

Metro area Chaldeans seek to avoid backlash

BY DAN WEST
CHICAGO

With heavy hearts, metro Detroit's Chaldean community leaders unified to voice their support for the American government and troops involved in the war to oust Saddam Hussein's government from Iraq.

They fear for the safety of their siblings, cousins and other relatives living in their war-torn homeland, but they want to publicly display their American pride.

"We want to fight for democracy too, but our burden to show our commitment to democracy and patriotism seems to be higher than others in the United States," said Mike Sarafa of Novi. The Southfield-based Chaldean Federation of America organized a press conference Monday to prove their patriot-

ism in an effort to avoid a war-driven backlash against Chaldeans — many of whom are Iraqi natives — in their neighborhoods, schools and businesses. Monday's event attracted more than 200 Chaldean community leaders, clergy, business people, law enforcement, political leaders and media gathered at the Mother of God Chaldean Catholic Church Hall in Southfield. The event also attracted members of the national media.

Chaldean Federation Chairman Saad Marouf announced plans to send President George W. Bush a letter on behalf of the nation's 160,000 Chaldean-Americans who "proudly stand behind our U.S. government in support of our brothers and sisters in the U.S. Armed Forces serving in the war on Iraq."

The demonstration of support for U.S. efforts in Iraq was not hailed by all local Chaldeans. They are some members of Troy's St. Joseph's Chaldean Catholic Church, who detest the Hussein regime, but they also protest the war.

"Too many civilians and soldiers are dying, but what for?" asked Sam Mansour, who has family living in Baghdad near one of the presidential palaces that was bombed by U.S. forces last week. "Let time run its course, don't force it with war."

Monday's press event was a proactive step to protect metro Detroit Chaldeans from harassment. With a campaign of "education and familiarity," local Chaldean leaders hope their community can avoid retribution if a prolonged war and economic troubles motivates others to take out frustrations on Iraqi

natives. When Iraqis took dozens of American hostages from the American Embassy and held them captive for more than a year in the late-1970s, Chaldean-owned stores were the targets of vandalism, graffiti and boycotts. Chaldean-Americans were targets of harassment and intimidation. Local Chaldeans said things have improved dramatically over the past 25 years. After the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Chaldeans feared another backlash from their neighbors, but Sarafa said there were minimal problems.

"More people know about us and our history of making contributions here in southeastern Michigan," Sarafa said. "We hope collectively this continues to be the case and we don't suffer any domestic reactions to the war."

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CHALDEAN CULTURE

■ Chaldeans are a non-Arab community of Christian Catholics with roots throughout the Middle East. In the Middle East, Chaldeans are also known as Assyrians. Most Chaldeans speak Aramaic, a dialect of which was spoken by Jesus and his disciples. Aramaic is also a base for the Hebrew and Arabic languages.

■ More than 600,000 Chaldeans live in Iraq, making up approximately 5 percent of that country's population. The largest concentration of Chaldeans live in the Middle East, Australia and United States.

■ Since they are a minority community in Iraq, Chaldeans are frequently persecuted in their homeland. To flee this persecution, some Chaldean families started moving to the U.S. in the early 1900s.

■ Of this country's 160,000 Chaldeans, some 120,000 live in Michigan. The majority live in Detroit and many communities in southern Oakland and Macomb counties.

■ There are five Chaldean Catholic churches in metro Detroit. They are located in Detroit, Southfield, Oak Park, West Bloomfield and Troy. A sixth is under construction in Shelby Township. They are not run by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit, but by the Chaldean Dioceses of the United States of America.

Sources: Chaldean Federation of America, Associated Food Dealers of Michigan

MCMR offers assistance with war concerns

Karen Bolen and Jim Hall, co-chairs of the Multicultural Multiracial Community Council of Farmington/Farmington Hills, issued the following statement this week: The MCMR Community Council is hopeful this international conflict regarding the Middle East will result in peace as soon as possi-

ble. Our thoughts and prayers are with all involved; especially in mind are the United States service men and women overseas and their families at home in America.

We are proud of the respectful behaviors the people of our community have exhibited in the past during times of international conflict. These days,

many communities in the United States, like Farmington and Farmington Hills, reflect populations originating from every part of the world.

We feel many different emotions, with thoughts of loved ones around the globe. And yet we are living in America, trying to realize the dreams of our founding fathers. And where

else is there a better opportunity to demonstrate this shared democratic spirit than in Farmington and Farmington Hills? The Multicultural Multiracial Community Council respectfully requests any information where we may be of assistance with these concerns. The MCMR Council's help line is (248) 426-4457.

TEACHER

FROM PAGE A1

and marketing staffer for Oakland Schools.

Earlier this month, Rohm was honored as the Farmington Public Schools High School Teacher of the Year. At that time, she also received a year's free use of a red Chrysler convertible, including maintenance and insurance, provided by the Suburban Collection of car dealers in a special promotion. Rohm picked from 26 different car models, including Mazdas, Nissans, VWs, an Acura, Chryslers, Jeeps and Hondas.

Rohm said she felt honored all over again.

"I'm not sure that I'm doing anything different than what any other teachers do," she said. "You don't go into teaching for awards. You go into teaching because you love it and you love kids."

The six criteria reviewed by

contest judges were:

■ Excites students to appreciate and seek learning and to attain their maximum potential

■ Understands the individual needs of students and reaches them in ways which contribute to their increased knowledge, talents and self-esteem

■ Demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the subject taught and the ability to share that knowledge effectively with students

■ Demonstrates classroom management, including punctuality, preparation and control

■ Has sound relationships with fellow professionals and with parents

■ Demonstrates, through example, those qualities which make him or her an outstanding leader and good citizen

In addition to these criteria, nominators were asked to provide a supporting statement, a brief summary of the nominee's teaching career and highlights of other employment or

career experiences, Rose said.

The difficult task of evaluating 53 nominees and picking just three recipients fell to a selection committee made up of last year's award recipients and representatives from Oakland Schools, the Oakland County School Boards Association, Michigan Education Association, Baker College, Oakland County Circuit Court Youth Assistance and community leaders.

The Farmington Public

School District has had a number of Oakland County winners, Farmington School Superintendent Bob Maxfield said. He called Rohm "the whole package."

"She's a great teacher and a wonderful role model," Maxfield said. "She heads up all those projects at the school and she's a great coach for young teachers. She has so many wonderful strengths."

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