

Islamic leader Emad Al-Turk and family

By Meredith C. McGee
Jackson Advocate Contributing Writer

Emad Al-Turk, International Museum of Muslim Cultures, Co-founder/President, Mississippi Arts Building in downtown Jackson on Pascagoula St., was born in Kuwait, and raised by Muslim Palestinian parents.

A Pew Forum report estimates Sunni Muslims comprise 87-90 percent of the world's 1.6 billion Muslim population, while Shia Muslims consists of 10-13 percent. The Shiites are the second largest Islamic sect.

Emad grew up in the 1960s and 70s. "The level of morality was a lot different for us than it has been raising children in America," he noted. "There was no peer pressure to engage in premarital sex and to use drugs during my teen years," he added.

There was absolutely no dating allowed when he grew up in the Middle East. "Our classrooms were segregated by gender. We had schools for boys and schools for girls," Emad noted. "Research suggest children learn better with members of the same sex," he said. "Children are less inclined to show off too," he noted.

A full scholarship lured 17-year old Emad to the University of Mississippi in 1977. "We met our freshman year during the second semester on the second floor in the game room in the Union Building," Karen, his wife of 34 years, recalled with a deep sense of pride.

Emad fell in love with and married his college sweetheart, a Methodist from Bruce, Mississippi – the heart of the Bible belt – in 1981. While her upbringing was connected to Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph, his was connected to Ishmael, the son of Hagar and Abraham.

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are all religions native to the Middle East, who share in common the concept of monotheism, and are the pillow of modern religious theology; yet theological differences are the center of age old colossal conflicts.

Emad and Karen's daughters, Amanda and Sarah were raised in the Islamic faith. "We tried to shelter our daughters from television programming relating to sex, violence, or drugs," Emad said as is the process was quite challenging. Karen converted to Islam during the past decade. Today, she is a devout Muslim. The family attends the Magnolia Islamic Center in Madison, MS. "Our congregation attends Friday Prayer Services," Karen said.

Karen is a traditional Islamic modest woman. "Modesty is personal between women and God," Karen acknowledges. "Modesty for me is not showing my skin," she added. Karen doesn't wear shorts, bathing suits, and wears head scarfs to religious services. "The Koran teaches us that being modest brings us closer to God," she confirmed.

Their oldest daughter Amanda Dahl, a graduate of Mississippi State University, teaches Nutri-



Harper, Brantley, Presley, and Sarah Ravenscraft

Amanda said, "My parents instilled in me the desire to choose a career path I would enjoy doing." She admitted inheriting a strong work ethic from her parents. "Patience is a virtue my dear," she recalled her father saying often. "We learned to show kindness and respect to others no matter how alike or different we may be," she added.

Sarah Ravenscraft, the youngest daughter, credits her parents with her strong sense of values.



Emad Al-Turk, Presley Ravenscraft, and Karen Al-Turk

"The things that make you rich in life are not always monetary, but are the result of hard work," she stated. Her parents' love was unchanging through the good times and the bad times. Sarah considered their devotion an example of unconditional love.

Sarah, who obtained a degree in Interior Design from Austin Art Institute, operates an online e-commerce subscription service entity with her mother called Noor Box www.noorbox.net. Subscribers obtain a box once a month containing Muslim themed activities and games for school age children. "Each box contains a gift, and recreational and educational activities on four subjects including science, nature, art, and Islamic heritage," Emad proposed.

Emad and Karen emphasized education to their children at an early age. "We read books to our daughters at night beginning at age one," he stated. They are also involved in their grandchildren's educational experience. Karen took Presley, age seven, to the library earlier this month and Presley checked out five books. "I just got done reading a book about Hajj," Presley said eagerly. "And there was a recipe in the back about healthy snacks. I learned eating healthy is better than candy," she happily said. "We make sure our grandkids

dedicated it as a house of monotheistic worship. Hajj is one of the largest gatherings in the world. "It attracts 2.5 million visitors," Emad said. "The beauty of Hajj is seeing all of the people dressed in white on one accord," he contended. Every Muslim is required to take the Hajj pilgrimage once in his or her lifetime," he stated. He and Karen are planning to take their Hajj pilgrimage in 2016.

The famous black Muslim leader Malcolm X took the Hajj pilgrimage in April of 1964, the year before he was assassinated. His Hajj trip was life changing. He converted from the Nation of Islam and became a Sunni Muslim after worshipping with whites and Muslims from other ethnic groups.

