

Foreign students at Christmas ; nowhere to go, nothing to do

By JEFF DAVIES

In a few weeks, when exams have come and gone, most UNB students will be packing up their books and preparing for a few weeks at home with their families. After all, isn't that what everybody does during Christmas vacation?

Not quite everybody. If you're one of the approximately 360 foreign students at UNB, you may just have to be content to sit around your residence or apartment, seek out what entertainment is available, and wait for the next term to begin.

That's about the extent of it, unless you're been invited to spend some time with friends or can afford to travel.

Needless to say, foreign students find Christmas a pretty boring time of year around Fredericton — to say nothing of expensive. No food service is provided at Christmas and buying meals at the SUB cafeteria will cost you an average of about four dollars a day, according to Garry Knox of Saga Foods. Students who stay in residence are charged \$17 for the Christmas period. (This is just the guys. Girls have to move out of residence at Christmas. The Dean of Women finds them a place to stay.)

One of the problems is the fact that Mrs. Joyce Stocker, the Foreign Students

advisor, isn't provided with an entertainment budget for the holiday. Last year she organized a party for the foreign students but the various foreign students' associations had to pay for the beer while Mrs. Stocker provided the rum herself. In addition, she had to enlist the help of her family in making preparations for the event. Meanwhile, the Rotary Club wives provided the food free of charge and the Salvation Army sent small gifts such as combs and other items of toiletry.

Naturally Mrs. Stocker would appreciate any assistance from the students, whether it came in the form of financial help from the SRC or just a hand in putting on some activities. With a large portion of the UNB student body living in Fredericton, this would seem a reasonable request.

"You don't need a vast amount of money for a thing like that," said Mrs. Stocker. "If the SRC would provide me with a bit of money to finance the party it would be quite a help."

The only other annual event for the foreign students at Christmas is a tour of Saint John put on through the combined efforts of the Saint John and Fredericton Y's Men's Clubs. This generally attracts about 50 people.

The campus, of course, virtually shuts down at Christmas, and the city itself isn't exactly noted for its night life. Add to this the fact that the foreign students probably don't have too much money to throw around at Christmas and it doesn't make for a very interesting time. As Mrs. Stocker put it, "What a miserable life if a student can't go and have a couple of beers occasionally."

Some of the students receive dinner invitations from families in the city but Mrs. Stocker feels that they may be reluctant to go unless they know the family.

One suggestion which has been tried as a means of combating loneliness is moving all the on campus students still around at Christmas into one residence. It wasn't successful. "They grumbled," said Mrs. Stocker. The students weren't happy at having to uproot themselves from their former residence for such a short period.

When we spoke to Garry Knox, he expressed willingness to institute a package meal plan for the Christmas period if enough students wanted it. This would be similar to the regular food service in which the students pay a lump sum for regular meals over a period of time. This would be cheaper for those who took advantage of it.

The small number of students around at Christmas is the reason food service is not provided, said Knox. Last year, the SUB cafeteria and coffee shop remained open through the holiday but didn't attract many customers. For instance, although special meals were provided at Christmas and New Years, only 10 and 17 people showed up respectively. In addition, a buffet was set up on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Years' Day but in each case attracted less than half the number expected.

We contacted the heads of three of the four foreign students' organizations on campus to see what they thought of the Christmas break and to find out any suggestions they had for relieving some of the boredom. (The head of the Indian Students' Association was unavailable for comment.)

Cecil Ojah, head of the Caribbean Circle, said that before things would improve, "there's going to have to be an increase in student-citizen relationship." He felt that it would be a good idea for the foreign students to develop more off-campus contacts and that many would be glad to have invitations to Fredericton homes. In this line, he suggested that Mrs. Stocker collect names of Fredericton residents who would like to entertain foreign students.

Ojah, a second year post graduate Science student from Trinidad, said he may go home at Christmas. He added that only a "fortunate few" could afford this, although quite a few do leave Fredericton. He said that from 10 to 15 of the approximately 35 members of the Caribbean Circle remained on campus at Christmas. His group has obtained \$30 from the SRC for a Christmas party.