



Alumna Launches Breast Cancer Awareness Program

When alumna Hiba Yazbeck Wehbe '97 was diagnosed with stage two breast cancer in September 2015, she started reading voraciously. "At first, you're so scared, you start reading and asking 'why?'" The more I read, the more I learned that the disease is impacting an inordinate number of women in Lebanon."

Once she began telling people about her diagnosis, friends from Lebanon shared that they had a sister, a mother, a friend, who was also diagnosed. "Many were in late stages because they didn't do the test (mammogram) at all, or they did it too late," she said. "I discovered I had PCB in my blood and other types of metals that may have to do with living next to a war zone, or a landfill." With the garbage crisis in Lebanon, she knew an awareness campaign was sorely needed.

The incidence of breast cancer is rising, with 1.5 million women worldwide diagnosed each year (WHO, 2012). Breast cancer is the most widespread type of cancer among women in Lebanon, with a median age of 52.5 years at diagnosis (Ministry of Public Health, WHO & National Non-Communicable Diseases program, 2008). About 22% of the cases in Lebanon are diagnosed in women under the age of 40, whereas in that same age bracket, the figure is closer to 6% in Western populations.

"I decided I wanted to do something positive out of what I was going through," said Yazbeck, who with her husband, Chady Wehbe, gave the LAU Health Foundation about \$15,000 in cash and in-kind contributions to initiate a breast cancer awareness program in Lebanon.

Teaming up with Dr. Myrna Doumit (pictured above), associate professor of nursing at LAU, they created Courage to Fight Breast Cancer, a program focusing on getting information about the disease to women in rural areas of Lebanon.

The first clinic was held on November 29, 2016 in Deir Al Ahmar, a village in the Bekaa Valley near the Syrian border. Doumit drove five hours round-trip to hold the seminar, and was rewarded with a strong turnout of about 50. "Most of the women had never performed breast self-examination nor had a mammogram," she said, exactly the audience that Yazbeck had in mind in creating the program.

Other 2016 clinics were held in Akkar, North Lebanon and Kferkila,

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LAU academic center

Joseph Audi Study Abroad Program Gets New Scholar



New York City is now playing host to another LAU scholar. Second-year student Hassan Jebai (pictured left) is studying at Baruch College in Manhattan thanks to a generous scholarship from The Joseph and Claude Audi Charitable Foundation. Jebai, 19, is taking courses related to his major, economics, but also plans to take advantage of other academic offerings.

"I will take a literature course and a speech communication course," he said, "because these two will be more challenging in the U.S., and I want to expand my horizons."

The Joseph Audi Study Abroad Program was established in 2016 by Audi, chairman and CEO of Inter Audi Bank and a longtime friend of LAU. His vision was to have one LAU student per semester get a real 'New York experience' that would include not only a top notch academic education, but also the experience of living alone, meeting new people, and taking advantage of all New York City has to offer.

Jebai had long dreamt of studying in the States. Before enrolling at LAU, he applied to study in the U.S., but couldn't secure enough financial aid. This scholarship presented an ideal opportunity for him, and his 3.8 GPA rendered him a top candidate.

"Hassan is a high achieving student, very passionate about his major, independent, and adaptable which is a perfect combination for success abroad," said LAU International Services Associate Program Manager Dina Abdul Rahman.

"In my mind, New York conjures ideas like ambition, hard work, entrepreneurship and success," he said, noting that he hopes to attend graduate school in the U.S. or Canada after completing his studies at LAU.

Another Joseph Audi scholar will come to New York in the fall.

LAU NY ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Public Events

February 16: Book Talk: "Children of Paradise"

March 23: Book Talk: "Lebanon on Screen"

April 6: Panel Discussion/Tasting: "The Lebanese Olive Oil Industry"

Courses

January 23- April 29: Arabic Language Courses

June 19- June 20: Survey of Middle Eastern Music

For more information, please contact:

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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.

