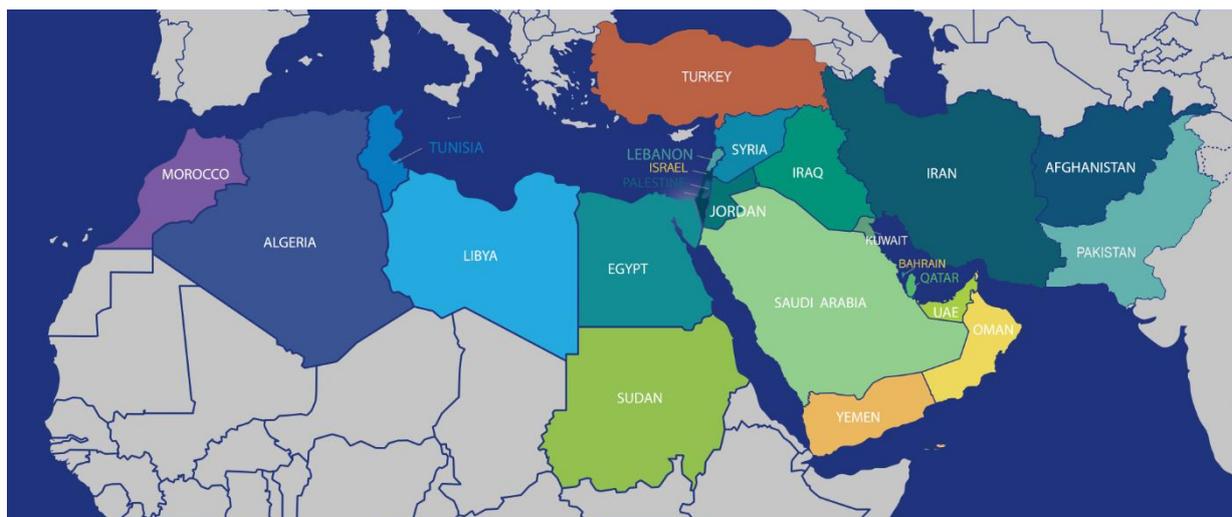




## Happy Fall to All!

from MEAAG Chair, Debbie Trent

Thanks for taking the time to browse the Middle Eastern American Advisory Group's third e-newsletter. It is brought to you by our 17 volunteer members, two interns, and Middle Eastern Liaison. MEAAG (ME-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 implement demand-driven projects to facilitate connections with county service providers, businesses, and ongoing 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. [continued on page 6]



**Members:** Sara Abdel (Egypt), Lina Abdul Wahid (Iraq), Karim Chaibi (Tunisia), Amjad Chaudhry (Pakistan), Sahar Fahmy (Egypt), Sughra Hussainy (Afghanistan), Mumtaz Jahan (Pakistan), Farideh Jahanbin (Iran), Karen Leggett Abouraya (Egypt), Zaffer Mirza (Pakistan), Shahrzad Nakhostin (Iran), Subhi Rawi (Iraq), Mahasty Sharifi (Iran), Sam Shihadeh (Palestine), Gihan Tammam (Egypt), Debbie Trent (Lebanon), Akhtar Zubairi (Pakistan).  
**Interns:** Sarah Edwan (Palestine), Anahita Javadi (Iran). **Middle Eastern Liaison:** Arwa ElBoraei.

**Inside this issue:** A Message From Us All • Member Initiatives for Our Community • Recent, Current & Upcoming Events • 2021-2022 Voter Education Initiative • Membership & Internship Information • A Surprise Coast-to-Coast MEA Connection • Message from the Chair (continued).



### ***A Message From Us All***

Thumbs up to county residents for getting vaccinated and continuing to take Covid-19 prevention measures! We've continued to meet virtually but will have a second outdoor gathering since the summer, on November 7<sup>th</sup> to launch our Voter Education Initiative (see page 3 for details). We would like to recognize Molly Calloway, who recently retired after 13 years as the county's Volunteer Center Manager. Molly and her team helped MEAAG set up our volunteer center database entries to publicize membership and high school internship opportunities and also guided us through the establishment of Student Service Learning accreditation with MCPS. We're excited to announce that MEAAG's annual heritage celebration in March, 2022, will have a wedding theme! Our members need help exhibiting wedding customs in the countries we represent, from Morocco to Pakistan and Turkey to Sudan. If you want to help us, or if you run a wedding-related business, please email [meaag.mc.md@gmail.com](mailto:meaag.mc.md@gmail.com). Last but not least, have a happy, safe **Halloween!**



