

Arab-Americans concerned

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"I am distraught like every American, like every human being in the world that has feelings and has humanity in their heart."

Habib, program coordinator with Oakland Community College, was among Farmington area residents of Arabic heritage reacting to the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks Tuesday.

National news reports have aired speculation that the attack was orchestrated by Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian dissident.

Habib said she is concerned about anyone who would rush to judge all people of Arabic background. "They cannot pinpoint every Arabic speaking person. We're all innocent people trying to conduct our life."

"I am more of an American than Arab," she said.

"I think my reaction would be one of outrage at a criminal act perpetuated by criminals which has nothing to do with religion or ethnic background," said Samir Hadad, Farmington Public Schools

lingual director and member of the Farmington-Farmington Hills Multicultural, Multicultural Council.

"There is nothing in our religion or our culture that calls for this," Hadad said. "Instead of advancing their cause they are destroying their cause. I'm completely outraged."

"I just hope that people recognize that this is a diverse community. Your neighbors had nothing to do with this in any shape, we are as outraged as other people. I hope people don't take their rage out on innocent people."

Habib said that after the Oklahoma City bombing, it was disturbing that people rushed to assign blame to Arab terrorists; particularly when the actual bombers were not of Arab descent.

"Unfortunately we were unjustly labeled that an Arab was doing that. I'm not saying 'Thank god it wasn't an Arab' or anything. A human life is very dear. My heart goes out to daughters, sisters, husbands, friends."

"These are innocent bystanders; these are martyrs."

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"This is beyond belief."

"It's as though the world has come to a standstill."

Time seemed to stop Tuesday morning in the Farmington-Farmington Hills area and across the United States as Americans watched and waited to learn more about horrifying terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C.

By noon, Farmington Public Schools were locked down, events in both communities had been canceled and business ground to a halt as residents tried to come to grips with the loss of thousands of lives after planes crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

"The feeling is how can you think about anything else," said Fred Marx of Marx Layne, a public relations firm whose client list includes firms directly and indirectly affected by the attack. "We've sent people over to help clients — and even people who aren't clients, who we've done work for in the past — to

help get materials together... and get statements written."

Marx said companies were closing stores and business meetings planned for the day were put on hold.

"There is no agenda today but sadness," he said.

As was the case in many firms, employees were gathered in conference rooms, watching events unfold on television.

Capital's vulnerable

For John Akouri, who recently left his job as press aide to Congressman Joseph Knollenberg to run for state Senate, the images of the disaster at the Pentagon were especially wrenching.

"Washington is basically a fortress," he said. "It's very unsettling knowing a city I worked in for several years could be facing such devastation."

However, Akouri knows the nation's capital is vulnerable.

"They are still structural buildings that have been intact for several hundred years," Akouri said. "I think we've found today anything is vulnerable. Washington, D.C. has always been open to the public. To be

able to see someone penetrate that basically says that terrorism will find you. I can't imagine the massive loss of life."

How to handle terror

Psychologist John Cotter, who serves on the Call To Action community coalition and works through Farmington Hills Counseling Service, said Americans have become de-sensitized to the word "terrorism."

"The intent of terrorism is to terrorize," he said. "How do people respond to terror? They feel helpless, out of control, vulnerable. It creates fear and anxiety."

While the attack has been compared to Pearl Harbor, he said, the perpetrator in this case hasn't yet been identified. "This is a nameless, faceless entity. There's no way to predict or control where or whether it could happen again."

That kind of psychological warfare, he said, is intended to inflict pain across the country, not just where the attacks occurred.

He encouraged people to talk to each other about their fears, even if those feelings seem dra-

matic or extreme. "We are all victims of an act of terrorism."

Cotter also urged parents to remember that children will receive information about the events and come to conclusions and create interpretations of what this means to them. "The younger they are, the more fantastic those conclusions are. Make sure you get them to talk about their fears and reassure them over and over."

While a number of community and school events were canceled Tuesday, the Multicultural/Multicultural Community Council's plans for its annual Heritage Festival remained intact. Held Sept. 14-23, the festival includes school and community-wide programs focused on increasing understanding of the many cultures represented in Farmington and Farmington Hills.

"We probably need events like this more than ever," said council co-chairwoman Karen Bolen. "I, personally, along with everyone on the council, am in national mourning. It's just such a sad event. There's no justification for taking human lives."

Schools from page A1

the east, flashes in her recollection.

"We have former neighbors who worked for the Pentagon," she said. "We have quite a few friends down there."

Parent Nina Bibicoff waited at

the school's front door wearing a visitor pass clipped to her blouse. "I called the school to find out if they needed any help," said Bibicoff, who waited for son, Lee.

School officials told her they welcomed parents who could

help monitor and provide a reassuring, adult presence. Shortly before the dismissal bell rang she slipped off to be a "presence in the parking lot," as she explained.

Across the street, Aleks Bimbad, a ninth grader, prepared to join his mother and grandmother who came to pick him up. Interpreting a question that asked for their reaction, Bimbad responded that they were of Russian descent, couldn't speak English, and hadn't heard about

the attacks.

"The school had a lockdown," Bimbad said. "They wouldn't let us out of classes unless there was an announcement. I wasn't scared, but everyone else was scared. They wondered what city or building would be next."

Ryan Warsh, a ninth grader, said he was shocked. "We went to the media center and watched it on TV," Warsh said. "I couldn't believe that the building was blowing up."

Brandon Leopold, a 10th grad-

er, left school "with many questions."

"Where was the United States Air Force?" Leopold said. "Where would it happen next? I got nervous and scared."

Joe Strawinski, said simply, "I couldn't believe it. I thought, 'We're next.'"

"It's the saddest thing," said Joy Stassinosopoulos, who waited for her son, Leo. "You wonder what the world is coming to. You say, 'God help us.'"

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