

Cherrefe Kadri:

Good evening, and Assalamu Alaikum, peace be with you. And thank you for coming this evening. I am Cherrefe Kadri and I'm past president of the Islamic Center. And I was, for lack of a better word, the point person from the center for this project. Nadia Ashraf-Moghal is our president and she probably has... she is an emergency room physician and I told her if she didn't make it at the beginning, we'll introduce her at the end. But I know that she wanted to be here to greet everyone. So, welcome on her behalf.

Cherrefe Kadri:

And welcome to an unveiling of a project, that is second only to the unveiling of the cornerstones of two mosques this Islamic community has built in the last 65 years. When I was putting this together that hit me. I thought, that's really a monumental feat. That's a statement that not many are able to make. My parents' generation worked to build the mosque on East Bancroft. And the next generation built this one. Those of us who were around at the East Bancroft days remember with fondness the spirit of diversity, as well as unity, that are the hallmark of this Toledo Islamic community. And that spirit continues until this day.

Cherrefe Kadri:

It is that spirit that Bowling Green State University has capitalized on in building a virtual community for the next generation. In April of 2017, Samir Abu-Absi, a good friend of this Islamic Center, told me about a grant that BGSU was considering applying for from the National Endowment for the Humanities. And the focus of that grant was to be the Muslim history in northwest Ohio. I was familiar with that grant because I had actually applied for it in 2016, but was unsuccessful in getting it. Thankfully. After seeing the planning and work and expertise needed to put this together and make it happen, I know that there was no way that we could have done it on a volunteer basis, no matter how goodhearted we are, and committed, without the necessary skill sets that the fine folks from Bowling Green State University's library and archival center brought with them.

Cherrefe Kadri:

So Samir put me in touch with Nick Pavlik at Bowling Green Center for Archival Collections, and Nick introduced me to Michelle Sweetser, and you'll meet both of them in a minute. She's the head librarian and university archivist at the university. And then we started to talk to put this together. Nick handled the technical portion of this project. And you might remember meeting Michelle and Nick at the May 5th Scan Day that we held downstairs. It was truly a pleasure working with these very talented folks. And I'm not leaving David out, but I know that Michelle's going to be mentioning you as well.

Cherrefe Kadri:

For the last couple of years we started working together like I said, in 2017. So now, Amjad Hussain we'll present the history of this Islamic community. Even though he was a latecomer to the community, having only arrived I think in 1969, right Amjad?

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

63.

Cherrefe Kadri:

63. A little over 50 years ago. Only 50 years.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

19 or 18?

Cherrefe Kadri:

And he was the new kid on the block. It's a testament actually to the longevity and roots of the Muslims in our neck of the woods, in northwest Ohio. And so I invite Dr. Amjad Hussain to come up and give us our historical perspective here. Thank you.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Thank you Cherrefe. Thank you very much. You mentioned, Michelle, that you were a little girl and going on the express when you seen this thing. There are so many stories about the Islamic center. The truckers would go and they would talk to each other on CB, and one of them said, "Look at this dumb farmer. He has built this thing but how small the silos are." The minarets. And then one came. Michelle, it could have been you, and asked her mother. Is that where the King of Ohio going to live? And then, another comment was, "Look at this farmer. He's building a Taj Mahal for himself." It was an unusual location for us, but nevertheless we enjoyed all those comments as this place was going up.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Now, I'm going to a momentous journey spanning 111 years. And I'm going to do that in about 30 minutes. You think I can do it?

Speaker 3:

Yep.

Speaker 4:

Yes you can.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Really?

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So let me tell you that history is funny. People have said that you should never, ever write contemporary history, because you're going to make lot of people angry. Some people will think that they were left out. I have tried, from my own recollection, as well as what I have observed, to name some people. And I'm sure I have missed some, but if I have, I would like you to join me in protesting this to Cherrefe. So I'm not going to take the blame for it.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Let's start. It's a story of four generations of men and women who came to Lebanon, from Lebanon to Toledo, Ohio. Now we keep hearing the Syrian Muslim, and I will explain that, why it is Syrian. There was an urge to preserve cultural and religious heritage. At one time, Lebanon was part of Syria, and so everybody called themselves Syrian. The distinct identity of Syrians and Lebanese would wait after World War I to gel. But at one time, this was considered, everybody considered themselves Syrians.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

In 1939, Syrian American Muslim Society was formed, and received its charter from the State of Ohio in 1943. Later, it was called the American Muslim Society. And this was a society, American Muslim Society, which went ahead and spearheaded the mosque on E Bancroft St. So the activities between 1939 and 1953 were held in private homes, the shelter at Navarre Park on Navarre Avenue in East Toledo, YMCA. Different places people got together to socialize as well as to pray. And the visiting imams for special occasions, a funeral, weddings, came from Detroit.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

