



Food as the Great Equalizer

For Lebanese-Americans, the cuisine of their ancestors has always been key to preserving their identity and perpetuating a culture that celebrates life and its joys. To further explore that connection, LAU NY organized a panel discussion and tasting event on June 9 entitled “Food and Identity: Celebrating Lebanese Cuisine in New York.”

“Food traditions are maintained over generations because they provide ethnic immigrant groups with a strong sense of attachment to their homeland,” said Lina Beydoun, LAU NY’s Academic Executive Director.

The turn of the century was a period of intense xenophobia and tremendous anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S., panelist Matthew Jaber Stiffler, research and content manager at the Arab American Museum in Michigan, told the audience of 150. Food became a way for

immigrants to control the narrative.

Indeed, there was open discrimination against Syrian immigrants in New York. Public health officials compared them to vermin, and many called for a halt to all immigration from Syria. At the same time, restaurant critics from the New York Times were praising the “exotic delicacies” found in their neighborhood, which was nicknamed “Little Syria.”

A fourth-generation Lebanese-American, Stiffler said, “By the time it got to me, nobody spoke Arabic anymore, nobody was travelling back to Lebanon ... what we had left was the food.”

Philippe Massoud, CEO and executive chef of the award-winning restaurant *ilili*, emigrated to the U.S. in the 1980s, a time when Lebanese were occasionally portrayed in the American press as terrorists.

“I came here a wounded bird from a land that was on fire ... and I took every occasion to promote and defend my people,” he said, adding that he hopes to continue to spread the gospel of Lebanese cuisine to Americans for a long time to come.

For others like Manal Kahi, co-founder and CEO of *Eat Offbeat*, preserving the cuisine means more than just recreating it. Her business began out of a longing for her grandmother’s hummus. Not finding any that tasted quite right in New York grocery stores, she began experimenting with her own variations,

Continued on page 7



LAU academic center



Beirut meets the Bayou at LAU NY

Seventeen-year-old Habib Shwayri arrived at the Port of New York in 1902 with \$20 in his pocket. A little more than six months later, he had paid off the mortgage to his family’s home back in Lebanon. His story, and that of many immigrants to the U.S., was the topic of conversation at LAU NY on July 27, when the Academic Center welcomed Lebanese author Raif Shwayri, Habib’s grandson, for a discussion of his new book, “Beirut on the Bayou: Alfred Nicola, Louisiana, and the Making of Modern Lebanon,” led by New York-based author and scholar Linda K. Jacobs.

Raif described with wonderment his grandfather’s journey to the U.S., where officials gave him the name “Alfred Nicola,” the 18 years his grandfather spent peddling in New Orleans.

“In Raif’s book, we learn that the Syrian peddler at the turn of the 19th Century was often despised and depicted as ‘the scum of the Levant’,” said Lina Beydoun, LAU NY Academic Executive Director, as she kicked off the evening event. “Raif counters this view by narrating the success story of his grandfather. It is the story of millions of immigrants, like my parents, who sought economic betterment in Sierra Leone. Alfred Nicola’s story is our story too.”

Raif’s ancestors worked in Lebanon’s booming silk industry. “When the Suez Canal opened in 1869, you could reach the outside world in no time,” he said. “So the French began getting their silk from the Chinese, the Japanese, and the economy in Lebanon died out.”

Wealthy families were forced to look for ways to maintain their lifestyles. And thus, Alfred Nicola set off in search of economic

opportunity.

According to Jacobs, who documented the Syrian Colony of Lower Manhattan in her book “Strangers in the West,” many became peddlers because the trade was lucrative and required little training.

“At that time, factory workers earned about \$5 per week. A peddler could earn from \$25-50 a week,” she said.

When Alfred Nicola eventually returned to Lebanon, he invested his earnings in real estate and died a wealthy man in 1956. Raif’s father Nadim used his inheritance to start Al-Kafaat Foundation, a non-profit organization with the goal of educating children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as those with disabilities. Since 2010, the foundation has partnered with SUNY to develop higher education initiatives.

This event was co-sponsored by the Consulate General of Lebanon in New York, SUNY Press, and SUNY Global.

