



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

February, 2017

BLACK HISTORY MONTH PROGRAM FEATURES CHOIR

Amherst College Gospel Choir, “Resurrect”
will perform on Saturday, February 4, 2017,
3:00 PM at First Congregational Church,
10 Wintonbury Avenue.

Wintonbury Historical Society’s Program Chair, Ruthanne Marchetti, has met many impressive young people during her career at Loomis-Chaffee School. Some, like JoDeanne Francis, she has kept in touch with. JoDeanne went on to Amherst College, where she is now a senior and a leader of Resurrect, the Amherst College Gospel Choir. The Choir will come to Bloomfield to help celebrate Black History Month on Saturday, February 4 at 3:00.



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Joan Sullivan

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2019

Elizabeth Merrow

William Weissenburger

Vacancy (2)

A New Year's Meditation

As we turn the calendar page, we cross a threshold into a New Year dawning. There is nowhere to go but forward. Seems simple. Logical even. But how much energy do we waste in regret? The past is nothing but a teacher and the lessons are sometimes hard, for sure, but in the letting go, the gift of the teaching is released and so are we. Friends as you make your way through the door of time and into a fresh new year, may your going be more forward than backward and may your spirit surge with courage and hope, kindness, and creativity. And may the Light of the world scatter the darkness before your path. Grace and peace to you.

By Stacy Emerson, pastor

First Baptist Church, West Hartford

(reprinted with permission)

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

In December, the Society sent out its first ever townwide mailing. A letter and brochure invited townspeople to join the Society. The mailing went to over 9,000 addresses all over town. As of January 10, the Society had gained 67 new members from this mailing, with donations totaling \$2,425. Thanks to Pat Braun of P & S Services, Inc. for all his help in making this happen. But most of all, a hearty welcome to new members of the Society. Your presence in the membership and at functions honors the Society and forwards its mission. Thank you for joining to support Bloomfield history.

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OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

Bloomfield Garage, 689 Park Avenue

Caruso's Auto and Body, 36 Tunxis Avenue

Geissler's Supermarket, 40 Tunxis Avenue

Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road

(And there's room for more!)



CATALOG OF CONGREGATIONS, #9 of a series

Lighthouse for Humanity, Inc., 11 Mountain Avenue

Bloomfield Muslim Community Center

O mankind! We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware. (Qur'an 49:13)



The Bloomfield Muslim Community got its start when, about fifteen years ago, a couple of Muslim students from Turkey came to study interfaith relations at Hartford Seminary. One of their first places of socializing was the house of the late Professor Ibrahim (Abraham) Abu-Rabi at 185 Park Avenue, Bloomfield. He was kind enough to make his house available for people from all backgrounds. Local and international students and members of surrounding communities often used to come together to talk about all kinds of interesting issues including God, religion and society. Muslims believe that One God, the only Creator of the Universe, has revealed himself to humanity through messengers, starting with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammed.

In a couple of years these students joined together with some other Muslim graduate students and bought the first Muslim student house ("Dersana") at 179 Park Avenue. The Bloomfield Dersana was not only a lecture hall and study center for them, but a home often used to accommodate guests, small gatherings, prayers, and is the location of a weekly Brothers' Study Group. While the student group was rapidly growing due to newcomers, they believed it a divine coincidence that the house they bought was one next door to Dr. Abu-Rabi. Six months later he was very happy to rent them his house while moving out of town for a new position. So they were even able to accommodate separate study groups every week simultaneously for sisters and brothers as well as children.



Muslim worship
(google images)

Within the following seven to eight years, new students, alumni and families who chose to continue their lives in the Hartford area felt that a local Islamic congregation was needed and started seeking a more convenient location. Naturally Bloomfield was their first hometown. The result is Lighthouse for Humanity, a mosque located at 11 Mountain Avenue since 2014. Lighthouse for Humanity provides spiritual guidance to people through intellectual and spiritual gatherings in which the focus is on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophetic example of Muhammed.

The mosque serves as Bloomfield Muslim Community Center, and it is now open for prayer five times every day. Every Saturday night after 6 pm they hold a family gathering that embraces people from all backgrounds. A Qur'an class is also available for kids and youth at the weekend school.

Muslims believe that brotherhood is the path to becoming better citizens

Continued—>

of the world; the brotherly connection among believers is the core for building a community that enjoins what is good and refrains from wrongdoing. Allah has ordered the believers to use Mashwara (consultation) with each other, Dua (supplication/prayer) and divine guidance before making decisions in life, even down to simple matters, to keep on the track and make it safely through this life towards eternity. It is imperative that we are constantly aware of our actions and speech and constantly asking for guidance for the future and forgiveness for the past.

