Pitch Perfect: The Gleeification of pop culture continues in this comedy about a freshman (Anna Kendrick) persuaded to join her university's female singing group, The Bellas.

Oct. 12

Good Afternoon General Hospi-

The Talk

Argo: Based on a true story, a CIA specialist (Ben

The Doctors (N)

Let's Make a Deal Dr. Phil Worst Husbands in America The Dr. Oz Show



5:00 5:30 6:00

Evening News News

World News

News

"Sinister" stars Ethan Hawke. SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Affleck) hatches a plan to rescue six Americans holed up at the Canadian

ambassador's house by sending in a team disguised as a sci-fi film crew.

to raise money to save his high school's extracurricu-

Enter- The Last- Happy Apart- Democratic Natainment Middle Standing Endings Ment 23 tional Convention

NCIS Playing With

lar program. Oct. 19 **Alex Cross:** Tyler Perry takes on the cinematic

mantle of James Patter-

son's literary detective as

he's pitted against a serial

killer named Picasso. Killing Them Softly: Three guys rob a mob-protected card game, throwing the local underworld into disarray. Enter Jackie Cogan (Brad Pitt), the enforcer unleashed to hunt them down.

Oct. 26

Cloud Atlas: The adaptation of the 2004 sci-fi novel following six stories that explore how human lives affect one another.

The Sessions: Hawkes stars as a paralyzed man in his 30s in an iron lung who decides that now is the time to lose his virginity, to a sex surrogate (Helen Hunt).

10:35 | Jimmy Kimmel Nightline Live (N)

Late Show With David Letterman son

Today on Television

Broadcast Local Channels 12:00 | 12:30 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 2:00 | 2:30 | 3:00 | 3:30 | 4:00 | 4:30

The Chew

News

Find expanded program schedules for cable and satellite television providers in the Des Moines area at DesmoinesRegister.com/tv.

6:30 | 7:00 | 7:30 | 8:00 | 8:30 | 9:00 | 9:30 | 10:00 | 10:30 | 11:00 | 11:30

NCIS: Los Angeles Democratic Na-Deadline Democratic Na-tional Convention

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