In 1951, a federation of Islamic associations of North America was founded, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. And in 1953, Toledo community held the 2nd convention of the federation. The keynote speaker was Sir Zafarullah Khan, who was at the time President of the UN General Assembly. He was a Pakistani diplomat. And later on he also became the chief justice of the International High Court in The Hague. And here is the advertisement for the 2nd international Muslim convention. And this clipping, from The Blade, highlights Zafarullah Khan as the keynote speaker. Just a little footnote, Zafarullah Khan and his sect in Pakistan, was declared non-Muslims. So here is Zafarullah Khan, coming to Toledo as a Muslim. And he was a scholar. As much as he was a [inaudible 00:09:47], he was a scholar. And it's the political Islam which really has played havoc in the lives of many people.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

This next slide I'm going to show you, is the proposed Muslim mosque in Toledo, Ohio. So the people had this urge to move from YMCA and the Navarre Park and private homes to have a place of their own. And there is the building of the mosque on E Bancroft St, 1953. And this was the inauguration of the mosque. Now some of the pictures that I see, are the same. And here is the gathering in that big hall which, the prayer area in the old mosque. And this is the side view of the old mosque. And I shouldn't call it a plaque, what do they call it?

Cherrefe Kadri:

Cornerstone.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

The cornerstone. It is in the corner, isn't it. I mean, it's literally in the corner. Okay, the cornerstone, which, I think we have brought it here.

Cherrefe Kadri:

Yes, it's up front.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Yes, we brought it here. This is 1954.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Now the center, Islamic center on E Bancroft, had its officers, and had a constitution and by-laws. And I'm proud to say, that this is perhaps one of the few Islamic communities in the country where we follow the constitution and by-laws. That does not mean it's always smooth, no. We fight. And I don't think there have been any fistfights, but we fight. We argue. We try to change. But the original document, which has been changed few times, has held the test of time. That even coming to this center, we had to rely upon that. And it has served us very well.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

This is in 1975 published. It is the Constitution and By-laws of the Islamic Center of Toledo. 1975. And here is the office holders... At that time it was called council. We still call it a council. These are the, you can call it board of Directors which run the mosque. And some of the people you can identify, Nasr Khan is here, I believe. Agree? Is this Nasr Khan?

Cherrefe Kadri:

Yes, looks like him.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

And on the end, on the other end, is [Uncle Harry 00:12:52]. I will talk about him just in a moment. But these are the people who ran and established a tradition, so that the newcomers, like I when I got off the boat in 1963, we followed in their footsteps.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

The move from E Bancroft, downtown Toledo, to Perrysburg was generated by some people who were holding at that time the job of president of the center. And there are two people that I want to acknowledge. And one is Nasr Monsour and Habib Khan. They had this vision, no? A lot of people had the vision, because the place was getting crowded and small, and knew a bigger place was needed. So that, Habib Khan and Nasr Monsour and others, and I will mention some of them, went ahead and looked for a appropriate site to build the new Islamic Center, or the new mosque. There comes Dr. Saleh Jabarin. Not only he came that many years ago, he just came back yesterday from Palestine. So it's nice to have you back Saleh. Dr. Jabarin then became the president of the council of the Islamic center, the old mosque. And it was really under his guidance and leadership that we made the move from the old place to the new place. And I will talk about the traditions, in addition to the brick and mortar, which made this community. And he had a pivotal role in establishing those traditions that we all are beneficiary of his work.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Also, we have had Imams in the old mosque. But remember we were there only from 1954 through the 70s. So it was not a long time. And we have had five or six different Imams. The last one before Hadab came, was Imam Kharufa. And after he left, we tapped Imam Abdelmoniem Khattab, who was at the time in London, Ontario. Naveed?