The Board of the mosque consists of young people with an average age of thirty. Board members are students at or graduates of the University of Connecticut, University of Bridgeport, University of Hartford, Hartford Seminary, and Bayyinah Institute. Mosque members believe it is important to be actively engaged in the local community, and they participate in Habitat for Humanity, the Bloomfield Interfaith Association, and other organizations.



11 Mountain Avenue

ganizations.

The president of Lighthouse is Ali Furkan (info@lh4h.org), and the vice-president is Ismail Yildiz. Ahmet Baykar is a founder of the mosque and serves as an imam. Sami Aziz, also an imam, is, along with his wife Vjosa Qerimi, very active in building bridges to the non-Muslim community. (See sidebar)

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SAMI A. AZIZ, a 2015 graduate of Hartford Seminary's Islamic Chaplaincy Program who is now enrolled in a Doctor of Ministry program at Hartford Seminary, has opened a business called Common Ground Services to build bridges and educate communities on a myriad of hot-button topics surrounding Muslims.

Sami, who started Common Ground in 2015, has been to over 100 venues for presentations on Islam, including libraries, churches, colleges and high schools. He speaks on topics from Islamophobia to Islam 101, jihad, hijab, Shi'a vs. Sunni, as well as other topics. He gives presentations, facilitates dialogue, holds trainings, and collaborates with organizations on how to best meet their needs. His goal for the audience is an understanding of what Islam is and isn't, with the goal of developing in-depth, interfaith communication.

"No one else was doing this, and those who could weren't doing it justice," he said after a presentation at Hartford Seminary in December. Sami saw the need for an organization that would be properly staffed, as well as speakers who could engage the audience instead of lecture.

Sami considers Common Ground Services an Islamic consulting firm, filling in gaps for community and faith leaders that may have been left open. Often, he said, imams who work at mosques are a one-man show and are so busy they can't respond quickly to those outside their community.

The challenges Sami has faced so far come from both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. He is battling the notion in some Muslim communities that interfaith work is incompatible with being a good Muslim. From outside the Muslim community, Sami faces challenges of people equating Muslims to ISIS or those in the community believing every negative thing they read about Islam.

While the organization is still young, it is thriving and growing. New organizations, churches, and communities call Sami each week asking him to facilitate discussions or present on a given topic.

—posted on the Hartford Seminary website on January 3, 2017

The members of Lighthouse for Humanity are followers of Said Nursi (sah-EED NOOR-see, 1876-1960), a famed Islamic scholar, and want to engage in ongoing study of his writings. Said Nursi had a very unique role in shaping modern Islamic thought by combining traditional values with secular understanding. His followers managed to apply moral values to their social and family lives despite the collapse of many social norms. Many, being scientists, found the way of inner reconciliation between mind and heart, or faith and knowledge, in his book, *Risale-i Nur* (The Treatise of Light), a major Qur'anic commentary. The verses mostly expounded in the *Risale-i Nur* are those concerned with the truths of belief, such as the Divine Names and attributes and the Divine activity in the universe, the Divine existence and Oneness, bodily resurrection, prophethood, and purpose of life. Nursi explains how the Qur'an addresses all mankind in every age in accordance with the degree of their understanding and development; it has a face that looks to each age. The *Risale-i Nur* goes on to explain that face of the Qur'an which looks to this age. However, it isn't solely an exegesis, as it includes reflections and details about Said Nursi's own life and interpretations. These reflections and details help the reader to learn how to practice everyday activities using Qur'anic norms, and "install" Qur'an in alternating life situations and emotions. (For more information, see listing on Amazon for *Said Nursi: Makers of Islamic Civilization* by Colin Turner.)



Thanks to Sami Aziz for an informative conversation and to Ahmet Baykar for his important help in strengthening this article.

Resources:

www.LH4H.org (website of the mosque; contains video links, etc.)

www.CommonGroundServices.org (website of Sami Aziz' organization)

www.hartsem.edu/2017/01/alum-spotlight-sami-aziz-launches-common-ground-services/

AZIZ TO SPEAK AT PROSSER

Imam Sami Aziz and his wife Vjosa will speak at the Prosser Library on Wednesday, February 1, 6:00-7:45 PM, on the topic "Does ISIS represent Islam or Muslims?" Hear from this engaging young couple how true Islam teaches



Vjosa Qerimi, Vice-president
of Common Ground Services

justice, tolerance, peace, and love. An evening not to be missed! Registration is appreciated. Call 860-243-9721 or go online.



