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ANERA

AMERICAN NEAR EAST REFUGEE AID

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Creating Opportunities for Change

By Robyn Long

In East Jerusalem, the Said T. Khoury Information Technology Center of Excellence at Al Quds University is generating hope for a better future for Palestinians. Opened in March, the IT Center brings state-of-the-art training in information technology (IT) to aspiring business professionals.

Launched through ANERA's IT initiative in Palestine, this IT Center of Excellence brings together a unique curriculum with competitive certificate programs and business incubation services. It has four labs, each equipped with 16 computers, available for such courses. "After acquiring IT skills, many individuals are interested in starting their own business. This center also offers technical and business support, and guidance," explains Reem Zeatoun, Office Manager of the IT Center. "We can give them whatever they need to achieve."

Undoubtedly, students and professionals have immense opportunities for obtaining new skills at the IT Center. But what makes it distinctive is its Business Incubation Center (BI Center), which connects those finishing their degrees or certificates with business opportunities. The curriculum equips students to obtain internationally recognized certificates from Oracle, CISCO, and Microsoft, all of which are in high demand, and includes the flexibility to offer training courses requested by students, instructors, or other community members. As community IT needs arise, training courses are created.

"We focus on specialization, so people can develop professional skills," states Omar Dhaher, Coordinator of the BI Center. He explains, "The basic idea [of the BI Center] is to give any talented individual the chance to develop their idea or product. The BI Center works as a link between the students and the market—we give them the basic elements to become an entrepreneur and help them build strategic relationships. This provides them the opportunity to sell their idea or have it adopted by others in the market." Currently, there are 50 students using the BI Center's services to run 22 different projects, including

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Opportunities for Change

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online databases and enhanced wireless communication.

Housed in the BI Center is the Job Center, which connects job seekers with employers. It maintains a database of companies and organizations with positions for graduates in IT programs. The Center helps professionals find jobs locally, regionally, and internationally—exemplifying the IT Center’s vision of contributing to the Palestinian IT industry and expanding employment opportunities.

“This Center is a pioneer in connecting universities with businesses,” states Dr. Badie Sartawi, ANERA’s IT Project Director. “This is the first time universities here have developed contracts with the private sector. All of this reflects on the curriculum at Al Quds University and encourages investors in professional job creation.” In tandem with the IT Center’s sustainable approach in training and the development of business skills, is the advancement of both individual opportunities and stimulation of the IT market—a promising combination for prompting positive change throughout Palestinian communities.

The Said T. Khoury Information Technology Center of Excellence is part of ANERA’s IT Initiative in Palestine. The initiative enhances IT skills and business opportunities among Palestinian professionals by partnering with local universities to offer training courses, business incubation, and job placement opportunities. This Center is the first of three planned for the West Bank. ANERA hopes to secure funding for a fourth center at the Islamic University of Gaza. ▀

REEM ZEATOUN, OFFICE MANAGER AT SAID KHOURY IT CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AT AL QUDS UNIVERSITY/ROBYN LONG



“After acquiring IT skills, many individuals are interested in starting their own business... We can give them whatever they need to achieve.”





ROBYN LONG

SCHOLARSHIP PROFILE

Jamal at Rawdat El-Zuhur

Jamal, a sixth grader at Jerusalem's Rawdat El-Zuhur elementary school, loves to show off his drawing book. The pages are filled with sketches of beautiful houses, paintings of gardens filled with flowers in vibrant colors, and drawings of tanks, military jeeps, and checkpoints with masses of people waiting in line. Art classes give Jamal an opportunity to express both his hope-filled dreams and harsh reality.

Since 1952, when the late Miss Elizabeth Nasir founded Rawdat El-Zuhur, the school has offered a strong academic program, personalized attention, and special classes in music and art to students such as Jamal, whose family lives in Qalandiya refugee camp.

Jamal's interests are not limited to art. He does well in science, math, Arabic, English and French. He loves his computer class—an activity made possible by ANERA's grant to the school for a computer lab last year. And he excels in sports, especially soccer and basketball.