Standing for local-to-global, intercultural peace and understanding,

The Middle Eastern American Advisory Group

### **Member Initiatives for our Community**

Gihan Tammam has launched a ***New Jackets 4 Kids Drive*** to benefit local children. New jackets of any kid's size, for boys and girls, will be accepted through November 20 and distributed on November 21 to local organizations serving the needs of children. Email [MEAAG.MC.MD@gmail.com](mailto:MEAAG.MC.MD@gmail.com) or call/text 240-899-2553 to donate \$ or a coat. (Flyer at right)

Sara Abdel and founder of Thrivers On The Move is launching a MEAAG Business Directory Database of MENA region business owners and jobseekers county-wide. Please contact her at [saraafiahmed@gmail.com](mailto:saraafiahmed@gmail.com) for more information.

Thrivers On The Move is offering assistance to our Afghan community through a career development incubator program for Afghan women & men seeking training and job placement. For more information, please email or book a call here.

Karen Leggett Abouraya will be participating in the virtual conversation - A Writer, A Vision, A Journey - November 27, 1 pm. She will be conversing with Ambassador Tawfik about her children's books, Hands Around the Library: Protecting Egypt's Treasured Books and Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words. Please contact [webmaster@arabworldbooks.com](mailto:webmaster@arabworldbooks.com) to join the mailing list and receive the Zoom links for author events.

The flyer for the 'New Jackets 4 Kids Drive' features a vibrant design. At the top, there are two stylized jackets, one in blue and one in pink, set against a dark purple background. Below the jackets is a green banner with the title 'New Jackets 4 Kids Drive' in large, bold, black font. Underneath the title, the text reads: 'To benefit local children', 'New jackets of any kid's size, for boys and girls, will be accepted through November 20 and distributed on November 21 to local organizations serving the needs of children.', and 'MEAAG.MC.MD@gmail.com or call/text 240-899-2553 to donate \$ or a jacket.' At the bottom of the flyer, there is a red and white logo for 'MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICAN ADVISORY GROUP' with the tagline 'Embracing Diversity and Bridging Communities'. In the bottom right corner, there is a small MEAAG logo with the text 'SINCE 2008'.

Design Credit: Shahrzad Nakhostin



Shahrzad Nakhostin founded Veno Art with the mission of harnessing the creative power of the world's artists and art collectors to support worthy humanitarian causes from the community level to the global level. She is curating the Covid-Free Kids Charity Auction, to take place online December 12th. Since the pandemic emerged, Shahrzad has been working to raise money in support of children's health around the world and to support artists. She launched the Covid-Free Kids Campaign and is kicking it off with a benefit auction. Debbie Trent is helping out with public relations and web content.

Veno Art and participating artists will each donate 5% of their share of the proceeds for each item sold to one of ten participating charities, per the buyer's choice. If the buyer prefers not to select a recipient, Veno Art will distribute the 5% cut evenly among all participating charities, all of which are involved in meeting the needs of impoverished children around the world. Veno Art does not accept direct donations.

Artists wishing to be exhibited on the platform and all people interested in the December 12th online auction may email [venoartveno@gmail.com](mailto:venoartveno@gmail.com) for further information. Follow the platform's photography, videos and written media produced by Veno Art [here](#) and on [Instagram](#).

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### Recent, Current & Upcoming Events

Mona Negm, President of the American Muslim Senior Society, shared a recap of AMSS' October 24<sup>th</sup> Town Hall Discussion, "COVID-19 Health Care Resources for You, Your Family and Community":

*The AMSS Town Hall was developed in direct response to our older communities' identified COVID-19 healthcare related priorities of concerns.*

