

Open World Republic of Georgia Delegates

June 13-21, 2025

We were fortunate to host business leaders from the Republic of Georgia through Open World.

Rima (facilitator), Mzia, Nino, Tamar, Salome, Mariam and their interpreter, Shalba, met business leaders and toured small businesses and agri-tourism sites throughout Cedar Rapids, Marion and Iowa City from June 13 to June 21. Thank you to host families: Ron and Margaret Nelson, Mary Ann and Larry Nelson, Patty Potter and Mary and Frank Stull. It took a village to create



such an interesting, informative, entertaining and challenging program.

Thanks to those who helped with the program: Connie Williams (coordinator), Vic and Bonnie Klopfenstein, Jean Thomas, Christine Allen, Rosie Russell, Gayle Bray, Judy Frascht-Miner and Jim Steggall. Dinner hosts Emily and Corey Schneller and their children, Julia Wasson and Joe Hennager and Joanie Lacayo provided another aspect of our Iowa culture.



Catching a t-shirt at the ball game

The first two days provided cultural immersion by visiting Uptown Marion Market & meeting with former Marion Mayor Dr. Victor Klopfenstein and Mrs. Bonnie, a living history of community service and leadership. They also attended a Kernels baseball game and got acquainted with their hosts.



Cooking a Georgian meal

The program included:

- NewBo City Market exploring how local markets can support entrepreneurship and serve as incubators for small businesses including women- and minority-owned businesses.
- NewBoCo on building startup ecosystems and entrepreneurial mindsets, and a visit to a family-owned, Woofables, a model of values-based business.
- deNovo Agency where creativity meets strategy in the digital space.
- A powerful session with Mayor Tiffany O'Donnell, also CEO of Women Lead Change, reminding them that women's leadership drives inclusive development.
- Kirkwood Community College & The Hotel at Kirkwood, learning how vocational education meets real-world business in hospitality and tourism.
- National Czech & Slovak Museum, preserving identity through culture and history.
- MERGE Iowa City & 1 Million Cups, a live startup pitching session with vibrant discussion, great networking, and community-driven innovation.
- Greater Iowa City Inc. on regional collaboration and support systems for business growth.
- 10,000 Villages, learning about fair trade models and exploring potential future collaboration to bring Georgian crafts and social enterprise products to international markets.
- Beadology & Get Fresh Café, stories of women-owned business models built on values, sustainability, and local empowerment.
- Walker Homestead, agritourism, sustainability, and rural entrepreneurship in action.
- Cedar Ridge Winery, ShopHop Inc., and Calyx Creek Lavender Farm and Amana Colonies exploring branding, niche markets, and rural business success.
- Grant Wood Area Education Agency, powerful experience sharing about inclusion, disability services, and education.
- Children's Museum, inclusive design and absolutely amazing educational engagement

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Newbo Market



Children's Museum, Iowa City



Meeting baby chicks at Schnellers



View from Pickle Palace



Touring Cedar Ridge



Walker Homestead Farm & Winery



Woofables



Beadology

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A frequently heard comment was “we have so many ideas in our heads from these experiences.” The facilitator, Rima, noted that every day brought new lessons in community-driven business, sustainable practices, inclusive leadership, and the power of local initiatives. The farewell dinner at Coe College Alumni House was the perfect closing moment — full of warmth, reflection, and renewed purpose. It was a reminder of the friendships formed and the bridges built.



Nino, Mary Ann, Larry and Tamar



Margaret, Salome and Ron



Rima, Frank, Mary and Mzia



Goodbye at the airport



At the farewell dinner at Coe College, delegates, host families and program hosts.