

MCRC NOTICIAS



Volume 1, Issue 2
October 2011

THE HEART SPEAKS, AND NEW LIFE BEGINS

A young man from the city of Damascus in Syria, **Bassam Dabbah** learned the art of floral design from his family. He eventually located in Amman, Jordan and became head florist at the beautiful, five star LeRoyal Hotel. There his floral designs and decorations were in great demand for weddings and other gala events as well as for the grand hotel itself. Then one day, **Nibal Abdel Karim**, a young woman from Nazareth in Palestine, came to the LeRoyal as a student intern. The internship would lead to her degree in hotel management from the American University in Palestine. What's more, it would also lead to a growing attraction between Bassam and her. The happy result is that they fell in love.

Since marriage between a Syrian and a Palestinian is culturally forbidden, Bassam and Nibal struggled with their families for two years for permission to marry. Finally, convinced of their true love, their parents agreed. Now, they say, each is well-loved and welcomed by both families. However, because of the danger their marriage brought to Bassam's family, all of them had to leave Syria for safety and seek a new life elsewhere.

Bassam and Nibal began



Top: Bassam, Celine, Nibal, Lubna, and Sham

rearing their first two daughters, Lubna and Sham, in Jordan, but life as a family there was difficult for a Syrian married to a Palestinian. Bassam was not permitted to own or drive a car. Their children were not permitted to attend school. Even getting food was often a challenge.

The family qualified for UN refugee status and arrived in the U.S. and Erie on December 7, 2009. Early months in Erie were difficult for them. Nibal felt the darkness of not knowing anyone or anything in a strange new place. Loneliness and not knowing where to go even for life's essentials led to

growing unhappiness and stress. Bassam says that suddenly trying to live in American culture, finding work, overcoming language roadblocks, and learning to trust others all became enormous challenges for him and his family. But help was found, and now, after 22 months living in Erie, this couple says with enthusiasm that they love living in the U.S.

Nibal says that their caseworker was her blessing in helping her adjust to American culture. "You have to show us the rules," she told him. Then with a smile she said, "Our caseworker Brian gave my life light, and I have been able to give that light to my family."

Bassam wishes that both Americans and people in the Middle East could learn about each other in truth and fairness. He says that respect, honesty, and relationships with others are values that everyone in both cultures hold dear. He believes that if the people could see each other as we really are and not only through the eyes of governments and media, we would be able to live in peace.

Coming Events

- Oct. 12' 2:30-3:30 Hispanic Heritage Celebration at Rise Leadership Academy
- Oct 18 Hispanic Día de la Raza (Day of Our Race/Columbus Day)
- Oct 24 Flu Shots at MCRC 10am-1pm
- Oct 31 Halloween
- Oct 25 Gannon Univ. Small Business Development Workshop at MCRC
- Nov 2 Mexican Day of the Dead

Multicultural Community

Resource Center of Erie

James Globa, Board Pres.
Joel Tuzynski, Exec. Director
MCRC Noticias Editorial Committee:
Joanna Cherpak, Dir. of HR & Fund Dev.
Allan Turner, PhD, Dir. Of Client Services
Trish Lawrence, Staff Social Worker
Al Richards, Volunteer Editor
554 East 10th St., Erie, PA 16503
Ph: 814.455.0212
FAX: 814.453.2363
Email:
MCRC@multiculturalcrc.org

NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH CELEBRATES HISTORY, CULTURE, CONTRIBUTIONS

One's heritage is the legacy of customs and traditions that are handed down through the family from generation to generation. A person with Latino heritage is a descendant of a family from Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, South America or Spain. The term *Hispanic* refers to people who come from a country where Spanish is spoken.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 16% (50.5 million) of the U.S. population are of Hispanic or Latino origin. This represents a significant increase from the 2000 U.S. Census, which registered the Hispanic population at 35.3 million or 13% of people living in the United States..

Each year, Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15. During this month we celebrate the histories, cultures, and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. The

observation started in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week by proclamation of President Lyndon Johnson and was expanded by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 to cover a 30-day period in September and October. It was enacted into law on August 17, 1988, on the approval of Public Law 100-402.

The date of September 15 is significant because it marks the anniversary of independence for five Latin American countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In addition, Mexico and Chile celebrate their independence on September 16 and September 18, respectively. Columbus Day or *Día de la Raza*, literally, "the day of the race," is observed on October 12, and also falls within this 30 day period.

Since 1975 MCRC was known as the Hispanic American Council. In September of 2009, the name was changed to the Multicultural Community Resource Center in order to more

accurately reflect the diverse population of clients served by the agency. According to the 2010 Census the Latinos account for 5.7 percent of Pennsylvania's total population. Erie County is home to a total of 9,518 Hispanics. New arrivals are coming every day, mainly from Puerto Rico and Mexico. MCRC serves about 500 Hispanics per year.

Serving the needs of the Hispanic community remains the cornerstone of our heritage at MCRC.