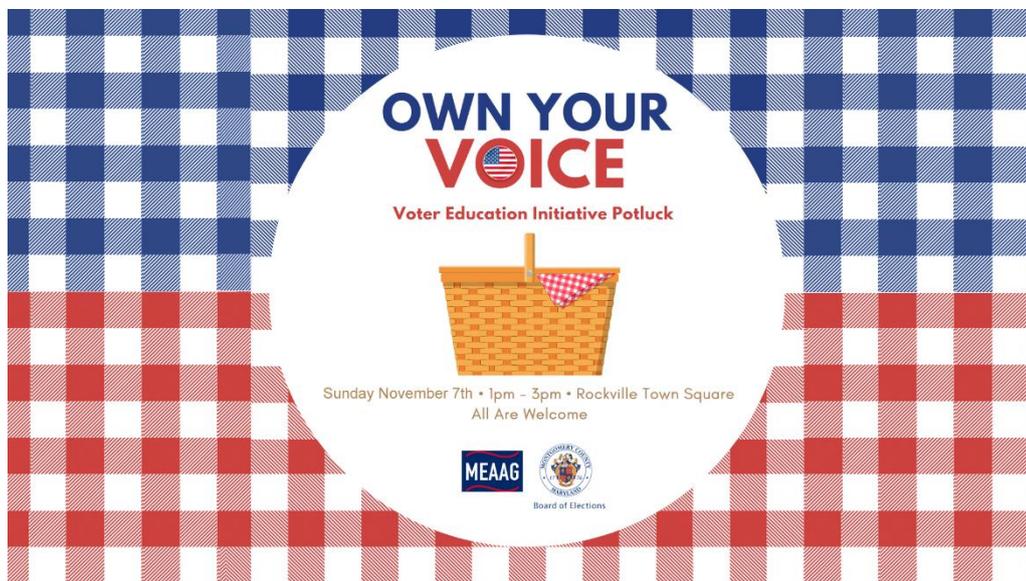
*At the first event participants had identified: 1-Mental health issues, especially social isolation; and 2-access to culturally competent, quality health care services, resources and information.*

*In response, AMSS brought together at our October 24th event health care experts with wide-ranging expertise to cover the above topics for both policy and practice. A list of helpful healthcare resources was developed and distributed to all participants and is posted on AMSS website for your convenience.*

*AMSS will continue the dialogues in 2022 as we look for implementation strategies of innovative collaborative culturally competent healthcare programs and activities to support the county's isolated and underserved older communities of color.*

October 30 Islamic School, Youth & Community Center - Opening Ceremony outdoors, at 10 am. Contact [news@icomd.org](mailto:news@icomd.org) or check the Islamic Center of Maryland website events page.

November 7, 1-3 pm, MEAAG Voter Education Initiative Potluck at Rockville Town Square. All are welcome. A MoCo Board of Elections representative will be available. Middle Eastern “finger food” will be provided and the event is free of charge, but please register [here](#).



Design Credit: Intern Sarah Edwan & Member Shahrzad Nakhostin

Nominations are due November 12<sup>th</sup> to the Maryland Humanities for *One Maryland One Book 2022*. The book may be fiction or nonfiction interpreting the theme “New Beginnings,” and should appeal to both young adults and adults. Books of poetry, essays, short stories and plays are welcome also. Here is the [FAQ page](#).

The second 2021 [“Connect Arab America Empowerment Summit](#) is November 12-14. MEAAG chair Debbie Trent attend a prior summit and highly recommends it for networking with ‘cousins across the country’ and e-meeting performers, public officials, businesspeople, artists, and social media influencers.

November 17, 5:00-6:00 pm, is MEAAG’s next community meeting date. Contact our [OCP Middle Eastern Liaison](#) to inquire/receive the Zoom link.

November 23, 6 pm: [The Colesville Council of Community Congregations Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service](#), Turkey Dinner with all the trimmings, followed by a service. The Baitur Rehman Mosque, 15000 Good Hope Road, Silver Spring. RSVP/info: Alyssa Ranko, 301-599-2108 ext 313, [alyssa@atlanticpersonnel.com](mailto:alyssa@atlanticpersonnel.com).



Participants are needed for Johns Hopkins Study on Women’s Safety, Health and Well-being: Join It’s weWomen Plus and help contribute towards an initiative to better immigrant women’s health and safety led by researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing. You can participate from any location and whenever is convenient for you. If you become eligible and complete the baseline survey, you will receive a \$40 gift card. To learn more about the study or to see if you are eligible, please answer the screening questions using the study link, <https://itswewomenplus.org/>. Our vision is a world where all women regardless of race/ethnicity, class, and

status have safer, healthier, and happier relationships. We value your support in developing this resource for improving women's safety, health and well-being.

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## Voter Education Initiative

September 2021-June 2022



MEAAG, of the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP), is partnering with Montgomery County Board of Elections (MCBE) and a number of community-based organizations on a nine-month *Voter Education Initiative*.

**Goal:** Strengthen local communities' knowledge and skills about voting procedures and processes to enable citizens in making informed decisions about electing their official representatives.

**Activities:** MEAAG, with MCBE, educational institutions, and relevant non-for-profit organizations, including those working with marginalized and under-represented groups, is implementing the following activities:

1. Launch a digital outreach educational campaign titled "Every Vote Counts" to disseminate information about voter registration, voting timetable, voting venues, and other related matters, and encourage community members to vote.
2. Disseminate MCBE flyers widely.
3. Organize a number of voter education virtual webinar sessions.