LAU matters

LAU Matters is published quarterly by the New York Headquarters and Academic Center of Lebanese American University and distributed free of charge to alumni, friends and supporters of the university in North America.

Editorial and Design

Paige Kollock and Maryam Zoma

Dr. Joseph G. Jabbara, President
Marla Rice-Evans, Vice President for University Advancement
Robert Hollback, Assistant Vice President for Development
Paige Kollock, Director of Communications and Media

LAU Matters
LAU New York Headquarters and Academic Center
211 East 46th Street
New York, NY 10017-2935
(212) 203-4333
laumatters.org

Please send all comments to: laumatters@lau.edu.lb

Cover Photo: June 9 panel on ‘Food and Identity’ at LAU NY.



A Blue Badge LAU student gets inside look at Lebanese diplomacy

Fourth year student Wadih Khnaizir got a front row seat to the corridors of power this summer. As one of five interns at the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations, he was an integral member of the team; attending meetings, preparing briefings, and conducting research.

“I thought I’d mostly be watching and learning, but I actually get to participate in the diplomatic process,” said the finance major.

Press, Protocol and Communication Officer Katia Badr runs the internship program at the mission.

“I was attracted by Wadih’s personality and his distinct sense of responsibility and professionalism,” she said. Two LAU graduates, Melissa Abdallah and Joelle El Sawalhi, have also interned at the mission, Abdallah while pursuing a Master's Degree and El Sawalhi while pursuing her undergraduate degree.

Khnaizir was no stranger to the United Nations, having participated in LAU’s Model UN program for four years, and serving as a member of the senior staff during the university’s two Global Model UN conferences in New York earlier this year. But working for his country’s UN outpost gave him an entirely new perspective.

One remarkable experience, he recalls, was attending the Security Council elections for its five non-permanent seats: “There was tension for the European seat because neither the Netherlands nor Italy got the votes needed to win. In the end, they took an unprecedented decision to split the two-year term. Witnessing the moment when the ambassadors shook hands and made that compromise was something I’ll never forget.”

Interns at the mission are given the opportunity to select an area to focus on, such as peacekeeping or refugees, and work closely

with the advisor in that area. They are given a UN badge that allows them to move freely around the Secretariat building, and are asked to attend meetings related to their focus, and report back.

“You get to have a voice and play a part in whatever they are doing,” Khnaizir said.

Lebanon’s Permanent Representative H.E. Mr. Nawaf Salam interacts with the interns, passing by to check on their work. He urges them to attend all of the UN meetings Lebanon is participating in. Interns are also encouraged to attend receptions, where they can rub elbows with diplomats from all over the world.

Thanks to LAU’s award-winning MUN program, students come to the internship well prepared. “When I go into a committee, I know how many members are going to be there, I know who the veto powers are in the Council, and I’m familiar with many of the UN resolutions,” adds Khnaizir.

As for a career in the field of diplomacy, he’s still deciding. But he knows his LAU Model UN experience, coupled with a hands-on internship in New York, will giving him the tools to succeed, no matter what path he chooses.

LAU NY ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Public Events

September 27: *Syria Resilient Series:* Poetry/Music Performance: “Stripped to the Bone: Portraits of Syrians”

October 6: *Syria Resilient Series:* Panel Discussion: “Syria’s Predicament and the U.S. Role”

October 25: Book Awards: “Honoring Writing from Little Syria to Today”

October 28: Film Screening: *Halal Love*

November 3: *Syria Resilient Series:* Music/Visual Art Performance: “Home Within”

Courses

September 5 – December 9: Arabic Language Courses

For more information, please contact:

Lina Beydoun, Academic Executive Director
(917) 720-8611, lina.beydoun@lau.edu

LAU alumni events



Toronto

The Toronto Chapter gathered for their “Annual Breakfast in the Park” on June 5 at the Lakefront Promenade Park in Ontario. It was a wonderful gathering of family and friends, and perfect weather to enjoy a breakfast picnic.

