



# Sheboygan Area Chapter

Happy Thanksgiving

November Newsletter 2017

## Learn about life in Syria at the November 9<sup>th</sup> PTP Program

Our speaker for the November 9<sup>th</sup> program will be Mr. Achraf Al Bakir, who arrived in the US the first week in May with his wife Alaa and two young boys. Seraj just turned 1 and Sef is 5. Sef is attending Pigeon River School. They moved from New Haven to Sheboygan on May 24<sup>th</sup> as he had learned there were opportunities for employment here. He works full time for a contract agency at Nemschoff.



Achraf is from Homs, Syria, and has a degree in accounting. His name is pronounced close to Oshkosh, so more like Oshrof. He is from a well-educated family and knows his history, culture and faith. He looks forward to sharing the richness of his country and he wants others to learn about the Syrian culture. He is Muslim and teaches Arabic and the Quran. His wife is also teaching with him.

The menu for the evening will include roast pork, pecan crusted chicken, mashed potatoes & gravy, corn, salad, rolls, and beverage. Dessert will be supplied by Esther and Rudy Weiss in celebration of their birthdays. Social hour begins at 5:30; dinner at 6:30; program at 7:30.

The cost of the dinner is \$16.00 per person. Please mail your checks **Char Gumm, N6222 Woodland Rd., Sheboygan, 53083**. The deadline for reservations is **October 28**.

## Coming Events



- Nov. 9 Chapter meeting at Elks Club
- Dec. 14 Chapter Christmas party at Elks Club
- Jan. 11, '18 Chapter meeting at Elks Club
- Feb. 8, '18 Chapter meeting at Elks Club
- Mar. 8, '18 Chapter meeting at Elks Club
- Mar. 11, '18 **Brat Fry at RCS Building**
- Apr. 12, '18 Chapter meeting at Elks Club
- May 10, '18 Chapter meeting at Elks Club
- August 16, 5:30-8 PM – Thursday night picnic

## Time to renew memberships

Our fiscal year ends in December, and that means that it is time to ask for dues payments for the 2018 year. Our treasurer, Rich Miesfeld, will accept dues checks anytime between now and our December 14<sup>th</sup> chapter meeting. It is o.k. to bring your dues checks to the November or December meeting, or you can mail checks to Rich at 2047 Marion Lane, Sheboygan, 53083. All memberships must be renewed by the December meeting.



Dues for 2018 will remain at \$35.00 for a family membership, or \$25.00 for a single membership.

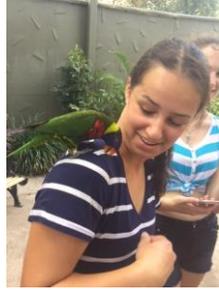
When you send your check to Rich, please confirm your address, phone, and email address so that he can update his records.

Our chapter accepts memberships from people who do not live in the Sheboygan area but wish to stay in touch with our chapter activities. We are pleased that two families in Esslingen, Germany, have already paid their dues for 2018 membership. Welcome, Pauline Hejl and Ralf and Martina Klvana. Thank you for your support of our chapter! We also appreciate the many “snowbirds” who continue to support the chapter with their membership, even though they cannot attend meetings during the winter months. We are proud of the fact that we remain one of the larger chapters in People to People International.

**PTP** This newsletter is produced monthly for members of the Sheboygan, WI People to People Chapter, which is affiliated with People to People International. Newsletter items should be submitted by the **15<sup>th</sup> of the month** to Ann Keckonen, 1542 Golf View Dr. E., Sheboygan, WI 53083 or by Email to [akeckonen@charter.net](mailto:akeckonen@charter.net). Our website is [www.ptpsheboygan.org](http://www.ptpsheboygan.org)

## Exchange students enjoy Florida

We continue to be grateful to Laura Testwuide Liebel, who graciously hosts our exchange students for five days at her home in Florida each year. In spite of not-so-perfect weather this year, the kids enjoyed Busch Gardens, Sea World, and boating with the Liebels.



**The board will meet at 5:00 pm on Thursday, November 9th at the Elks Club. Please call Bob Quasius at 451-8565 if you need to be excused from the meeting.**

## Changes to brat fry fundraiser

Henry Schoen is willing to chair the brat fry again this year, but he needs help in replacing some very necessary chairpersons. Anna Schoen has retired as chairman of the wine and cheese raffle, and Esther Weiss has retired as chairman of the bake sale. This is a plea to all members – please call Henry at 920-451-9160 if you are willing and able to step into one of these important positions.

## Speaker's Bureau suggested

Tom Hammond is working on compiling a list of possible speakers from our chapter who could give presentations to other organizations in the community about their cultural experiences in foreign countries. By making outside speeches, we would be letting more people in our community learn about People to People and our chapter's activities. If you are willing to be put on such a list, please contact Tom Hammond at 452-4972. Tom will make this list available to other organizations.

## Reading list suggested



*Beth Hejl is a former PTP exchange student, now living in Germany with her husband, and when possible we include excerpts from her blog about comparisons between life in Germany and the U.S.*

I write often on my blog about the refugees I have come to know as students and friends, and how my experience with them differs greatly from impressions people have of refugees who don't personally know any. I have interviewed five of my Syrian friends about their stories, and I am working on a project that will hopefully become a book. In the meantime, however, I offer two recommendations of books I've read that tell about life in Syria, the grueling and frightening journey to Europe, and the life of uncertainty they face upon reaching safety. I read seven such books this summer, but so far only these two are available in English.

**Nujeen: *Flucht in die Freiheit*** When I mentioned this book to my daughter, she said the late night talk show host John Oliver had talked about her (you can find his bit on Youtube). Nujeen has been unable to walk since birth and is confined to a wheelchair. She is from Kobani, Syria, and she and her sister fled to Turkey, across the sea in a flimsy boat to Greece, and over the Balkan route to Germany. At one point a BBC reporter saw her and interviewed her - which is what we see in the clip from John Oliver. Despite the many obstacles made even more complicated by Nujeen's disability, their dream of living and learning in a country not torn apart by war spurred them on. Nujeen's sister pushed her most of the way, and at especially critical times others came to their aid and carried her.

The beautifully titled book, *a Hope More Powerful than the Sea*, was written by Melissa Fleming about the life of Doaa Al Zamel, a young woman who hadn't really intended on leaving her home to go to Europe. During the Arab Spring, her family left Syria and settled as refugees in Egypt. While in Egypt Doaa met Basaam, her future husband. He wanted a better life for them than just living as refugees, and his dream was to go to Europe where they could make something of themselves. They were both hard workers and fighters, and he knew they could pursue the life they dreamed of. But first they had to make it across the sea - and Doaa was terrified of the water because she had almost drowned as a young child.

Something that ties these books together is the information provided about Syria before the war, during the Arab Spring revolution, and during the war. Still, the focus is on their personal stories more than history and politics. Enough background is provided to give readers an idea of why the questions some have voiced are not so easily answered. "Why didn't they just stay and fight for their country?" "Why didn't they just flee to a Muslim country closer to their home?" These writers don't preach, but they do explain pretty clearly what life has been like in Syria.

Both of these books go a long way to shattering - or at least challenging - assumptions and prejudices readers might have about Syrians, Muslims, and refugees. I am interested in these stories because so many details are similar to those I've heard from my former Syrian students. With every story I hear or read I am more amazed by the resilience of these people and what they were willing to go through to get where they are today. I was continually reminded of what an easy and privileged life I have had.