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

[crosstalk 00:15:35]

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So Imam Khattab, at one time, was the Imam in London, Ontario. He was not ... At the time he was working in Sarnia as a social worker in a hospital. He had a Masters in Social Works, in addition to masters from Al-Azhar, and in the process of PhD. So we tapped him and there was a little bit hard negotiation, because he has gone through some of the Islamic communities, and he saw us, we were yet another Islamic community. Big talk, big ideas, but very short on action. So he agreed to come to Toledo on a weekly basis to officiate as an Imam in the old mosque. And after about a year we realized... We both realized. He realized, we realized, that I think his destiny was in Toledo with us. So Imam Khattab and Dr. Jabarin together, they lured the community to the Perrysburg location that we have.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So, I'm going a little bit back. Within 15 years of building the old mosque, we needed a bigger place, and we bought the land on Cass Rd.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

[crosstalk 00:17:39]

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

How ungrateful one can be. You brought me water and I made fun of you.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So we bought land on Cass Rd, that this would have been the future home. But then, remember I mentioned Habib and Saleh and others? They were still looking. And we found out that there was a farm which was available for sale. A German Lutheran family. The man had died. And his widow put this up for sale. Now, at that time, there was a lot going on in the world. There was Iranian Revolution of 1978, and we felt its effect in Toledo, because the owner refused to sell the land to a bunch of Muslims. So Dr. Jabarin is not one who accepts no for an answer. So he persuaded two lawyers, and Mrs. [Kaupf 00:19:15], to meet with us. So we met in Perrysburg, in the French quarters. It was Dr. Jabarin, his wife, Habib Khan, his wife, Jim Adray, his wife, myself, and my late wife, am I missing any person? There were four couples.

Speaker 5:

Mr. Hady was there I think.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Now she expected, Mrs. [Kaupf 00:19:39], that we would come in with turbans and guns and swords. Really, she expected that. Instead, we showed up in our suits and coats and during conversation realized that I as a surgeon might have operated on some of her relatives. And Habib Khan might have sold her a car. And Dr. Jabarin might have taught some of her relatives at the university. And Jim Adray might have taken care of some of her divorces, no I'm sorry, the legal work. So we appeared to her normal people. And, I am not exaggerating, after about an hour, hour and a half, her instruction to the lawyer, her lawyer was, that I want to sell this to nobody but these people. So, that's the story of acquiring this land. Mrs. [Kaupf 00:20:44] incidentally was our special guest at the time of inauguration.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So the timeline is, the land was purchased in 1978, groundbreaking in 1980, construction... well, for two years we didn't do anything. It's really a big mystery why. And the answer, we didn't have money to start the construction. We had the foundations, but we did not have the money. So construction started in September of '82, and construction completed within a year in 1983.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So, here is another interesting story. A journey of three million dollars, started with 500 dollars. So an interesting meeting took place in Toledo Club. We were about 25 or 30 we were gathered. And, I don't know, we are in the habit of talking, and saying the same thing over and over again. So the same conversation went around the table time and time again. And Nasir sitting right here, Dr. Nasir Ali, he was there. So he put a stop to that going round and round and

round. And he says, "Let's commit ourselves if we want to build a new center." And that stopped that conversation going around. And then the pad went around, and I think by the time the evening was over we had about pledges for close to forty or fifty thousand dollars. At the time when the meeting happened, we had 500 dollars. So I think this shows a lot about how the community comes together. This was the land that we bought. 48 acres.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So Habib Khan and Nar Khan had a classmate at University of Toledo who was an architect. And he was from Turkey. And he had his own architectural firm in Toledo. So they talked to him and Mr. Itil, what's his first name?

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

[crosstalk 00:22:58]

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Yeah, Talat Itil. He was all too happy to help us free of charge to draw what you see here today. So Talat Itil was... And this was the rendering which was done at that time. Now here is a... I don't know whether you have a pen and pencil, Nadia? Yeah, you should, because I'm going to...

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

[crosstalk 00:23:31]

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Oh God. I'm going to point out few things. We had neglected mentioning Talat Itil who was the architect of this Islamic Center. I think we need a plaque outside acknowledging what he has done for us. I don't think we are that ungrateful. But it just slips our mind. We should do that.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So it just happens that there were five people who happened to be in Toledo and belonged to the old mosque. And that was Dr. Jabarin.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

[crosstalk 00:24:18]

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

What was comment?

Speaker 5:

Jim Adray.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Is Jim Adray there? Yeah. So, Dr. Jabarin got some people together. It was actually his cabinet more or less. It had nothing to do with the council of the mosque. Not all of them were on the council I believe. But perhaps they were. But anyway, he got them together. And here is what I think a interesting aspect. Jim Adray worked very hard to make sure that all the legalities are

taken care of. Habib Khan was go to person, at the construction site as well as anything else he could do. Zuhair Kamal, who's sitting with us here, he was really in overseeing that everything goes well. I had no expertise, except that I have some connection with the press and I became a public relations person. And the person on your left is Deib Hady who was a green grocer. He did not have formal education, but he had a vision. And he guided us by his advice and counsel as we met almost every week in Zuhair Kamal's office on Holland Rd. And I think we met for better part of a year. And occasionally other people will join in at that time.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So when the foundations were laid, the plaque was unveiled. And then as I said, for two years we sat on it. And here is now the construction begins. So the children... And the third from the left is my daughter who happens to be here today, Tasha, and then the person on my side here is Shakil Ahmad, Dr. [Shoaib Ahmad 00:26:49]'s son. And the other two kids I don't remember. Anybody?