New York/New Jersey



Members of the NY NJ Chapter hosted a “Brunch on the Hudson” on May 15 at the Frying Pan, an historic boat moored at Pier 66 in Manhattan. Over 25 alumni and friends gathered for drinks and brunch and weathered a cool, windy NYC day on the Hudson River.

UPCOMING ALUMNI EVENTS

*Executive Director of Alumni Abdallah Alkhal will tour the following chapters with Ed Shiner:

September 18: Washington, D.C. Chapter gathering

September 22: Houston Chapter gathering with LAU Pharmacy students

September 23: Atlanta alumni gathering and establishment of Atlanta Chapter

September 25: Chicago Chapter gathering

September 26: Detroit Chapter gathering

October 2: NY/NJ Chapter excursion to Ellis Island – “Little Syria Exhibit”

If your alumni chapter has an upcoming event,
please notify:

Ed Shiner

Director of Alumni and Special Projects
(646) 255-1099, ed.shiner@lau.edu

Dr. Joseph G. Jabbara

President of Lebanese American University

and LAU New York

Would Be Honored By Your Presence at LAU's

5th Annual *Gala*

Friday, September 9, 2016

Metropolitan Club of New York, Fifth Avenue and 60th Street
Cocktail Reception 6:00 PM | Dinner 7:30 PM | Black Tie Invited

Please RSVP no later than **SEPTEMBER 6, 2016**

For tickets, please contact Ed Shiner, (646) 255-1099, ed.shiner@lau.edu

Special Honorees



Rosalind Elias
Renowned international
opera star



**Ambassador
Edward Gabriel**
Former ambassador to
Morocco and founding
member of ATFL



Joseph Maroun
Former member of
LAU Board of Trustees,
entrepreneur and
humanitarian



Emcee
ART Talk Show Host
Rita Zihenni



**Musical
Entertainment**
Lebanese-American
tenor Amine J. Hachem
and pianist
Brian Holman

Entertainment

Gala Committee (In Formation)

Dr. Corinne Chahine Chakhtoura
Ron Cruikshank
Nelly Adel El Najjar

Merva Faddoul
Eva Kotite Farha
Adib Kassis

Paige Kollock
Edward Shiner
Hiba Yazbeck Wehbe

A New Way to Give: IRA Rollover Investments

By Atty. Ron Cruikshank

As I’ve tried to emphasize in my previous two articles, planned giving primarily means smart giving, and smart giving definitely is for everyone, not just the wealthy. In this vein, we’ve already reviewed the importance of wills and estate planning, and we’ve discussed non-cash gifts such as real estate, artwork, collectables and other items of value.

The end of 2015 brought some more news for those who want to give in smart ways. On December 18, the U.S. Congress passed a bill that makes permanent the IRA Charitable Rollover.

Despite what you may have heard, the “rollover” is not complicated, and it isn’t just for the wealthy. For those of you who have an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), here are the quick facts:

- Once you reach age 70½, you must withdraw a federally mandated amount (a Minimum Required Distribution) from your IRA every year. This amount then becomes taxable as income.
- If you don’t need this money, you can avoid paying income taxes on it by designating that the Minimum Required Distribution (up to \$100,000) be sent directly from your IRA

to your favorite charitable organization (such as Lebanese American University).

It’s that simple. But, I also want you to understand that you do not get a charitable tax deduction on an IRA Charitable Rollover. Instead, your tax benefit comes from not having to pay income tax on the Minimum Required Distribution.

As is the case with most planned gifts, it’s wise to involve your attorney, tax consultant or IRA provider in your plans for making an IRA Charitable Rollover. The LAU Development Office can give you additional information, as well. Please also keep in mind that IRA rollovers typically take a few weeks. So, plan ahead – particularly if you’re intending to make a year-end gift.

Two final reminders:

1. It’s always a good idea to alert the recipient charity that your IRA rollover distribution is coming.
2. Be certain that the charitable institution you’re supporting issues you a formal gift receipt. You may need this for the IRS.

Ron Cruikshank is of counsel with Choate & Seletski. He is a former trustee of LAU and a current member of the Advisory Board of the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World.



