

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUND AS ISLAMOPHOBIA PERSISTS

There's a menacing disease in our country that won't go away. We've had it for 20 years or longer. And it affects more than 3.5 million Americans.

I'm talking about Islamophobia. The Americans it affects live in communities across our country. More than 100,000 live right here in San Diego.

In a cruel way, September could be branded as "hate your Muslim neighbor" month. The anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks has a way of reigniting anti-Muslim sentiments.

San Diegans witnessed Islamophobia in March 2019, when John Earnest set fire to the Dar-ul-Arqam mosque in Escondido. Seven missionaries were asleep in the mosque, but no one was injured. A month later, Earnest entered the Chabad of Poway synagogue and opened fire, killing one person and injuring three others.

Earnest recently pleaded guilty in federal court to a 113-count hate crimes indictment, admitting that he wanted to kill Muslims and Jews. According to the terms of the plea agreement, Earnest will

serve a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

We can breathe a tiny sigh of relief. The criminal justice system has done its part, banishing one more hater from our streets. But a newly released survey of U.S. Muslims from the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley shows that the problem of Islamophobia is widespread: 76.7 percent of Muslim women have personally faced it, along with 58.6 percent of men. The difference in their experiences is likely because Muslim women wear a hijab (religious veil), making them more recognizable. Still, the numbers are stark.

The study also found that most Muslims censor their speech or actions, fearing how people might react; one-third have hidden their religious identity at some point in their lives. Nearly all participants reported that Islamophobia affects their mental health and well-being.

But what stood out most in the survey is this finding: U.S. Muslims share an overwhelming desire to have their children recognized as Americans. Nearly 95

percent agreed with its importance, while 77.5 percent strongly agreed.

The finding is well aligned with what I heard last week at a community dialogue hosted by the National Conflict Resolution Center, part of the series we call "A Path *Forward*." We launched "A Path *Forward*" in 2019, following the hate crimes that were perpetrated by Earnest. It was a way to bring members of our community together to build understanding and begin the process of healing — a need that continues.

Our most recent program was called "Centering the Voices of Muslim-Americans: Rising Up Against Islamophobia and Building Stronger Allyship 20 Years After 9/11." Joining the discussion were Imam Taha Hassane, director of Interfaith/Public Relations & Youth Programs at the Islamic Center of San Diego and a member of the NCRC board of directors; Homayra Yusufi, deputy director, Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans; and Rosemary Johnston, secretary of the San Diego Interfaith Collaborative.

Our panelists talked about the common misconceptions that may contribute to feelings of hostility toward Muslim Americans. There are people who mistakenly believe that all Muslims are Arabs who come from the Middle East. If they fear Arabs, they often fear Muslims, too. But Muslims are as ethnically and culturally diverse as Christians and Jews; they come from countries around the globe. Just 14 percent of Muslims are Arabs.

Here's something else many of us get wrong: the belief that Muslim Americans would rather isolate than assimilate.

If you look at San Diego, Muslims are a vibrant part of our social fabric and contribute to our economy as business owners, professionals and workers. They consider themselves to be Americans. As Imam Hassane told us, with pride: "This is our land. This is our country. This is our nation."

After all, he said, Muslims have been coming to America since the beginning of the 20th century. The pace of immigration accelerated in the 1970s and '80s, when the U.S. raised its refugee quota.

Muslims come here seeking safety, opportunity and enjoyment for their families — reasons that all of us can understand.

Yusufi comes from one of those immigrant families. She was born in Afghanistan and became a refugee at the age of 2, eventually landing in San Diego.

Yusufi experienced a pivotal 9/11 moment when she heard someone in a classroom say, "We should just bomb all Muslims." The teacher said nothing in response. Today Yusufi works to protect the civil rights of immigrants.

The panel shared some ideas for fighting Islamophobia and becoming stronger allies. As is always the case, "A Path *Forward*" begins with building connections. As Afghan refugees come to San Diego — fleeing violence and seeking better lives — now is the time to stand together.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com.



David and Jessica Mier, MANA de San Diego Brindis Gala co-chairs at the event.

SCENE

MANA's Brindis Gala

Event supports programs for Latinas in San Diego County

BY U-T STAFF

MANA de San Diego celebrated its 35th anniversary Oct. 2 during its annual Brindis Gala at The Rooftop at Jamul Casino. The gala was established in 1990. It is the organization's signature event and fundraiser. It supports MANA's programs year-round. The gala also gives the organization the opportunity to

highlight its work, events, milestones and accomplishments. Because of COVID-19 safety measures, the event was limited to 200 attendees. It was sold out.

MANA's goals are to elevate Latinas of all ages to assume leadership roles in their communities through education, advocacy and empowerment.

If your organization has held a philanthropic event,

you're welcome to email a high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduniontribune.com. Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer's name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.



The honorees: From left, Julie Cowan Novak, Esther Rodriguez, Roberta Tidmore, Danitza Villanueva, Jackie Helm, Wendy Urushima-Conn, Ursula Kuster, Jaime Carr, Ellen Moxham, Lynne Doyle, Denise Jackson and Deborah Marengo

SCENE

'Women of Dedication'

Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary luncheon

BY U-T STAFF

The Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary held its 2020-2021 Women of Dedication Luncheon on Sept. 17 at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina to recognize its Women of Dedication honorees. The event is the signature fundraiser of The Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary.