Contributed by
Jeanette Latorre,
Director of Latino Services

DASHAIN IS GREATEST FESTIVAL FOR NEPALESE



The Hindu festival Dashain, otherwise known as the greatest Hindu Festival, is also the longest of all Hindu festivals, and is celebrated in the first two weeks of October. This two week long festival marks the triumph of virtue over evil or other times stated victory of the gods over the devil and is celebrated by all castes and creeds. The first nine days of the festival are devoted to the nine different forms of the Goddess Durga. The tenth day, or the day of victory, is for family reunions and get-togethers with various relations. Many daughters will return home to their parents and brothers during this time. The festivities reach heights, sacrifices come to an end, and Tika is offered on this day. Tika is a mixture of rice, yoghurt, and red dye that is placed on the forehead by community elders and is the symbol of triumph and power of female deities. The final day of the festival is called Kojagrat Poornima, who remains awake. People are to remain awake throughout the night and worship Laxmi, the Goddess of Wealth. Observance of Dashain is believed to bring prosperity to people and rescue them from all miseries. Here in Erie our Nepali Hindu community is working hard to prepare for the Dashain Festivals this year . **Please follow up on our website for dates and times if you are interested in attending a festival or celebration.**

www.multiculturalcrc.org

ART WEDNESDAYS AT MCRC



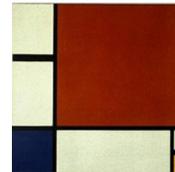
Mercyhurst College Intern Brings Joy, Creative Discovery to the Refugee Journey

Art Wednesdays at MCRC started through an educational interest of one of our college interns. **Jesse**, an adult student from Mercyhurst College came to us with the idea of teaching art education and creative expression to our adult English as Second Language (ESL) students. Each week Jesse and his colleague **Ricardo** engage the students in discussion and demonstration of various forms of art work. After that MCRC students get an opportunity to try their hands

as some art themselves, like origami or Mondrian design. Participant **Fatuma A.** from Somalia says that “I love every class because I like to learn every day a new thing. It’s a happy time too. I love it.”

Students are also realizing the personal benefits that art can bring to their lives. **Siah T.** of Liberia explained that “The art class helps to bring some of my good memories back.” Through art, students are learning not only language skills,

but new things about themselves as well.



Piet Mondrian: Composition in Red, Blue, and Yellow, 1930

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Carl Hanes has always been fascinated by language and culture. That fascination, along with a history of loving and helping other people, has drawn him to serving as a volunteer classroom aide at MCRC. Since Spring 2010, Carl has been assisting teacher Cathie Whitmire each Monday and Thursday morning in her Advanced ESL class.

A former employee of Verizon Communications, Carl learned about MCRC when he enrolled in company-sponsored Spanish language classes and studied with Teri Amicucci in 2004-05. At that

time, he took courses that extended 34 weeks, and since then has continued to study Spanish. He retired from Verizon in 2009.

As an ESL volunteer, Carl says one of the biggest challenges lies in developing learning approaches and techniques for adults. And he points to limited resources – particularly teaching

technology - as another area of challenge.

He says the biggest payoff is seeing people reach a point of language understanding without having to translate. Equally rewarding for Carl is discovering and building his knowledge about the customs, traditions, and experiences of the many people he meets in the MCRC classes. And a third big payoff is the opportunity to see students become U.S. citizens.

Carl earned a Bachelor’s degree in Social Studies at Penn State, and an MBA at Gannon Univ. He served 4 years in the U.S. Air Force during the war in Vietnam.



He has volunteered for three short-term mission projects in the Dominican Republic, and he also has participated in a program mission to Poland called *English is Friendly*. The objective of that program was to provide second language speakers with experience in speaking English.

Carl also volunteers at the Erie City Mission satellite at San Juan United

Methodist Church. He is currently an active member of First Alliance Church in Millcreek, and for many years, he taught Sunday School classes in the Episcopal Church.

He and his wife Linda are parents of two children, one living. Linda is retired from Elgin Electronics in Erie

MCRC volunteer opportunities exist for one-time or continuing activities. Please visit the Volunteer tab at our Website at www.multiculturalcrc.org. To inquire, send an email to MCRC@multiculturalcrc.org. Be sure to include your name and phone number in your message.

Fortune favors the brave.

—Proverb of Mexico

MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER

Phone: 814-455-0212
Fax: 814-453-2363
Web: www.multiculturalcrc.org



Small Business Development Workshop

Tuesday, Oct. 25

Pre-registration required.

The Gannon University Small Business Development Center will conduct an educational workshop for limited English speaking MCRC clients interested in creating a small business. The workshop will be held at the **Multicultural Community Resource Center on Oct. 25 from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.** Minimum number of participants needed to offer the workshop is six.

To register, make an appointment with Paul Jericho, Director of Refugee Services to complete an application.

Your donation to MCRC is

Appreciated

To make a financial gift to MCRC, send it to **Joanna Cherpak, Director of Human Resources & Fund Development**, 554 East 10th St., Erie, PA 16503 or call her at 814.455.0212, X329.

MCRC is a 501 (c)(3) charity and all donations are tax deductible.

**The Erie Philharmonic and
Multicultural Community Resource Center**
are partnering to present



Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, "Pathetique"
Saturday, November 12, 2011 at 8:00 p.m.

The "Pathetique" is famous for the juxtaposition of emotions: just as you are about to rise and celebrate certain victory, you are plunged into a deep, dark personal inner world of tumult.

Other works performed at the Nov. 12 concert are Christopher Theofanidis: Rainbow Body, and Rodrigo: Concierto de Aranjuez featuring Ana Vidovic, classical guitar

Please mention that you are "supporting MCRC" when you purchase tickets for this concert. A portion of the ticket sales will go to MCRC.

No vouchers necessary; just mention MCRC.

Proudly serving the needs of the Hispanic and
refugee communities since 1975.