Food and Identity

Continued from page 1

eventually teaming up with her brother Wissam to provide authentic foreign cuisine with a socially-responsible twist: Eat Offbeat only hires refugees as chefs.

“New Yorkers are not only hungry for new tastes, but also for a different narrative around immigration,” Kahi said.

For co-founders of the new fast-casual restaurant Semsom Eatery, sisters Carine Assouad and Christine Sfeir, heritage is key to defining their menu.

“We have recipes that are very innovative, but you will also see recipes from my grandmother, my mom, and some of my own,” Sfeir said.

Following the panel discussion, the audience was invited to sample everything from traditional manousheh and labneh to halawet el jibn to rosewater chocolates from local Lebanese restaurateurs, caterers and confectioners.

“If they started peace talks with a good meal, the talks would go so much better,” said Charlie Sahadi, owner of the iconic Sahadi’s Grocery in Brooklyn. “Food is the great equalizer—it makes you not any better than me and me not any better than you.”

This event was co-sponsored by the Consulate General of Lebanon in New York, and was made possible by a generous gift from Lloyd Baroody & Zeina Mehio.



Mini cones topped with Labneh from Semsom Eatery.



Thank You For Your Generous Support

Michael Ameen
Elie and Sally Andary*
Anonymous
Nicholas Audi
Tony Ayoub
Helen Badawi*
Monir and Hayat Barakat
Samira Baroody*
Lucinda A. Brown
Frederic Cadora*
Hala A. Choukair*
Rose M. Clark*
Mr. Robert Karl B. Cordahi*

Ron Cruikshank
Amb. Edward M. Gabriel
Waleed and Hannah
Gosaynie
Nuha Hababo
Sahar Habli*
Phillip Hanna
J. Randolph Hiller
Frieda Howling
Interaudi Bank
Dr. Nancy W. Jabbra
Dr. Shake K. Ketefian*
Don and Nancy Mafrige

Alberta S. Magzarian*
Raffi H. Makhouljian*
Ellis A. Mansour
Tony Mazraani*
Marguerite Boueri McLeod*
Elise Mills
Rita Saliba Nasr*
Rudayna Charrouf and
Nicholas Oliver*
Richard and Sharon Orfalea
Marla Rice-Evans
Dr. Markley Roberts

Dr. Rudolph and Odile
Rouhana
Rabih Salloum
Ferris and Lenore Saydah
Charlotte and Gilbert
Sheard*
Bilal H. Sleiman*
Mary Spence*
Fatme N. Toufaily*

* denotes alumni donors

This list includes donors from North America who have recently supported LAU



Hanadi **Chehabeddine**

Why did you choose to study at LAU?

I was drawn to the American system of education and the programs LAU offered. I knew I wanted to work in advertising. LAU only offered a minor in Advertising, so I chose Communication Arts, Radio/TV and Film and graduated with my BA in 1998.

How did you start doing the bridge-building work you do now?

When I came to the U.S., I had children and had to be home frequently. As a result, I ended up watching a lot of TV. When I saw how Muslims were portrayed, I got the idea about speaking up as a Muslim. I had previously done similar projects in the Middle East, mainly to empower the Muslim youth to be who they are, to share their

experiences, and not to limit the dialogue on Islam to just Muslim scholars. I started training with the Islamic Research Group, a Minnesota-based non-profit that offers education about Islam and fosters dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. I got certified by IRG and started speaking in schools and in community centers.

How has your work been received?

In May, I received the Human Rights Award from my city, Eden Prairie, MN, for my efforts to dismantle misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, and for building bridges of unity. I got a letter from my Congressman Erik Paulsen congratulating me on the award and offering help. When an attack happens on a global level, I reach out to

people and say, 'if you have questions please contact me.' People appreciate the fact that I come forward, rather than them coming to me. Muslims cannot afford to be silent, and cannot afford to be intimidated either. We do not hear enough Muslims speaking positively about their religion and their experiences.

How did LAU help you in your career path?

The encouragement I received from my professors, namely Dr. Dima Dabbous, had an everlasting effect on me. A professor saying the right things at the right time can really be a future for that person.