

### **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day of National Service: A Day on, Not off!**

The American Mideast Leadership Network (AMLN) kicked off the new year by celebrating Dr. King's Birthday volunteering at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) as part of AmeriCorps' 2010 King Day of Service.

Volunteers from AMLN and other non-profits joined together to cook meals for single mothers and their children at the West End Intergenerational Residence. Under the direction of the JCC's enthusiastic chef, Emily Klein, AMLN staff and volunteers chopped vegetables, mixed batter, blanched broccoli and spiced up soup alongside Americorps members, retirees and other volunteers looking to give back to the community. The meals were made from scratch and included coleslaw, macaroni and cheese with vegetables, tomato soup, cornbread and cookies!

After completing their dishes, AMLN volunteers and their peers carefully packaged and bagged each meal to be delivered to the mothers and their children at the West End Intergenerational Residence.



### **AMLN Panel Discussion on the 2009 United States-Syria Grassroots Diplomacy Program at Columbia University**

In an effort to highlight the importance of international dialogue, The Arab Student Association at SIPA (School

of International and Public Affairs), the Conflict Resolution Working Group at Columbia University, the Middle East Institute and the U.N. Studies Working Group invited AMLN to help host a panel discussion on its United States-Syria Grassroots Diplomacy Program.



Following the opening remarks, Rami Nuseir, the President of AMLN, gave a short presentation emphasizing the need for cross-cultural exchange between the US and the Middle East and explaining the various services and programs that AMLN offers both domestically and internationally, most notably its Grassroots Diplomacy programs between the United States and the Arab world.

Dr. Mazin Adi, First Secretary to the Syrian Mission to the United Nations, agreed and encouraged students to participate in AMLN's programs and others like it to experience firsthand all that Syria and its neighbors have to offer.

After Dr. Adi's remarks, former US Civic Ambassadors Heidi Rosbe, Nora Gordan and Nick Jaegger shared their experiences in Syria and emphasized the importance of AMLN's efforts to cultivate relationships between American and Syrian students. A lively question and answer session followed in which Dr. Adi and the Civic Ambassadors discussed women's rights, the Golan Heights and other issues regarding US-Syrian relations. Afterwards, several interested students signed up to participate in future AMLN programs.

## Magic of Communication Seminar

AMLN, in keeping with its commitment to foster leadership and communication skills among members of the community, hosted a one-day intensive instruction and training course on the art of communication and presentation.

A group of Arab-American professionals attended the full day seminar hosted by the American University of Cairo and conducted by Dr. Ridwan Shabsigh, who trained the participants in communication and presentation skills in spoken, written and Power Point form.



Throughout his professional career of 30 years, Dr. Ridwan Shabsigh has been well known for his superb public speaking skills. He is a highly sought-after speaker and is frequently invited to address diverse audiences. He has spoken frequently about health, medicine and urology at local, national and international events. Furthermore, he has appeared successfully on TV and radio and has been interviewed by newspapers and magazines. A polyglot, Dr. Ridwan has spoken publicly in English, Arabic and German.

“Dr. Shabsigh gave us great, insightful tips on how to plan for and execute an effective and engaging presentation or speech that will resonate with our audiences,” said participant Gina Shedid.

### Ambassadors of the Arab-American Community: AMLN Teaches Students the Importance of the 2010 Census

In a bid to educate the Arab community about the importance of the 2010 census, AMLN partnered with the Razi School in Queens to impress upon the students the need to encourage their parents to complete the surveys. CNN sent a news team to cover the seminar as

Mr. Rami Nuseir, president of AMLN, spoke to an auditorium full of students, teachers and staff.



The students were trained in how to educate their parents about the census and encourage them to complete the form. The census was crucial to the Arab American community this year in particular, because its numbers have traditionally been underreported and thus it loses out on a great deal of potential federal funding. In order to ensure that the Arab American community receives its fair share, families need to be reassured that information on the census questionnaire is kept confidential and encouraged to submit the forms.



After the presentation, CNN interviewed five Razi School students who spoke eloquently about their opinions, concerns and questions regarding their identity as Arab Americans and how the 2010 Census would affect them. For more information on the interview, please visit [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-04-02/us/arab.american.census\\_1\\_census-bureau-census-form-arab-american?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-04-02/us/arab.american.census_1_census-bureau-census-form-arab-american?_s=PM:US)

## **AMLN's 2009 United States-Syria Grassroots Diplomacy Panel Discussion at Rutgers University**

In April AMLN, the Palestinian American Organization (PAO) and Rutgers International Law Society conducted a forum on AMLN's United States-Syria Grassroots Diplomacy Program. Students and faculty alike were able to directly engage and questions the speakers in attendance, who included: Dr. Bashar Ja'afari, Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations; Rami Nuseir, President of AMLN; and 2009 Civic Ambassadors Denise Elnajjar, Saman Mazahreh and Jirair Khorozian. The former Civic Ambassadors shared their experiences with the faculty and students assembled and answered their various questions, sure to emphasize the importance of reaching out across the divide to overcome the traditional diplomatic impasses between the US and Syria.