Over ten percent of Rawdat El-Zuhur's 250 students receive ANERA Scholarships. ANERA's Scholarship Program helps cover the costs of tuition, books, school supplies and medical expenses for 210 students in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan. For more information about how you can help a child in the Scholarship Program, contact Adrian Loucks, Director, Scholarship Program, at (202) 347-2558 or adrian@anera.org. ▶

IT Graduate Profile: Muneer

By Susan Bertoni

Muneer spends two to three hours each day walking on the beach during stressful times in his life. He lives in Gaza City, where the term "stressful" can describe a multitude of scenarios, the least of which are road closures.

Muneer remembers when he was an undergraduate student five years ago and the journey from his home in Deir al Balah to the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) took only fifteen minutes. Now it sometimes takes two hours. If the road to the university is closed, Muneer and hundreds of others must walk four to five kilometers along the beach.

In an ANERA-sponsored certification course in database administration, called Oracle Developer 2000, Muneer gained expert training. The course, originally expected to last three to four months, took Muneer a year to complete because of closures and curfews, but already it has given him an edge in database management.

Muneer currently works as the chief computer engineer of the IT department at IUG, developing and maintaining programs that enable students to register for courses and receive their grades by logging into the university database on the web. "My job is to make students' lives easier," he explains. Considering the access problems facing residents of Gaza, these measures can save students hours or even days of travel.

In regard to the development of IT in Palestine, Muneer points out that there are many people in both Gaza and the West Bank who are highly intelligent and quick to learn, but because the economic situation is so bad (over 60% of Gaza residents live on less than \$2 per day), they cannot afford the training needed. A course like the one ANERA offered and subsidized at IUG can run up to \$1,000 merely for the certification exam and travel costs incurred by a student. But through ANERA, the course fees only cost \$300.

"I know the value of this course. I feel that it is free

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SUSAN BERTONI



Zena's Bustling Business in Deir El Balah Refugee Camp

By Robyn Long

Zena's customers have a large selection of livestock from which to choose at her house in the Deir El Balah refugee camp in central Gaza. Zena's hard work has led to a thriving business and success in the local market. It is a prime example of the effectiveness of micro-loans from the Gaza Women's Loan Fund (GWLF). By raising and selling a variety of animals, Zena is able to support her four children during a time of widespread unemployment and poverty in the Gaza Strip.



Five years ago, Zena worked in an industrial zone sewing textiles. The job took hours to reach, paid a meager wage, and provided no benefits for her family. In 2000, Zena boldly left the factory and started a home business with a \$1,000 loan from GWLF. She began raising chickens and turkeys, which are in regular demand locally. With two additional loans she expanded her production. Now Zena also sells rabbits, ducks, pigeons, and geese – all bringing her earnings that would not have been possible working in the industrial zone. Zena states with pride that she has been able to repair her home and purchase needed appliances with her new earnings.

Over 2,000 women in Gaza have benefited from loans by the GWLF program. The loan amount for new borrowers is \$1,000, and for repeat borrowers, \$2,000-\$2,500. Loans are granted to women with new or pre-

IN MEMORIAM:

Murray Gart

Murray J. Gart, longtime ANERA board member and generous supporter, died March 31, 2004 in Mitchellville, MD, at age 79.

Mr. Gart was a leader in ANERA's Information Technology Initiative, which has established IT Centers of Excellence at universities in the West Bank and Gaza, and in our work with education at the primary and secondary levels.

Mr. Gart was a distinguished journalist. For decades he was a correspondent, senior editor, and, later, chief of correspondents for *Time* magazine, and chief editor of the former *Washington Star*.

During his career, he interviewed world personalities, including Saddam Hussein, Yasser Arafat, Ariel Sharon, and five U.S. presidents. During the first Palestinian intifada in the late 1980s, Mr. Gart spent two months living in Nablus in the West Bank, measuring the pulse of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Gart also served on the boards of the Foundation for Middle East Peace, Middle East Institute, and Geopolitics of Energy.