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Cover Photo: Dr. Myrna Doumit and the Courage to Fight Breast Cancer Clinic, December 2016



LAU Friends Host Syrian Refugee Family

In 2015, as the war in Syria flared, Lloyd Baroody and his wife Zeina Mehio were pondering what they could do to help. President Obama had just promised to admit at least 10,000 more Syrian refugees, and they thought, ‘why not host a Syrian refugee?’

Baroody had like-minded friends, so a group of about 10 people was formed in Salisbury, a small town in Connecticut 100 miles north of New York City where he and Mehio spend half their time. The group identified an organization called IRIS (Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services), which resettles refugees from various countries, not just Syria. After some back and forth between the group and IRIS, including a training session for the group in New Haven, Connecticut on how to host a refugee family, a family was identified. The group was told that a family was arriving in the US shortly, and it had just three days to decide whether to accept them. Nobody knew what they were getting into.

The group picked up the Al Ghanem family at JFK Airport on August 30, 2016. The family consists of the father Mahmoud, mother Alia, and six children (five of them girls) ages 11, 10, 9, 8, 6, 4, and 2. A seventh child, Maya, was born in the U.S. on November 22nd. The family hails from Aleppo – their house bombed to smithereens just one hour after they left Syria in

2013. They spent the next three years as refugees in Jordan struggling to make ends meet.

Mahmoud used to work in construction, and has more than 20 years of experience, but the family is poor. “He came with only one pair of shoes which were rubber sandals,” said Baroody. All but the eldest daughter are illiterate.

The Al Ghanems live in a house in Salisbury for \$1,000 a month including utilities, a heavily discounted price to which the landlord agreed. Baroody and a colleague chipped in to cover the first two months of rent, and there was some assistance from IRIS to pay for some subsequent months. For the rest of their needs, they rely on various forms of assistance from the state of Connecticut, as well as the time and good will of their hosts and the local residents.

“People in the town pitch in with babysitting, taking them and their kids to the doctor, someone takes them to the grocery store every week, and shows them how to use the food stamp card,” said Mehio. The Al Ghanems had to forgo eating Halal because the nearest Halal grocery store is over one hour away from Salisbury.

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LAU Friends Host Syrian Refugee Family

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Now just a few months after their arrival, they are slowly adjusting. The children are going to school and Mahmoud got a job at a restaurant where he washes dishes and mops floors. As the only fluent Arabic speaker in town, Mehio often receives frantic calls from Mahmoud and his employer each asking what the other one is trying to say. A recent misunderstanding between a restaurant employee and Mahmoud almost got him fired.

“I don’t know what he’ll do if he loses that job,” she said.

Salisbury lies within a predominantly white, Christian and affluent area of Northwest Connecticut, and the Al Ghanems are believed to be the first Muslims in the town. They face a long road of challenges ahead of them: learning English, getting driver’s licenses, catching up on years of lost schooling, raising six girls in a secular society, and combatting the incessant loneliness of having no family, friends, other Syrians, or even like-minded Arabs, around to talk to. Despite all that, they are grateful for a safe home, and welcoming neighbors.

With transcription and translation help from Mehio, they penned an open letter to the community in the local newspaper, in which Alia said, “It was remarkable to us that anybody, especially

people we didn’t know, would do so much for us without wanting something in return.”

Baroody and Mehio had the chance to share their experience hosting the Al Ghanems at LAU’s New York Academic Center on December 1, 2016, following the screening of “50 Feet from Syria.” During the Q&A portion of the evening, they shared the challenges and triumphs of their own personal experience, and encouraged those in the audience to do whatever they could to aid the Syrian people.

Hosting nine refugees and helping them become financially independent in a place where they know no one, don’t speak the language, and don’t understand the culture, is a sizable task. But Baroody says he knows the rewards will materialize with time.

“These kids are all going to have the chance to become doctors, lawyers, engineers ... rather than be married off at a young age,” he said, pointing out that the baby in the family, Maya Al Ghanem, who was born at the local Sharon Hospital, could even be president one day.

**Lloyd Baroody and Zeina Mehio are supporters of LAU’s New York Academic Center, and helped underwrite the Syria Resilient series in the fall of 2016.*

LAU alumni events

Montreal

On November 24, over 30 alumni from LAU, AUB, USJ, and NDU gathered at the W Hotel Square-Victoria to celebrate Lebanese Independence Day.



