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LAHC Marks 21 Years of Supporting Education; Awards 55 Students of High Academic Distinction

Dearborn, Michigan – The Lebanese American Heritage Club’s (LAHC) Arab American Scholarship Foundation (AASF) marked 21 years of providing assistance and encouraging the pursuance of higher education at their 21st Annual Arab American Scholarship Foundation Banquet at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on Friday, May 8, 2009.

The event brought in nearly 1,000 of Metro Detroit’s most influential community members, business professionals, and corporate executives to honor 55 students of high academic distinction as they receive scholarships from the organization, each in the amount of \$1,000.

The LAHC, a non-profit cultural and social organization was established by founder, Ali Jawad 25 years ago in 1982. Since its inception, the organization has developed to encompass programs of all types including athletics, cultural, social, and educational activities open to all community members and families, no matter their national origin.

The AASF was established by Chairman Allie Berry in 1988. It began with the giving of one scholarship and has expanded to provide over 1,000 students in Michigan with over \$1.5 million in scholarship funds over the past 21 years. The AASF is one of the largest ethnic based scholarship programs in the nation.

The evening commenced with the presentation of the flags by Cub Scouts Troop #1127 from Sacred Heart in Dearborn, National Anthem performance by renowned Lebanese-Peruvian Opera Tenor, Jose Sacin from Washington, D.C., and the processional of the scholarship recipients who were seated on stage for the duration of the event.

Wassim Mahfouz, Executive Director of the Lebanese American Heritage Club opened the ceremony with remarks on behalf of the Lebanese American Heritage Club and its Board of Directors. Mahfouz thanked the sponsors, asking them to stand and be recognized as their commitment to the program was crucial in such hard economic times. Furthermore, Mahfouz addressed the students and urged them to be proud of their achievements and Heritage. “Don’t let anyone make you feel less American than any other. Hold firm to your ancestral roots but also work hard to be an exemplary citizen and Proud American. Your personal success will come through working as an American with Arab roots rather than an Arab Working in America.” Stated Mahfouz.

Welcoming remarks were given by LAHC President, the Honorable Salem Salamey, Wayne County Executive, the Honorable Robert Ficano, Mrs. Zahra Roberts with the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Honorable Ghattas Sleiman, Mayor of Amsheet, Lebanon. Mr. Sleiman spoke on behalf of his brother, the President of the Republic of Lebanon, His Excellency General Michel Sleiman; delivering remarks of

encouragement to the students and applauding the LAHC for their hard work and commitment to the youth.

The LAHC honored several members of the greater Arab American Community for their efforts to advance the community.

LAHC Award for Excellence and Great Achievements: Attorney Turkia Awada-Mullin; Decorated US Army Veteran and Wayne County Director of the Economic Growth & Development Engine

LAHC Award for Leadership and Outstanding Community Service: Osama Siblani; Publisher of The Arab American News; providing 25 years of dedicated news service and for building bridges of understanding between media and the community.

LAHC Young Leadership Award: Abdulrahman El-Sayed; Rhodes scholarship recipient and Muslim activist for his outstanding academic achievements and leadership.

El-Sayed provided the evening's guest remarks, encouraging the students to further their education and be proud of their ancestry. The recipient of the prestigious Rhodes scholarship, El-Sayed will study Global Health Sciences and Public Health in England at Oxford University.

“As Arab-Americans, we occupy a special niche: As Americans we understand the value of hard work and determination; we embody that American ideal of the work ethic,” stated El-Sayed. “But as Arab-Americans, that ideal is tempered with the crucial understanding of the value of tradition, and culture, and faith. That special niche gives us a unique vantage point from which to analyze the economic, political, and social problems of the day. It is our crucial responsibility to lend that vision, that understanding to our globe, in our future professions as academics, doctors, lawyers, teachers and so on.”

A special surprise at the event astonished guests, leaving a ripple of excitement run through the crowd and left the entire audience awestruck.

Arab American and four year old musical prodigy, Julian Pavone (www.JulianPavone.com), the “World’s Youngest Drummer” gave a spectacular performance on a 22 piece drum set which was hidden during the event.

Hailing from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, the charismatic child star who has been featured on The Oprah Winfrey Show, Good Morning America, Martha Stewart, Inside Edition, MSNBC, WGN, FOX News Dayside, Good Company and Japan’s #1 television show, Amazing Stories, among others took the stage and performed “Shining Star” by Earth, Wind and Fire and gave a solo drum performance for his finale which received a standing ovation!

Other event speakers included Suehaila Amen, the Banquet Co-Chair, 1st Vice President of the LAHC and Chair of the Public Relations and Communications Department.

Amen welcomed major sponsors who came to the stage to hand deliver scholarships to the recipients. “These children are our future and we are proud to honor such dynamic individuals this evening,” she stated.

Scholarship recipient and President of the National Honors Society at Fordson High School, Ali Nasrallah, delivered remarks on behalf of the students.

“We say thank you and will continue to say thank you for all you have done,” stated Nasrallah. “Thank you for easing a financial burden that has struck us all. Thank you for being there when we needed you most and most importantly, thank you for believing in us.”

MBN Television had an exclusive on the event, which will air not only locally, but nationally and internationally to its viewers.

The evening's invocation was given by Father Rani Abdel-Masih and Imam Mohammed Mardini.

Event sponsors include event partners, the CIA and BP Armada Oil & Gas, along with Meijer, DTE Energy, Ford Motor Company, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Henry Ford Community College, Army ROTC, US Army, and the Michigan National Guard, among countless others.

Gerald Smith, Comcast Cable's Government Affairs Manager served as the Master of Ceremonies.

Click here to see pictures of the event: http://www.lahc.org/news_events/gala2009



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