

Residents share emotion, stories

BY JONI HUBBED
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It was a very different evening than organizers of the Heritage Festival had anticipated.

Sponsored by the Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council, the event was held at the



gathering at the Costick Center in Farmington Hills was supposed to be a celebration of diversity.

The Council planned to unveil its activities for the coming year — which include several community forums, the Rainbow Recognition Awards and a student diversity conference.

But when the world changed on Sept. 11, the Heritage Festival changed with it. Thursday evening became a focal point for a community's grief and an expression of its hope in the wake of terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania.

"Connections are going to be this tragedy's silver lining," said school board president Cathy Webb.

Moderator Carolyn Clifford, a Farmington Hills resident and reporter for WXYZ television, said she had been very affected by a report she did from a local school, where children had written letters to rescue workers in New York.

"I don't think I've ever gotten teary-eyed on the set about anything until yesterday," she said. "To see 9 and 10 year olds talk about death, courage and their heroes really touched me."

Clifford, who is African-American, said she grew up in Detroit but never ventured into the Farmington area until she came back to this area three years ago. "I felt very welcome in this city," she said.

While the event was originally to celebrate differences, 47th District Court Judge Maria Parker said the community had shared in a sense of loss and in hope. "It strikes me that we have more than unites us than divides us."

After music by the Harrison High chamber orchestra and East Middle School choir, the community dialogue also included Oakland County Bar Association President Elias Escobedo Jr. He first asked for a moment of silence, then spoke about his trip to Washington, D.C., last November to spend Veteran's Day at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Fellow Americans

A survivor of that war, Escobedo said as he viewed the names on the wall, "It became very evident to me each name was simply listed as a fellow American. None of the names distinguished race, creed or color."

The same was true in Arlington Cemetery, where he walked past row after row of white crosses that mark the graves of soldiers.

"If we, as a country, do not learn from this, I can assure you we will die together," Escobedo said.

Referring to the terrorist attacks, he added, "The five thousand plus men and women whose bodies have yet to be recovered came from all walks of life. There was no discrimination on September 11."

The Rev. Brad Geis, pastor at Hope Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills, spoke to his experience with the youth of his congregation. They have expressed a desire, hope and prayer for peace.

"Our high school youth are wrestling with this," he said.

Samir Haddad, an American of Arab descent, was visibly moved as he spoke of the "double whammy" Arab-Americans face. "As Americans, we bleed like you do. At the same time, we are Arabs and we have people outside of this room that think we are to blame, too."

One mother, of Spanish

descent, expressed her concern that parents teach their children the terrorists acted on their own, not on behalf of an entire people. Her husband is Arab-American. Their young son came home from school terribly upset by comments he'd heard that "Arabic people did this."

His mother told him that might be true, but "he had nothing in common with people who did that."

Aldo Vagnozzi, a Farmington Hills resident who said he experienced some discrimination during World War II because of his Italian heritage, urged people not to make the same mistakes that were made after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, which included detaining Japanese-Americans in camps and suspicions cast on those of German or Italian descent.

"There's a rainbow of colors over our two cities," said the former Hills mayor. "Let's keep it that way. Let's look out for each other."

In closing remarks, Rabbi Danny Nevins of Adat Shalom expressed his relief at learning his brother, Teddy, who worked just a few blocks from the World Trade Center, escaped unharmed. He quoted from the 27th Psalm: "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?"

"That light within us is so special and so sacred that when we cause it to shine together, we shall be strong and we shall not be afraid," he said.

Rabbi Nevins, Rev. Mark Jensen of North Congregational Church and Deacon Mark Springer of St. Alexander Catholic Church lit candles of remembrance, thanks and hope at the close of the evening, which was cut a bit short due to President George Bush's nationwide address at 9 p.m.

On Sunday, the Council's planned Heritage Festival was postponed. It was an opportunity for residents to contribute to relief efforts — from signing special greetings to rescue workers in New York to signing up for blood donations.