Cherrefe Kadri:

Isn't that Moni?

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

No, no.

Cherrefe Kadri:

Is it Nadeem?

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

It could be.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

[crosstalk 00:27:06]

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So the kids got in action. And here is where the foundations were being dug for the center. And here is the inside view of the prayer area. And this in an iconic picture of when the dome was lowered. It was a windy day. And you can imagine swaying. And we all gathered there saying silent prayers.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

As the mosque was being built, we started using the grounds in fair weather for special occasions. And this is one of the Eid prayers, which was held just by the barn facing Scheider Rd. And finally the day arrived when we were able to open this mosque. I want you to look at the door. And this door is a wooden door, makeshift door. Because the door which is now there had not arrived. And it took all night for Habib Khan and some of his friends to put that temporary door so that the place looked at least complete. And here is a picture of inauguration, which Dr. Jabarin had an oversize scissors and he cut the ribbon. And at that time we received a gift of this part of the cover of Kaaba with a gold embroidered [Arabic 00:28:46], God's name. And that is just outside the door, framed, with a black background. People took note of us. New York Times, USA Today, they were here in the following the inauguration of the center and

talking about this amazing center which has been built in the corn fields of Ohio. And actually it was in the corn fields of Ohio, surrounded by corn fields.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Now here I come to the tricky part. No, not yet...

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

It was more than just bricks and mortar. Remember I told you that there was a vision of the people? As to what they wanted this mosque to be? This could have been yet another mosque where the women were delegated to a back room, but we established those traditions. Now when you come to the prayer area you see this, just about three foot high partition between men and women. When we decided that this was how it was going to be, there was some opposition. But no we are going to do that. And Imam Khattab, God bless him, he was in favor of that. And much thought went in that concept, and many other things. Not only Dr. Jabarin but his late wife Dorothy, who loved this place tremendously, as much as her husband did at that time.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So let me read this down the list. It's a partial list of innovations. We did not want a separate entrance for women. We declared on day one a gender equality. And we had this arrangement, first time anywhere, the women would pray side by side with men under the same dome, under the same roof. And, my God, talk about blasphemy, first woman president, Cherrefe Kadri. Somebody told me that a lightning bolt is going to come and hit the center. I think it hit that man. Cherrefe was a successful president and she went on to remain, to serve to times. Then we had Mahjabeen Islam president, and now our last president...

Cherrefe Kadri:

Current president.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

But last in that series, current president Nadia Moghal. So this has been, when they say gender equality, yes. The women in this center are not relegated to the kitchen or to do anything else. But they are in leadership positions. Interest taking. It was a taboo. But Khattab said, "No, taking a mortgage from the bank to build a mosque is halal." And that did not sit with many people. Not many people are doing that.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Fixing holidays using scientific methods. University of Toledo, Astronomy Department, Physics Department calculated for us three years ahead of time the moon sighting so that our holidays could be fixed. We were the first center in America and Canada to do that. One thing, magazine we started publishing so that the community would know what's happening. Visiting scholars program, a gift of the Islamic Center to the community at large to bring people, scholars, in areas of different areas of human endeavor. It doesn't have to be religion. It could be science. It could be any branch of humanities. I know we had archaeologist here, historians here, who gave a public lecture. Interfaith dialogue. Islamic food bank. Naveed and Razi are sitting here and they have made that bank as one of the best in the state of Ohio. Imagine, international festival, Imam Khattab Chair of Islamic Studies at U. of T., inspired and supported by this community, and community outreach. This is just a partial list of what this center has been doing.



Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Here is just few examples of the Monitor, which was our monthly magazine. And this is a special issue on the dedication of the center. And these are the original, initial attempts, not attempts... Initial international festivals that we held on the ground. Now it has grown many fold. And those of you who have come know this thing, that this is from looking at it from the minaret. I did not take any more pictures from the minaret because my knees don't cooperate with me and I don't want to be stuck in the minaret for the next month. So, but I used to go up in the minaret and take these pictures. And here is another picture.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Did I say that we believe in women equality? So let me tell you a story. This is Jack Shaheen who's talking. He was a very well known national speaker. And he had been to the center a few times as a visiting scholar. But that is not what I want to tell. I want to tell you, on that extreme right is me I believe, this is Imam Khattab, and this is Fatima Simon, who was the chair of the board of elders. At that time, there was clergy from Lebanon who came. And we were told that they would come and join us. Their head honcho walked in. He saw a woman on the stage. He walked out. I was told that this happened. Fatima Simon says, in that case I will leave the stage and I will go and sit with the audience. And I said, "When hell freezes over. You are chair of the board of elders. I don't give a damn about the man who comes in or not. Our destiny is not his destiny. And his destiny is not our destiny." So Fatima Simon kept sitting at her place in this banquet. Later on they joined us, I think for few minutes or 10 minutes. But I'm going to tell you is, that to support our ladies in this center and to let them run this place when they're elected is something which has been the hallmark.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