"We give gifts to our family at the end of each Eid. Last year we took the kids to Chucky Cheese, and our entire family spent time on the coast enjoying each other and the beach," Karen recalled. "The national budget should include programs which improve our infrastructure, public education, and contain an effective plan to eradicate U.S. poverty," he contended. "No child should go to bed hungry," he determined. As a co-founder of the International Museum of Muslim Cultures along with Okolo Rashid, Emad Al-Turk, a God fearing man, and a history buff, has busied himself preserving Islamic history for Mississippians. Stop by to learn about Islam and its many contributions to civilizations past and present. The museum presently has three exhibits: Legacy of Timbuktu, Moorish Spain, and Spirit of Ramadan. Tours are open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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"Our family's core principles are based on our worship of God "Allah." We are enjoined to do what is good, avoid evil, and to show kindness and respect in all we say and do," Karen added. The family adheres to a halal diet, and they all enjoy eating Maamoul treats which is a wheat cookie filled with nuts, and sprinkled with powdered sugar. Sarah regards her father as a God fearing, honest, and noble man, who practices what he teaches. "I am a history guy," he said of himself.

There is a minimal admission fee. They want to give everyone an opportunity to partake of the Islamic culture and history displayed at their magnificent museum. "Admission is free every Wednesday," Emad said.

In closing we leave you with the Muslim greeting, As-salamu alaykum which translates to "the peace be upon you."

International Museum of Muslim Cultures, 201 E. Pascagoula Street, Jackson, MS 39201, www.muslimmuseum.org, info@muslimmuseum.org, 601-960-0440.



Sterling, Amanda, Sutton (age 4), and Hayes (age 2 months) Dahl

to fast for 30 days. "The first Eid breaks the fast of the month of Ramadan. The second Eid follows the end of the annual pilgrimage to the Ka'aba.

During prayer Muslims face the Ka'aba from where they are in the world, and all are required to pray five times per day.

According to the Quran, the Ka'aba was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael as a house of monotheistic worship. In 630 A.D., Muhammad and his followers took over leadership of Mecca from pagan Arabs, destroyed the idols inside the Ka'aba, and re-

Vote Christopher M. Bell Mississippi House of Representatives District 65

Chris Bell is currently running as a candidate for State Representative in Mississippi's House District 65. Mr. Bell is running because he understands the needs of the residents of the 65th District and has a vision for growth and revitalization. The district covers the following precincts: 80, 79, 43, 42, 41, 40, 39, 38, 37, 16 and 14.

Bell is no stranger to Mississippi politics. In 2007, he ran for the District 65 seat, has served on the Hinds Democratic Executive Committee from 1995 to 1999 and is a member of the Mississippi Black Leadership Institute.

Mr. Bell is a proud alum of Jackson Public Schools' Callaway High School and understands the importance of a high quality education. He earned his Bachelor's of Science in Criminal Justice from Jackson State University, where he was also a member of the Sonic Boom of the South. After graduation, Chris worked for the law firm of Walker and Walker before beginning his career in Insurance. Chris is an insurance broker and owner of The Bell Group, LLC. In 2012, the Obama administration invited Bell to participate as a panelist for the White House Business Leaders Briefing.

A long-time resident of Hinds County, Bell has served on the Leadership Greater Jackson Board of Trustees, former Operation Shoestring board member and is an active member of Anderson United Methodist Church and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Bell's experience throughout his career and civic service has afforded him the opportunity to develop strong relationships within his community and beyond. He has also earned the reputation as a problem solver and level-headed negotiator known for building consensus out of conflict.

Bell will bring the same approach to the State Legislature, working with Mississippians across the state to make a real difference in District 65. Using his strong experience as a proven relationship builder, Bell will get to work for his constituents and provide results.

When elected, Mr. Bell's priorities will include: fully funding public education; expanding Medicaid which would add 20,000 jobs over a three year period; working to improve the Capital City's infrastructure by making sure Jackson is included in appropriations for roads and bridges; and fighting for our State employees to receive a much needed pay raise.

Chris Bell's roots in the Jackson community run deep. He understands the issues facing Mississippians and is committed to moving Mississippi forward. Among his many endorsements are: Congressman Bennie G. Thompson, Rep. Earle Banks, Rep. Jim Evans, Attorney June Hardwick and Attorney John L. Walker.

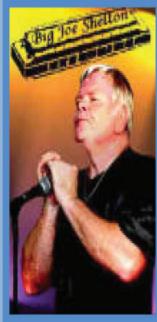


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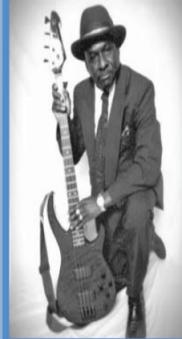
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Please no glass containers

For information please contact:
Address: Campaign to Elect Chris Bell, 510 George Street, Suite 239,
Jackson, MS 39202
Email: ElectChrisBell2015@gmail.com, • Website: www.ElectChrisBell2015.com