Hills will help with N'western trees

A tree and shrub planting program along Northwestern Highway from I-696 to south of 14 Mile Road will cost \$1 million, and the Farmington Hills City Council voted Monday to contribute toward it.

The city of Farmington Hills and Southfield, along with the Michigan Department of Transportation, have proposed the Northwestern Highway transportation aesthetics project. It will include trees, shrubs, perennials and ornamental grasses in the median

to present a unified look to complement existing natural features along six miles of Northwestern Highway.

The grant request to the MDOT includes a requirement that Farmington Hills and Southfield share contributions that make up 25 percent of the project cost. Dale Countegian, Hills director of planning and community development, estimated the city's contribution at \$180,000. If the grant is approved, work on the project will happen in 2003, Countegian said.

The city council also on Monday approved spending \$76,350 for a city-wide tree planting project. It calls for the planting of 55 deciduous shade trees and 12 evergreen trees along major roads, removal of dead trees and other tree maintenance.

The Citywide Tree Planting Program was devised by the city's planning office in conjunction with the Beautification Commission, city offices and citizens.

Crate Magic Show travels to local schools

The Crate Magic Show will visit Farmington area elementary schools now through Oct. 5.

The show, featuring members of the Farmington Hills Fire Department, uses illusions and tricks to reinforce fire safety messages for elementary school children in Farmington Public Schools.

This is the 19th year the Fire Department has been taking its fire safety shows to local schools. The presentations lead up to National Fire Prevention Week, which is Oct. 7-13. The Fire Department will also host its 24th annual Fire Prevention Open House noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7, at Fire Headquarters at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake.

Following is the schedule for the Crate Magic Show:

■ Thursday, Sept. 27
Forest Elementary: Shows at 9 and 9:45 a.m.
■ Friday, Sept. 28
Lanigan Elementary: Shows at 9:30 and 10:15 a.m.
Hillside Elementary: Shows at 2:15 and 3 p.m.

■ Monday, Oct. 1
Highmeadow Elementary: Shows at 9 and 9:45 a.m.
■ Tuesday, Oct. 2
Flanders Elementary: Show at 10:15 a.m.

Longacre Elementary: shows at 2:15 and 3 p.m.
■ Wednesday, Oct. 3
Kenbrook Elementary: Shows at 8:30 and 9:15 a.m.
St. Fabian: Shows at 1:30 and 2:15 p.m.
■ Thursday, Oct. 4
Woodcreek Elementary: Shows at 9:30 and 10:15 a.m.
■ Friday, Oct. 5
Gill Elementary: Shows at 8:45 and 9:30 a.m.
William Grace Elementary: Shows at 2:15 and 3 p.m.

For information, contact Lt. Michael Garr at the Farmington Hills Fire Department, (248) 426-4400.

Man charged after making threats at library

A Farmington Hills man is awaiting a forensic exam in Oakland County Jail in connection with a Sept. 16 incident at the downtown branch of the Farmington Public Library.

Mostafa Omar El-Bealy, 42, was arraigned Sept. 17 before 47th District Court Judge Fred Harris on trespassing and disorderly conduct, resisting arrest charges. A plea of not guilty was entered for him.

Harris set bond at \$1,000 personal on the trespassing charge and \$10,000 for the second

charge. Each misdemeanor carries a fine of \$500 and/or 90 days in jail, according to a court spokesman.

Further court action is pending until the results of a forensic/psychiatric exam are obtained, she said.

Police were notified about problems at the library about 4:30 p.m., after a man allegedly made threats and said he was going to shoot everyone inside.

"A large number of individuals were running out of the building," according to a report by the

responding police officer.

When police arrived, the man was standing behind the information desk, holding a telephone.

Police ordered him to the floor at gunpoint, and he resisted. He identified himself as an agent for the FBI and the CIA. He said he was with the National Security Agency.

A library employee told police the man became upset and began pounding on the information desk when he could not use the phone.

Hills woman explains her beliefs

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She has a sense of humor, sees that her children learn what's right, and knows that violent acts against innocents violate her religion.