The initiative is intended to support voter administration services of MCBE, including recruitment of volunteers to facilitate access to the polls. Volunteers will assist with transportation, babysitting for single moms when they go to vote, and other efforts to make voting easier for all. The Maryland Board of Elections will be adding two early voting sites in the county, and MEAAG will place special emphasis on preparing especially newly registered women voters to prepare and submit their ballots in 2022. If you are interested in participating in or receiving voter education information about this democracy-building effort, please email Arwa ElBoraei, OCP Middle Eastern Liaison.

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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.

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## A Surprise Coast-to-Coast MEA Connection

The world keeps shrinking. On vacation in the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State in September, I knew I would encounter lots of nature lovers, hikers, boaters, anglers and majestic mountains, but I really wasn't expecting to meet up with Middle Eastern Americans, let alone locally prepared Arabic food. (continued on next page)

One day, walking downtown in the picturesque seaside town of Sequim, I spotted the Sequim Kabob House. I put on my mask and went right in. Amalia Awawda, owner and chef, was busy chopping parsley for tabouleh. (She makes each order from scratch!) I wanted to try everything but limited myself, since I would definitely be returning before heading back to Maryland. There's nothing quite like fresh tabouleh, perfectly whipped, garlicky hummus with the sweet bite of fresh lemon juice, fattoush salad and falafel. As I slowly enjoyed the meal, memories of my grandmother's cooking, the Middle East – and Lebanese Taverna – transported me.



Sequim Gazette

I asked Dr. Google for any information about this amazing place. The local newspaper ran an article in 2017 when Chef Amalia opened it. She is Palestinian and lived in Brazil before coming to the U.S. Finishing everything on the plate, I consulted my Reverso translation app to compose a proper compliment to Chef Amalia in the best Levantine dialect I could manage. During a lull after the lunchtime rush, when she sat down at a table to rest, I approached and thanked her, sharing my delight at finding such authentic Middle Eastern food. Why did Amalia and her family relocate here? She asks her husband that almost every day and is still waiting for an answer. It's been a nice place to raise her three sons, and when they became old enough, she decided to take her home cooking to the community. Why not, with her talent and the abundance of locally produced vegetables, grains and spices that make her dishes irresistibly fresh and delicious? Amalia has been very gratified in her work, and judging by the foot traffic I observed, she and the people of Sequim have formed a mutual admiration society!

P.S. The second time I stopped in, the Sequim Kabob House was closed without notice, perhaps due to a family issue. I'll just have to go back and visit my cousins. @Debbie Trent



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## Message from the Chair (continued from page 1)

The guest speaker at our October monthly meeting was Lisa Lorraine, new Community Navigator hired by Jubilee Association of Maryland to help Asian and Hispanic populations in Montgomery County learn about and use services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These are the two populations accessing services in far lower numbers than their percentage of the population. The Asian population includes people of Pakistani, Afghan, and Iranian heritage, part of the MEAAG community. Lisa talked about these discrepancies and the services she offers, both in presenting to appropriate groups (senior centers, health centers, mosques, churches, etc.) and also making herself personally available to help families. Please email, call or text Lisa at (240) 621-2750 Lisa to inquire.

I attended two county budget forums in mid-October and learned a lot about the County Executive's 2022 priorities. On behalf of our community, I posted in the virtual meeting chat the following comments and request: *Thank you for this enlightening forum. I chair the county volunteer group, the Middle Eastern American Advisory Group. MEAAG (ME-ag). We 17 members are grateful for the stewardship of the Director of the Office of Community Partnerships, Diane Vu, and our excellent Middle Eastern Liaison, Arwa ElBoraei. With the CE's support, we have run virtual educational and cultural programs and supported pandemic and refugee assistance programs. What we would respectfully request is enough funding for OCP to support a website that will accommodate individual*

*Advisory Group webpages that each group can administer and update easily. A web presence will increase our capacity to share information and hear from the thousands of Middle Eastern Americans in MoCo, especially up County. We have Covid-19 outreach messaging on a YouTube channel and Facebook, but we are hampered without a website in connecting and engaging with our community on our new Voter Education Initiative, our annual heritage celebration, food and clothing drives, and library program planning. We also hope the CE will continue to support the Arab and Muslim community groups who are working toward equitable treatment regarding public school policy and holiday calendaring, safety, and other services. Finally, we are delighted with the newly hired Interfaith Liaison, who is already deeply engaged in discussion of critical issues of intercultural misunderstanding.*

MEAAG e-newsletters are posted [here](#), with thanks to member Karen Leggett Abouraya for hosting!

MEAAG operates on land originally inhabited by the Nacochtank or Anacostans.

**~ Have a productive and happy month ~**