## **Arab American National Service Day**

In celebration of Arab American Service Day, AMLN teamed up with a number of Astoria-area community organizations to clean Astoria Park and its shores. Over 65 volunteers worked hard to rid the park of trash and make it a clean, welcoming, and safe space for the community's residents and families.



AMLN was proud to partner with Green Shores NYC and the Astoria Park Alliance, both of which wholeheartedly contributed to the project. Many of New York's elected officials—among them Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Councilman Peter Vallone Jr., State Senator Michael N. Gianaris and Assemblywoman Aravella Tsimotas—along with members of the local community board and NYC Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, came out to show their support for the efforts and hard work of all the volunteers that participated. They thanked AMLN for its outstanding effort in recruiting volunteers and getting the job done.

Katie Ellman, president of Green Shores NYC, was especially thankful for AMLN's work and its effort in recruiting so many volunteers. We at AMLN extend our deepest gratitude to all who came out and volunteered.

## **City Hall American Heritage Day**

On June 24<sup>th</sup>, the City Council of New York celebrated the first Arab American Heritage Day with a ceremony that honored leading members of the Arab community in NYC.



The event was sponsored by NYC Council Speaker Hon. Christine Quinn, Councilmen Danny Drumm and Peter Vallone Jr. AMLN President Rami Nuseir was honored alongside other prominent members of the city's Arab American community for their work and tireless dedication to advancing their communities.

AMLN is proud to know that the contributions of Arab Americans are being recognized by the City Council and looks forward to many more events like this in the future.

## **A Spectacular Celebration of the First Arab American Heritage Festival in Astoria**

On July 18, AMLN commemorated Arab American Heritage Week with Astoria's first annual Arab American Heritage Festival. People from different ethnic backgrounds arrived from all over the tri-state area to celebrate Arab heritage. Athens Square Park in Astoria was filled with hundreds of spectators, performers, vendors and volunteers as music played, people danced and food was served. Rami Nuseir, president of AMLN, opened the festivities alongside Sheren Attal, founder of Yallah Youth of Arts.

A number of diverse performances made it a Sunday to remember. A rendition of the Dabke--a traditional Arab dance--by the Yallah Youth Dancers and performances of the Whirling Daraweesh and Saiidi (also traditional Arab dances) by Yasser Darwish engaged and entertained an enthusiastic audience. The passionate recital of Arabic Poetry by Manal Ramadan and the performance of traditional Arabic songs by Salma Habib and Zikayat wowed spectators.



While the stage was rocking, people lined up at Sido's Falafel and Carlos's Corn for lunch and dinner. For dessert, All My Sweets Pastry Shop had all the Arabic sweets one's heart could desire, from baklava to ma'amoul. For those who needed a break from singing and dancing, henna tattoos provided a welcome diversion.



The festival's unequivocal success has undoubtedly cemented what we hope will become an Astoria tradition. Please join us next year for a bigger and better Astoria Arab American Heritage Festival!



### American Mideast Leadership Network's 2010 U.S.- Syria Grassroots Diplomacy Program

In July 2010 AMLN commenced the fifth iteration of its successful flagship Grassroots Diplomacy Program. A group of ten Civic Ambassadors, composed of university students and young professionals, accompanied by five AMLN administrators, left New York for Syria. They spent the following three weeks engaging in dialogue sessions with Syrian students and young professionals, meeting religious and government officials, learning Arabic, visiting Syria's magnificent cities and historical sites, and immersing themselves in Syrian culture.



AMLN's Grassroots Diplomacy Program, a cultural exchange, brings young Americans and Syrians together in forums that allow them not only to address salient topics, but also to develop strategies that can facilitate the progress of Syrian-American relations. While attempting to form a bridge of civic understanding, students discuss political, cultural, personal, and familial issues to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions that run rampant in both American and Syrian media outlets. In doing so, AMLN hopes to create the channels of communication between the US and the Middle East that can bring about future dialogue and cooperation.