This is a centerfold of Time Magazine, special issue on ethnic diversity of the United States. And in the centerfold this essay, One Nation, Under Gods, talk about different faiths in America. But look, what picture did they choose in the whole country to signify multinationalism and multireligious gathering? Islamic Center of Greater Toledo.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Now it is not all beautiful and rosy. We have had some setbacks. In the late 80s a group split away from us and established Masjid Saad. They are doing very well. Perhaps ideologically we were not at the same page. And they decided to leave. But they are doing very well. October 3rd, 2012, this place was set to fire, torched, by a self-appointed vigilante who came from Indiana. And it took us out of the center for six months. And few million dollars damage. But we recovered from that. And the most recent was 2014, another faction split from us and went and started another mosque. That's okay. The people are happy in a different way, we are happy. We, on the other hand, have gone through these ups and downs. But, I have a good news for you. Please confirm what I am saying: we are doing very well. Fiscally and otherwise we are doing extremely well.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So here is that trap that I'm going to walk into. There are so many people that have given their lives' work. And lest we forget just a handful of people out of hundreds who helped put the Islamic Center on the map, and Mitch Salem, who was the president of the old mosque, Jimmy Deen, James Deen, I'm sure that he will not mind if we tell a story about him. We had some people who, you know, when you are really enthused with religious fervor, you want to change everybody. You want to tell people that what they are doing

wrong. It's no secret that a lot of people in our community owned bars at one time. Not anymore, but they did many many years ago. 60, 70 years ago. So one self righteous man told Mr. Deen that people here do not practice real Islam. So he says, "Young man, if you go and take a brick from the mosque and squeeze it, liquor will come out." And he was right in a way. It is not where the money come from, but these people who came to Toledo and established a place of worship. Those gave more than money, they gave of themselves. And somebody, Johnny-come-late, comes and he points a finger. So Jim Deen, Anne Kadri, Cherrefe's mom, Anne Sharp, John Hussein Shousher, Hussien Boraby, Anna Mae Albert, Aneesa Shaheen... She is living, by the way... She has been the secretary of this center ever since the days of the old mosque. She is a historian. She has an institutional memory that we can rely upon her. Thank you, Aneesa. You have done a wonderful job. Thank you.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So today, a new generations of leaders born in the US are a group running the center. A proactive board of trustees. A vibrant Foundation of the Islamic Center. A fiscally sound institution. Am I saying it right?

Imam:

Yep.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Okay. I have paid my dues. And a breath of fresh air. We have a new Imam. Imam, will you please?

Imam:

My hat is already standing up. So....

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

Imam Deeb joined us just two months ago, and it has been a wonderful addition to this center. If you ever want to be mesmerized by how he brings difficult issues, come and join us on a Sunday or a Friday. His has been a great addition to the Islamic Center, and his outlook matches the outlook of this center. It matches the outlook of the people who established the center. I think we have fantastic times to have with one another.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

So... When there was a 25th anniversary of the mosque, I scribbled ... I'm at the end of my presentation. I scribbled a... I don't want to call it a poem. It's a free flowing verse called Crossroads. And I will tell you those, I'll read that to you in the backdrop of this collage.

Sayed Amjad Hussain:

25 years is a short time in an institution's life, but nonetheless it is a landmark. So let us stop for a while and rejoice. It is time to count the blessings and say thanks. It is time to reminisce and to pay homage to those who gave so much to start a tradition. It is time to reflect and to look back at the uphill course we have traveled. But let us make it only a wayside stop on the crossroads. Like a festive break in a long journey. Our job is not done. We still have a mountain to climb. The road is difficult and uphill. But it was more so 25 years ago. So we must move until we reach the top. Let us keep our eyes on the goal. Let the caravan keep moving towards the top.

Let the sounds of the toiling bells carry the message to near hills and faraway valleys. And, let us resolve that our next festivities will be on the other side of the mountain. Which incidentally was when we celebrated this Islamic Center. I thank you very much.