Founded in the 1950s,

the auxiliary supports The Salvation Army's social service programs through fundraising, donations and hands-on volunteer efforts, helping those in crisis to heal, to develop emotionally and spiritually, and to learn new skills that promote self-sufficiency and transform lives for the better.

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RETURNING Oceanside plans to open shelter in 2022

FROM B1

City officials saw the program as more than just a way to temporarily get around the precedent, however. Everyone who entered the program was offered COVID-19 vaccines and was provided help and referrals for mental health screening, enrollment in CalFresh and other services.

Some homeless advocates have criticized the program as simply a ploy to clear out encampments with no real intention of finding long-term help for the displaced homeless people.

While some large encampments have been cleared out, several remain throughout Oceanside.

"Most encampments of late have been located in the Caltrans right-of-way," Gossman said. "We've worked collaboratively with them in offering access to our hotel voucher program and have successfully cleared out some encampments along I-5. Some of them tend to pop back up, but we have a good working relationship with Caltrans and will continue to partner."

The City Council plans to open a 50-bed shelter sometime earlier next year near the corner of El Camino Real and Oceanside Boulevard. It's unclear if the voucher program will continue after then.

"It's been successful and will likely continue until such time that



From left, bassist Evan Killeen, drummer Ian Kisbert and guitarist Rodney McGough have been jamming together as a group they call Loud Mouths Rusty Train.

our shelter is up and running," Gossman said. "At this point I don't foresee a different location, but if we had to, we would find one."

As for McGough, he said he has been sleeping in a van bought with money raised through an online GoFundMe fundraiser that a supporter set up to help him. Unfortunately, the transmission went out after he made about \$1,000 in repairs to the vehicle.

McGough said he still has hopes

for creating a safe camping community where homeless people can work the land, and he has rented a small room at Lockout Music Studios in Oceanside, where he has set up a desk to work on a book he started writing two years ago as a student studying psychology and sociology at MiraCosta College.

"I was documenting scientific research on the streets of Oceanside as a learning service site," he said.

McGough had attempted to keep the encampment alongside South Oceanside Boulevard clean and orderly as a safe place for people he saw as in need of help to overcome trauma. He said his book will include the experience.

"I was performing a trauma-informed service site right on the street," he said. "The first tenet of trauma-informed care is a safe place to sleep and second tenet is peer support."

McGough, who plays guitar, cello, piano and violin, also has been writing songs influenced by his experience at the encampment. Lyrics also are inspired by Biblical verses, and he calls his genre classical folk rock. The 53-year-old multi-instrumentalist also has been jamming with some recent college graduates as part of a group called Loud Mouths Rusty Train.

Evan Killeen, 24, plays stand-up bass with the group and said he met McGough at the encampment earlier this year.

"I had a seasonal job that ended in the summer and I realized I had no excuse to not do something and just drive by and see people suffering on the street," he said.

After learning they both were musicians, he and McGough made plans to have a barbecue and create music at the encampment, but the site was cleared before they could get together.

"We kept each other's numbers and he called me back a few months ago and asked if I'd like to play some music with him again," he said.

The band has six musicians in all, and they play a mix of covers and original songs by McGough.

"This was the first time I heard his music, and I thought they were fantastic," Killeen said, adding that the songs express McGough's desire to raise awareness and find solutions to help people who are suffering.

Killeen, who is earning a teaching credential at Cal State San Marcos, said they hope to perform in public some day soon.

"We want to play great music in a way that benefits people," he said.

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HOMELESS

FROM B1

lice about the people contacted and any progress achieved.

"Hopefully, this new method with PATH will work and then [the police] can go on to other things instead of dealing with the homeless issue," Surwilo said.

Surwilo emphasized that the new rule applies only to reporting a homeless camp.

People still should call police if they notice any suspicious or dangerous activity in the camp, he said.

"If you see an encampment that's in a canyon and they're lighting a fire, I wouldn't use Get It Done for that," Surwilo said. "I would actually call dispatch and let them know because that's a fire hazard. That's maybe not criminal, but that's something we should probably be checking up on and trying to address."

Some audience members

expressed reservations about the new approach. Denny Knox, executive director of the Ocean Beach MainStreet Association, told of how her organization had struck a deal with PATH to assist homeless people out of the OBMA offices once a week, only for the program to end after a few weeks.

"I'm hesitant to say that I don't think (the new policy) will work, but it was a disappointing experience for us because we were over-

whelmed for a while and had (homeless people) lined up outside our office, which was way over our head," Knox said.

Surwilo advised patience with the new policy, saying that even for police, disassembling a homeless camp is time-consuming. For instance, people's personal possessions have to be collected, tagged and taken to storage when impounded, even if they may seem like "junk" to an outside observer.

He added that the time is ripe for a new direction because police have been ordered to reset their "progressive enforcement" model with the lifting of some COVID-19 restrictions. Misdemeanor suspects, including those who are homeless, can be arrested by their fourth contact with police, after three previous engagements have produced warnings, citations and an offer of services.

But Town Council trustee Aaron Null expressed

concern that the new policy might delay addressing the homelessness issue because PATH doesn't have nearly the resources available to police.

"I'm worried that the timeline ... is going to double because now we have to wait for PATH and then it gets to (police)," Null said. "Hopefully we can work out a way that the system works smoothly."

Mihailovich is a freelance writer for the U-T Community Press.