

Community outreach inspired by Eid holiday

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For the more than 1 billion Muslims around the world, the end of the holy month of Ramadan is a time of fellowship and charity.

That was exactly the case this past Friday, Sept. 18 as dozens of Muslims and non-Muslims gathered at the Scadding Court Community Centre (SCCC) for the first Eid al Fitr food basket distribution and community meal.

Mona Elshayal, one of the event's organizers, said it was a new way for members of the Muslim Association of Canada to reach out to the community at large.

Just over a year ago, the organization, which operates Masjid Toronto, started hosting community lunches at SCCC on the last Sunday of each month. "We're taking it further and reaching out to all members of the community," she said. "We're hoping that this is the first of many initiatives to get in touch with the community and help out in general."

Last Friday afternoon, dozens of volunteers - many from University of Toronto's Muslim Students' Association (MSA) - eagerly packed and distributed 1,000 bags with non-perishable food.

"We try to engage in events that make a difference. We're a very creative campus group," said the MSA's Anton Kuratnik, who came out to help.

"This is amazing. The students were all really excited to help out. We rounded up 50 volunteers in two days."

The majority of those packages containing sugar, rice and pasta were then delivered to needy families in the nearby Alexandra Park/Atkinson Co-op, near Dundas Street West and Spadina Avenue.

The following day, about 200 packages were distributed to families in Regent Park, while more than 150 went to those from north Riverdale's Blake-Boulton neighbourhood via the Eastview Community Centre.

Later on Friday, more than 130 volunteers reunited at Scadding Court Community Centre after their



Community outreach inspired by Eid holiday. Eid al Fitr event co-organizer Mona Elshayal, left, with Kevin Lee, Scadding Court Community Centre's executive director, and Anton Kuratnik of U of T's Muslim Students' Association with 1,000 gift bags distributed to the less fortunate. *Staff photo/JOANNA LAVOIE*

distribution duties to break their fast with a tasty homemade meal, which included three different types of flavourful cold teas, dried dates, figs, apricots, prunes, pineapple and papaya, tandoori chicken, flat breads and pitas, homemade hummous, raitha, tabbouleh, falafel, a vegetarian shepherd's pie dish, fresh fruit, green salad, and even Spanish rice.

When possible, the cooks from Scadding Court's Greenhouse Cafe made use of fresh fruits and vegetables grown in the centre's community gardens.

Busy scooping wonderfully aromatic tabbouleh into large bowls, SCCC's executive director Kevin Lee said he hopes the inaugural Scadding Court Eid celebration is the beginning of many religious and cultural celebrations at the downtown community centre.

"I'm going to do it for Hanukkah. We want to engage with the Jewish community exactly like we do for the Muslims," he enthused, adding that the possibilities are endless for celebrating different occasions there.

"We're also going to do this for Christmas."

Lee said the Eid al Fitr event is a way for the community to engage and create understanding and awareness, which helps break stereotypes in an intercultural way. One way he said to do just that is by serving up an Eid meal that represents the different parts of the world Muslims come from.

Package recipients and community members are also invited to attend a special Eid al Adha lunch on Nov. 29. This holiday marks the end of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. People can sign up to receive a free meat package at that luncheon. For more information, contact Mohsin Khattak at 416-392-0335, ext. 228.

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