

MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICAN ADVISORY GROUP

Embracing Diversity and Bridging Communities

Office of Community Partnerships
Montgomery County, MD



MEAAG NEWS July 2021 Issue 1

Message from MEAAG Chair, Debbie Trent

Summer greetings to all!

Thanks for taking the time to browse the Middle Eastern American Advisory Group's first e-newsletter. It is brought to you by our 17 volunteer members, two summer interns, and Middle Eastern Liaison. MEAAG (MEE-ag) was established in 2008 by the [Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships](#) to better connect the linguistically and culturally diverse Middle Eastern American communities with county government and to encourage greater participation of Middle Eastern Americans in local, economic, civic, and cultural life. We are a non-political, non-religious, welcoming, intergenerational group. Our monthly public meetings feature guest speakers and discussions of our communities' interests. We plan projects to facilitate connections with county service providers, businesses, and nonprofit projects. Our members engage with and advocate for our community, representing our shared interests with the County Executive (who appoints each advisory group member) and other elected officials. MEAAG represents one of the smaller heritage population groups in MoCo, but we make up for that geographically, stretching from Morocco to Pakistan and Turkey to Sudan. Visit us on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) to check out our latest news.



Members

Sara Abdel (E), Lina Abdul Wahid (IQ),
Karim Chaibi (TN), Amjad Chaudhry (PK),
Sahar Fahmy (E), Sughra Hussainy (AF),
Mumtaz Jahan (PK), Farideh Jahanbin (IN),
Karen Leggett Abouraya (E),
Zaffer Mirza (PK), Shahrzad Nakhostin (IN),
Subhi Rawi (IQ), Mahasty Sharifi (IN),
Sam Shihadeh (PL), Gihan Tammam (E),
Debbie Trent (LE), Akhtar Zubairi (PK)

Interns

Tina Pasha (IN), Mehak Sukhera (PK)

Inside this issue: A Message From Us All, Current & Upcoming Events, Community Initiative Corner, Member Snapshots, Membership & Internship Information, Reconnect



A Message from Us All

MEAAG members and interns extend heartfelt condolences to all who have faced challenges and loss during the novel coronavirus pandemic. We've tried to do our part, helping out at food banks, holding virtual educational and cultural programs, sharing accurate [pandemic-related information](#), and trying to spread some [joy](#).

Current & Upcoming Events

It's weWomen Plus



Be part of a research study for women's safety, health, & well-being. Activities are remote & no in-person meeting is needed.

Earn \$40 per survey completed.

To enroll visit
itswewomenplus.org

Calling All Immigrant Women!
The weWomen Plus Research Study at Johns Hopkins University is evaluating the impact of adaptive technology-based interventions on safety, mental health and empowerment of immigrant women. Visit [here](#) to learn if you are eligible to participate and earn up to \$160 for completing four surveys over the next year.



Community Initiative Corner

Thrivers On The Move

Thrivers On The Move is currently accepting applications for its first cohort of female immigrant victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence from the Middle East and North Africa who are now living in the United States. This program is free. Our mission is to:

- PROVIDE** sustainable employment and economic empowerment solutions to immigrant female survivors of SGBV;
- DEFEND** the rights of immigrant female survivors of SGBV and their families in the USA;
- STRENGTHEN** the corporate, philanthropy, and advocacy collaborations and partnerships; and
- HONOR** the transformation from a Survivor to a Thriver.

[Click here for July 24th info session and further information](#)

- July 20th Meet-the-Author: The inspiring author, Pauline Kaldas, will be talking about her memoir, *Looking Both Ways* and her essay in *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature*. To register, please [click here](#). If you miss this conversation, meet Pauline Kaldas [here](#).
- July 24th *Thrivers On the Move* Info Session
- August - no monthly MEAAG meeting (summer break)
- September meeting date to be determined. Contact our [OCP Middle Eastern Liaison](#) to inquire.

The MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICAN
ADVISORY GROUP and MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARIES INVITE YOU TO OUR SIXTH...
MEET THE AUTHOR EVENT



The inspiring author, Pauline Kaldas, will be talking about her memoir, *Looking Both Ways*, & her essay in *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature*

July 20, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

To register, please click [here](#)

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Member Snapshots



Mahasty Sharifi

Ms. Mahasty Sharifi is originally from Iran, immigrated to the U.S. in 1975, and became an American citizen in 1984. Mahasty earned a BA in management from Marymount University and would have completed a master's at George Washington University in recreation, entertainment and leisure studies had not the Iranian revolution left her financially strapped. That did not stop her from pursuing sports or writing, though. At the 2016 Maryland Senior Olympics table tennis championships, Mahasty struck gold in women's doubles, silver in mixed doubles, and bronze in singles. An independent writer in her native Farsi, she has published two books and a third is due out by the end of 2021. Mahasty also writes weekly articles on the Telegram social media app.

About 12 years ago during Ike Leggett's first term as Montgomery County Executive (CE), Mahasty was nominated to join MEAAG. Mahasty has enjoyed all her activities with MEAAG, including helping needy people during Thanksgiving, informing her community of Montgomery County services and procedures, and encouraging the Iranian community to get involved in local, state, and federal voting activities. During Mr. Leggett's second term as CE, she initiated the MEAAG program to display Persian books in public libraries and joined other members in arranging Middle Eastern American Heritage month activities every March, including country display tables and community banquets with regional cuisine and entertainment. Since Mr. Mark Elrich was elected CE in 2018, Mahasty decided to seek re-appointment to MEAAG and is pleased by his full support of our group.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Mahasty organized an educational and recreational gathering for approximately 200 Farsi speakers every other month. The next event will be outdoors, on August, Sunday 29th, in one of the local parks.

Akhtar Zubairi

Mr. Akhtar Zubairi is from Karachi, Pakistan, and lives in the Silver Spring neighborhood near the Muslim Community Center (MCC). He is a Senior Cardiovascular Specialist in Marketing at the Novartis pharmaceutical company. He was introduced to MEAAG by a friend and former chair, has been a member for about 15 years, and is currently Vice-Chair. Akhtar has enjoyed serving the people in his community by meeting with neighbors for discussions and offering suggestions to solve specific problems the people in the MCC community and elsewhere have had, sometimes working with other community leaders or county officials.

Every March (except 2020, due to the pandemic), the Middle Eastern American Heritage Month event takes place. It was virtual in 2021; [here](#) is a video. It's MEAAG's major annual cultural event; more than 100 people participate. The County Executive presents an official proclamation of the Heritage month, and speakers and country displays provide educational and community services information. The lines at the buffet tables are always long and people can socialize with people from similar or different countries.

Akhtar is looking forward to continuing the Heritage celebration and planning different types of projects in collaboration with others in and beyond MEAAG. These include: helping people in MoCo and Prince George's County to find or improve low-income housing, assisting new immigrants who have modest incomes, and connecting them to English language classes taught at MCC.

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Membership & Internship Information

Adults interested in exploring membership in MEAAG, and middle and high school students interested in earning Student Service Learning credits through internship, should visit the [Montgomery County Volunteer Center](#).

Check Out [this Video](#) to Reconnect

Now that more than 62% of county residents are fully vaccinated against the Covid-19 virus, we can resume many prior community activities and start new ones. There's even a social media contest to contribute your ideas!