Imam Sami Abdul Aziz, President
Of Common Ground Services
(website photos)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on January 11 with ten people present. Ruthanne Marchetti chaired the meeting in the absence of the president. The treasurer's report for December 31 showed income of \$5,981 since July 1, and expenses of \$7,571 for a checking account balance of \$6,002. The president's report on the year-end appeal to the membership showed forty-two donations totaling \$3,068, an increase of 6.5% from the previous year. At about the same time we sent out our first-ever town-wide mailing to over 9,000 households. That mailing has, to date, yielded sixty-seven new memberships and a total of \$2,425.

Ralph Schmoll has finished his new Filley Park video. With the rebuilding of the park continuing in the spring, we may have a chance to share the video more widely. Celebrate Bloomfield 2017 will feature History Day on Sunday, June 4, with Ron Marchetti already planning one of his famous tours. A display remaining from the May dedication of the Fannie Gabriel History Center could be still up at this time.

In building and grounds topics, Ben Whittaker of Public Works suggests that a portable handicapped ramp is the most feasible for the Old Farm School. The Board approved purchasing one as long as it will accommodate a motorized wheelchair. Bill Weissenburger learned from the town engineer that the town has two boulders from the 1930s WPA which we could use for landscaping. Finally, Joan Sullivan took the old chandelier from the History Center and will take to a consignment shop.

HONOR ROLL OF YEAR-END DONORS

The following members sent in gifts above and beyond their annual dues in response to the year-end appeal. A year ago the total given was \$2,280. This year's total of \$3,068 is an encouraging vote of confidence!

Ahrens, Doris E.
 Baram, David and Paula
 Barnard, Douglas and Diana
 Beeching, Barbara
 Bercowetz, Bonnie S.
 Berman, Robert and Phyllis
 Bernstein, Sara L.
 Bidwell, Bruce E.
 Blumenfeld, Louis B.
 Bossler, Robert
 Brock, Kenneth S.
 Buscarello, Jean C.
 Clarke, Ronald and Martha
 Cooney, David and Joan
 Cushman, Solomon F.
 Dahlgren-Dechand, Judith
 Daly, Thomas F.
 Fuetsch, Elizabeth C.
 Gough, Kevin, and Paula Jones
 Grisevich, George W.
 Hauptman, Angela R.

Hendrickson, Alice
 Hubbs, Dennis and Donna
 Hunt, Dorothy and Kimball
 Johnston, Marilyn and Ray
 Katz, Tobie E.
 Kelliher, Marion C.
 Kramer, Nancy A.
 Lehmann, James and Helen
 Merrill, Barbara C.
 Nielsen, Donna L.
 Novak, Dordre J.
 Pierce, Richard and Jean
 Politis, John and Joan
 Schenck, Philip
 Schmoll, Ralph and Louise
 Schulman, Sydney T.
 Smith, Robert and Sharon
 Sullivan, Patrick J.
 Tinto, Gail D.
 Weissenburger, William and Lois Ann
 Wright, Claudia P.

WALKER PHOTOS BRING BACK THE PAST

We recently received a photo album that was given to Charles Walker when he left the presidency. It was donated by his son Stephen, who lives in Deering, NH. The photos were taken on Sunday, October 22, 1989 at a celebration of the Society's fortieth anniversary and the rededication of the Old Farm School. The School, of course, had been moved in 1976 to accommodate the state's realignment of the Park Avenue/School Street intersection. It had taken the next dozen years for Society members to open it to the public and restore it to the condition we see today. Walker, who served as Society president prior to 2000, was a science teacher, musician, traveler, and outstanding citizen of our community.



Left: Past presidents Jeanne Hunciker, Charles Walker, Alice Sorant, and Richard Bartlett

Right: Charles Walker with Fannie Gabriel, chair of the Rededication Committee



Left: Town council members Faith McMahon, David Baram, Marc Needleman, and James Graham as Mayor Baram reads proclamation

Right: Representative Naomi Cohen reads General Assembly proclamation



Left: Charter member and Acquisitions Chair Nell Breining (grandmother of member Gail Tinto)

Right: Program Chair Patricia Walker talks with Secretary Paul Pelletier



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