He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Jeanne Gart of Mitchellville, MD; two children, Mitchel Gart and Marcia Mersky; a sister; and four grandchildren.

existing businesses ranging from home gardening, food processing, and retail, to livestock projects such as Zena's. In 1995, ANERA—in partnership with the Culture and Free Thought Association, a Palestinian women's organization in Gaza—started the GWLF. ANERA continues to strengthen and expand GWLF's work to help women provide for the basic needs of their families and hope for a better future. ■

ANERA Receives Kahlil Gibran Award

ANERA, along with Muhammad Ali, Queen Noor, actress Mary Louise Parker, Rock the Vote, and Suheir Hammad, headlined the Kahlil Gibran *Spirit of Humanity* Awards gala held May 4, 2004 in Washington D.C. ANERA was one of five recipients to receive this year's award, given by the Arab American Institute Foundation.

The award honors individuals, corporations, and organizations who have demonstrated a commitment to humanitarian values and cultural understanding consistent with the ideals exemplified by Arab American poet and author Kahlil Gibran. Past recipients of the award include MTV's Fight for Your Rights Campaign, Ford Motor Company, Sting, Mercy Corps, and Amnesty International.

"We are honored to be included among the esteemed recipients of this award," stated Peter Gubser, ANERA's president. "It is especially appreciated at this time of great turmoil. By joining people from different areas of the world, we work to bring freedom and dignity to the

"...Tonight we honor the people who have worked with and through ANERA... They remind us, there are enough resources, and there is enough love, for us all."

lives of people living in the Middle East. We are pleased to share this award with the thousands of donors and people we work with daily – they embody the true meaning of humanity."

Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad presented ANERA's award, and said "...we know that our only true enemies are poverty, lack of medicine, lack of education, powerlessness and a disconnect from the world. Working to feed and shelter Palestinians kids has never been a sexy job. Tonight we honor the people who have worked with and through ANERA, who have personified this spirit of humanity we are celebrating. They remind us, there are enough resources, and there is enough love, for us all."

Ms. Hammad has appeared in numerous publications and she is an original cast member in the Tony award-winning "Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam on Broadway." Currently she is one of the stars in Def Poetry Jam's national tour. ▶

IN HONOR OF

Dr. Edward Said
Mrs. Yvonne Moossy
Mrs. Ann Torrey
Mr. Jean Haddad
Susan Higham Dahl
Mr. Murray Gart
Mrs. Gladys Richardson's 80th Birthday
Kathryn Habib & all the Habibs
Dr. John Davis
Kareemah
Gloria L. McSherry
Loren Tesdell
Pope John Paul II
Peter Heslin
Dr. John Shiber
Olive & Harry Snyder
Esther Howard Deeb
Ann Cabot Ogilvy
Virginia Whitney Dorman
Mr. Ernest Ferris
Rev. Paul Susumu Seto
Samira Khorma

Muneer

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compared to what it could be,” says Muneer, shaking his head. “Still, out of the sixteen registered students in my class, only four could pay for the course.”

When asked what measures he feels will improve the IT sector in Palestine, he says he would love to see an IT Center of Excellence in Gaza with support for both university students and IT businesses. “People in Gaza are very clever, and they have the abilities to improve things. But especially now, under these desperate conditions, we can use as much support as possible from the outside.” ▀

Staff Change

Cyril Bindah, ANERA's Senior Accountant, is retiring after 24 years of dedicated service to the people of the Middle East. In any organization, accountability and transparency are of the essence. Cyril was central to helping ANERA achieve these goals. As a dedicated soccer fan, Cyril has donated videos and soccer balls to support the development of a Palestinian soccer team with the hope of one day seeing them in the Olympics. We wish him our very best.

Alfonso Wright, ANERA's Assistant Accountant for the past seven years, will take over the Senior Accountant position. We recently have hired Ms. **Lisa Ransome** as the Assistant Accountant. A native of the Washington DC area, she comes to ANERA with four years accounting experience.

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