

The Initiative To Educate Afghan Women

NEWS & Events

From the Founder

The Initiative To Educate Afghan Women began three years ago as the result of a friendship between two women, one Afghan, one American. I read about my dear friend Fatima Gailani's story of living in exile for 23 years in the *Providence Journal*. She and her family fled from Afghanistan to avoid being harmed. Her father was the highest spiritual leader of the country.

At the time that I read her article I had been watching the news, learning about Afghanistan, its many years of war, and the negative position and treatment of women. I was haunted seeing the women hidden, kept in the house, denied the right of education. I asked to meet with Fatima to discuss her country's situation and how I could be of help.

What I had in mind was to offer a scholarship to an Afghan woman to study in the U.S. My commitment would be to find other scholarship opportunities across our great country.

Fatima and I became fast friends. We have similar personalities; we are both very driven and have difficulty taking no for an answer! Our common mission was to educate the women of Afghanistan, knowing the impact that educating women will have on Afghan society. When my husband and I presented the first scholarship at Roger Williams University, Fatima responded to this gift with tears. This would become the only program of its kind around the world that would help to educate the women of her country by offering university scholarships. This was Fatima's biggest dream. Before she left her country women were professionals and went to university. Fatima's biggest hope was that women would be free to study and work once again.

Three years have passed. Fatima Gailani has lived in Afghanistan since the Taliban period ended. She remains an active member of the Initiative advisory board, and helps in Kabul with finding and selecting candidates. Recently our dear friend Fatima was named Director of the Red Crescent of Afghanistan. I remember the days when I visited often with she and her husband Anwar Ahady when they lived in Rhode Island. I witnessed their commitment to their



Fall 2002: President of Roger Williams University Dr. Roy Nirschel, Paula Nirschel, Fatima Gailani and Dr. Anwar Ahady.

country and their strong desire to return and help the reconstruction process. Those days seem long passed. Anwar Ahady is now the Minister of Finance.

We offer many congratulations to these two very strong committed leaders of Afghanistan. The Initiative To Educate Afghan Women commits to teaching the women in this program the necessary professional skills so they may return and assist these two Afghan heroes in the reconstruction of their country.

Fatima and I were brought together from two countries to achieve a common goal. This program has brought people from two different cultures together to know one another and help each other to grow.

Happy New Year!

Paula Nirschel



IEAW Supporter Gives Twice

Arlene Violet (far right) is a very special woman. While attending a charity event Arlene bid on an elaborate dinner for twelve. She not only paid heartily for the dinner, but she also sold tickets to attend the dinner and benefit the IEAW. Arlene is a mentor for the IEAW students. Presently Arlene is the leading talk show host in Rhode Island. She has also been a nun with the Sisters of Mercy, left to become a lawyer and then was Rhode Island Attorney General.



Fabulous Eid Dinner At Fatima's

Fatima Gailani was here from Kabul visiting and had her family, Initiative students and supporters over for Eid dinner, celebrating the end of Ramadan. The students that attended were from Roger Williams, Simmons and Montclair.

Fatima cooked traditional dishes including Kechri Qoroot which is a peasant dish reminding Afghans to always remember the struggle of others.

Interestingly the IEAW students enjoyed this dish the most. Since the invitees were all women there was traditional dancing following the grand feast.

Fatima and the students taught Diana, Barbara and Paula the way to dance Afghan style!

Donor Challenges Others

An anonymous donor has pledged \$10,000 to benefit the IEAW. This is a challenge gift to motivate others to match her pledge. Any new donations of \$100 or more will be matched by this donor. In addition, any donor giving a second donation in the same year, providing it is \$100 or more will be matched by this great person.

If you wish to meet this challenge please send contributions in with the enclosed card.



Law Firm Internship

Nadima spent most of intersession at the law firm of O'Melveny and Myers LLP, Washington, DC. She heard arguments in the Supreme Court and met with the judges. She had individual meetings with the firms partners including William Coleman. There were tours and meetings with the White House lawyers, Congress, State and Justice Department Lawyers. She attended law classes at Georgetown. This was all orchestrated by Michael Murphy lawyer and Brooke Silard, administrator at the firm. After hearing a segment about the IEAW on NPR's *The World*, Mike offered and planned this opportunity for Nadima. Nadima is hoping to attend a law school in the US Fall 06.



Nadima Sahar (right) and Shakiba Adil, lead journalist.

Afghanistan Unveiled

We attended the screening of *Afghanistan Unveiled* in Washington D.C. in November.

In the film “fourteen young women, several still in their teens, were trained as camera operators and video journalists” in Kabul.

They were the first female journalists to be trained in Afghanistan for more than a decade. They traveled to rural outside regions of their country to show the widespread suffering of the women and children post Taliban. These young journalists had never been to the areas they filmed. Tears came down all of their faces as they were exposed to the sad realities of life for those they were filming.

The film is part of the PBS Independent Film Series.

Intersession January 2005

Each year students get together for at least a week at semester break. The IEAW sponsors intersession which is a time for bonding while touring parts of the US.

This year seemed to outdo the last! The students are so fond of each other that they chose to spend most of the one month together. They were first hosted by Alean and Forozan at their dorms. We filled their refrigerator with Afghan food products. They cooked familiar foods, enjoyed the Montclair community, and went into NYC to walk around a bit including a stroll in Central Park. After many days at the dorms they headed for Hilton Head, SC and were hosted very warmly by Peggy and Vic. They enjoyed the warm weather and toured the area. This was certainly a highlight of the vacation! We then all met in New York City for a few days. Libby, Peggy and I took the women to the Empire State Building, UN, Public Library, Frick Museum, 5th avenue and many more stops along the way. There were two very special evening dinners. Advisory

board members Regina Lee and Deborah Wiley exposed us to the Colony Club, the oldest women’s club in the country. The women looked lovely dressed in their traditional attire. Everett and Karen Cook invited us to their home which was adorned with the Afghan flag in the foyer. What a welcome that was! We heard stories from Everett about his two month college work experience in Herat. After some great conversation we all walked to an Afghan restaurant nearby.

The students left intersession with warm hearts, ready to succeed at another semester in the US.

1. The Colony Club
2. The United Nations
3. Karen and Everett’s welcome
4. Hilton Head
5. Peggy and the students
6. Christmas at Rooney and Susan’s home, Saddle River, NJ



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