"It's so important that not one person get hurt with one word that you say. This is in the Koran," said Rana Khalaf.

Khalaf stood out from her fellow presenters at Sunday's Mini Conference on Religious and Cultural Diversity — but not because she wears the traditional Arab black dress, the jilbab, and the white veil, or hijab.

"I'm not a scholar. I don't claim to be a scholar," she told more than 100 people gathered at the Costick Activities Center for the first ever mini-conference, in conjunction with the Heritage Festival.

That made her unique amidst the group of pastors, priests and the university-trained.

Khalaf of Farmington Hills admitted to being a reluctant presenter, following the terrorist attacks Sept. 11. Still, she spoke clearly and with feeling about her pride in being Muslim.

"It was a very difficult decision to be here," Khalaf said. "Every Muslim, we are suffering pain."

"The true meaning of Islam is peace in Arabic. It derives from the word peace."

Khalaf pointed to similarities between Christianity and

Islam. "We all believe and worship one god who created us," she said, adding that prophets are shared by the two religions.

She said the Koran teaches that "when we are at peace with ourselves we are peaceful with one another."

"Many people hear 'Allah' and think Muslims worship a different god. It is just a different word for god," she said.

Khalaf said there are 1.2 billion Muslims around the world, and only 18 percent are Arab. Besides the Middle East, Muslims are found in Indonesia, Asia, the Soviet Union and the United States.

Khalaf delved into some Muslim traditions which may seem unusual to many Americans, but have deep meaning in her faith.

She noted that during the month of Ramadan, Muslims don't eat or drink between sunset and sundown. "The most important thing Islam wants us to be is disciplined human beings. Fasting teaches us to be patient," she said. "You can have control over your own life."

"At the end of the month you really want to celebrate because you have demonstrated you have control."

"I think everybody wants to ask about dress," she said, gesturing to her own clothing. She smiled and turned toward staff from Hillside Elementary, where two of her three children attend. The staff members smiled back, and Khalaf

turned back to the podium microphone.

She said that being a woman covered from head to toe in traditional Muslim dress "gives me an identity I'm proud to show."

"I don't feel I'm alone; I'm me," she said, adding the Koran stipulates women should dress this way around men who are not their husband or brothers.

She rejected the idea that Muslim women are kept ignorant, saying women in Islam are free to be educated and pursue careers. "How can an ignorant woman raise educated men?" she asked. "Islam treats women justly and fairly; exactly as it treats men."

Again rejecting the terrorist attack Sept. 11, she said the Koran urges people "not to kill each other but to know each other."

Diana Fair of Farmington Hills said she enjoyed Khalaf's talk "because she was just an average person; just a woman talking about her faith."

"What strikes me is there are much more similarities than differences," she said, between Islam and Christianity.

Barbara Yuhas, of The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, said, "I'm a Christian and it was nice to know that we share some of the same beliefs."

She said Khalaf also communicated well with the crowd, mostly female, because she spoke of women's concerns.

Fundraisers from page A1

department is sponsoring a Benefit Car Wash for the New York Fire 911 Relief Fund from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday at Fire Station No. 5, 31455 W. 11 Mile Road at Orchard Lake Road.

The council also received a report Monday from Peter Baldwin, assistant fire chief and coordinator of emergency management.

"There is a plan in place, it defines the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved depending on what the event is,"

he said. "Everyone knows ahead of time what their role is."

Baldwin said the events of Sept. 11 could increase the number of exercises planned by the emergency management team.

Those exercises range from scenarios discussed around a table to disaster drills, such as the drill in August at Oakland Community College. In that drill, local authorities responded to a poison gas attack on an auditorium.

Bates said citizens continue to

ask where they can make donations to boost relief efforts. She directed them to the city's Web site, www.ci.farmington-hills.mi.us, where lists of legitimate relief groups are listed.

Marinucci urged citizens not to mail supplies to New York City, as these coordinating relief efforts are unable to handle these items.

"Financial support is what they can handle today," he explained.

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