

Soaking up culture with cotton

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Wenny Rachmaningrum from Indonesia, Kyung-Jin Min from South Korea, Gadia Gaitan from Panama, Jen Cantu from USA, and Mukaddes Karaoglu from Turkey have a "cotton picking good time" at Richard and Becky Edgar's cotton field

Photo: Special to The Indy

By [BRIAN HODGE](#)

Marcia Monroe of Millbrook is one of a dozen or so instructors for adult students learning English at Maxwell Air Force Base. The students are typically made up of dependents of foreign military personnel visiting Maxwell's Officer's School and Air War College. Typically the veterans visiting Maxwell are already fluent in English, but for their family members and dependents that is not always the case.

Monroe took her students to have a cultural immersion unique to the American South, especially Alabama, by having the students pick cotton by hand.

"I have been bringing students to pick cotton for the past eight years. We do a lot of different activities to immerse the students in American culture, but word gets around from predecessors to current students and picking cotton is one of their favorite activities," Monroe said.

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The group visited Richard and Becky Edgar's cotton field in Millbrook for the adventure, which not only included the adult students but also their children. After having all the "cotton-picking" fun they could stand the class regrouped at Village Green Park for lunch.

Though Monroe is a native Spanish speaker, she has students this year who speak 13 different languages. The students are organized by their skill level in English. But Monroe says as much as the class is about the English language, immersing the students in the local culture is a key importance.

"The Montgomery area and its surroundings are perfect for this because there is such a rich history here. We also take the students to see the Alabama Capitol Building, First White House of the Confederacy, and other historical sites. But they really look forward to picking cotton," Monroe said.