### National Network of Arab American Communities (NNAAC) Conference

In 2010 AMLN, a member of the National Network of Arab American Communities (NNAAC), participated in the annual NNAAC Conference held at the Newark campus of Rutgers University in New Jersey. The three day event was full of info sessions, lectures, workshops, entertainment and more. Some of the highlights of the event included over 10 workshops and panels on topics of importance to nonprofit leaders, with a focus on peer learning and a policy forum on issues of great

importance to the Arab American community. Over 300 members from 19 different organizations attended.

### **September 11<sup>th</sup> National Day of Service**

As part of President Barack Obama's call to all Americans to make September 11<sup>th</sup> an annual National Day of Service and Remembrance, AMLN was proud to work alongside Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. and the New York Anti-Crime Agency for a day of community service in Astoria.



The national community service day called for acts of kindness. Organizations from across Queens recruited volunteers for a variety of projects around Astoria, where people of different faiths, ethnic backgrounds and races worked together to improve Astoria. While doing so, they learned that they have much in common and developed a spirit of volunteerism that lasted well beyond the day.

### **Financial Literacy Seminars Hosted by the Queens Public Library**

AMLN, acutely aware of the challenges facing the Arab American and immigrant communities in these trying economic times, collaborated with the Queens Public Library to provide the community with a number of seminars on the topic of financial literacy. These bilingual lectures discussed issues and topics absolutely crucial to weathering the recession. The seminars were also designed to meet the needs of our community and equip it with the tools and knowledge it needs for better financial planning in general.

The seminars focused on topics such as “Understanding the Recent Financial Crisis” and “Running Your Own Business.” A seminar titled “Financial Planning for College and Fixing Your Credit” assisted parents in

planning their child’s education and discussed credit, credit agencies, how one’s credit is rated and what can be done to get a higher credit score.



### **NNAAC Advisory Board Chair Honored with Leadership Award**

NNAAC Advisory Board Chairman, Rami Nuseir, was presented with the 114<sup>th</sup> Civilian Observation Patrol Peter F. Vallone Jr. Award. The award is given annually to a leader from Astoria, NY to honor the spirit of activism and volunteerism.



“There is a lot of work that needs to be done in Astoria, and with the help of our community leaders and our elected officials like Peter F. Vallone Jr., the Arab American community in Astoria will continue to work and contribute to the enhancement of our society” said Mr. Nuseir.

The award is named for Peter F. Vallone Jr., a New York City Councilman who represents Astoria and surrounding communities.

## **AMLN Makes Exercise Fun**

In order to fight obesity and educate children about healthy lifestyles and the importance of exercise, AMLN Family Services held a series of events in Astoria, Queens to help the Arab community.



One of these events was “Making Exercise Fun,” held at the Steinway Branch of the Queens Public Library to encourage children and adults to be physically active. “We made exercise fun and children were having a blast,” said AMLN Director Rami Nuseir.

Salma Habib, a Zumba certified instructor, lead a special session combining Zumba and Middle Eastern dance, encouraging over 50 participants to exercise and have fun. Participants were thrilled to wrap their waists in jingling beaded cloth and wear chiming bracelets and anklets. Salma’s instructions got them on their feet,

## **Statement from the President**

2010 has proven to be a busy year—from park cleanups and financial literacy seminars, to our Arab American Heritage Festival and the fifth iteration of our US-Syria Grassroots Diplomacy Program, AMLN continues to remain at the forefront of community-building initiatives and international exchange programs. It is my sincere hope that AMLN builds upon the success of the past year to reach new heights in the future, encouraging the continued development of the Arab American and immigrant communities here in New York and ensuring that Americans and citizens of the Middle East alike continue to maintain and enhance the ties we have fostered in the past. My sincere thanks go out to all those who have supported us over the years, and I wholeheartedly invite you to continue assisting us in our mission.

Best,  
Rami Nuseir

The American Mideast Leadership Network is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to improving the relations between the United States and the Middle East at the civic level through culturally immersive, real-world exchange programs with young leaders. For more information on AMLN programming, visit our website at [www.amln.org](http://www.amln.org), or contact us at:

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moving and dancing to the rhythm of the music, burning calories and sweating with a smile.

## **AMLN 2010 Open Houses**

AMLN is conscious of its community’s needs and consistently makes an effort to reach out to individuals who need assistance. In order to inform the community of the various services we offer to address such needs, AMLN hosted several open house sessions throughout the year. Community members were introduced to the staff and briefed on the details of our ESL classes, resume and employment workshops, and other initiatives in place to help the community. These open houses were a great way to meet new faces and spread the word about some exciting new programs.