New York/New Jersey



On February 20, the New York/New Jersey Alumni Chapter committee members welcomed Associate Director of Alumni in Beirut, Ghada Majed, to New York. The group dined at Trattoria Trecolori in Manhattan’s Theater District.

Alumni Spotlight:

Nibal Rizk



Nibal Rizk attended Lebanese American University for both her undergraduate and medical school degrees. She spent the summer of 2011 as a research intern at MD Anderson in Houston, and returned in 2015 for a neuro-oncology elective. She also participated in a neuro-ICU (intensive care unit) elective at the University

of Chicago. She is currently a Neurology Resident at Emory University.

Why did you choose to study at LAU?

I grew up in El Koura, north of Lebanon, and graduated from high school with ambitions of pursuing medicine as a future career. Throughout its history, LAU has proven to be the leading university in Lebanon and the Middle East providing a way for ambitious young ladies to strive and pursue their dreams. The School of Medicine was newly established but had a promising future as its program was affiliated with world-renowned medical programs. I felt that it was one-of-a-kind in the area, encompassing highly innovative teaching methods and a state-of-the-art structure. LAU not only aims to be the best in what it delivers but also makes sure that it helps the best students reach their goals. LAU has long been known for the scholarships it offers, both for merit and for those with financial needs.

I still remember with clarity the day I received a phone call from LAU, informing me that I had received a full merit scholarship for my undergraduate studies. I went on to graduate with a B.S. in Biology with a 3.99 GPA in 2011, and applied to the School of Medicine. Once again, LAU offered me what no other university does, another merit scholarship that covered the tuition for all four years at the School of Medicine.

What do you think the benefits of an American-style education are in Lebanon, or in the Middle East in general?

I am currently finishing my first year as a post-graduate (PGY1) in internal medicine and will be going into neurology for the

next three years. The fact that LAU's School of Medicine program is so similar to the American system has given me a great advantage over many of the [non-LAU] international students, and has helped me cope easily with the transition into the US healthcare system. I look forward to being a neurologist who someday will be able to help her country and people by proving that knowledge has no gender or racial boundaries.

How do you feel that LAU has helped shape your career?

I can never be grateful enough to LAU. It has provided me with so much throughout the years. It has helped me to become a successful Lebanese doctor who is now pursuing a career in neurology at Emory, one of the top university hospitals in the United States of America. Not only has LAU provided me with an astounding education, but also it gave me the opportunity to develop in all aspects of life: including (but not limited to) politics with its democratic student life, arts with its various available courses, and social support with its diversity of student backgrounds. Almost a decade later, I look back and realize that LAU has given me degrees that will help me reach out to anywhere I desire in the world, knowledge that has helped me flourish among my peers, friendships that have lasted till this moment, and memories that will last me a lifetime. I only hope that one day I will have the chance to pay back my community and beloved LAU.

UPCOMING ALUMNI EVENTS

February 23: Detroit Alumni Chapter Professional Mixer at the Punchbowl in Detroit

March 11: New York/New Jersey Alumni Chapter Lebanese Party Night

April 1: Southern California Alumni Chapter Garden Party and Luncheon

April 29: Northern California Alumni Chapter Lecture and Reception

April 30: Seattle Alumni Chapter Hike and Lunch, Snoqualmie Falls

July 9: Toronto Alumni Chapter Annual Breakfast in the Park

July 11-16: Alumni Homecoming in Byblos and Beirut

September 10: Toronto Alumni Chapter Family Picnic

TBD: Florida Alumni Chapter Spring Gatherings

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

Anna Hopshe Mitchell Memorial Scholarship



Anna Hopshe Mitchell was born in El Mina, an island near Tripoli, Lebanon in 1892. She came to the U.S. at age four, settling in Newburgh, NY. She married another Lebanese-American at 16, had six children, and was pregnant with the seventh when her husband passed away from influenza. Now her granddaughter, Georgiana Elizabeth Mitchell, has chosen to honor her life and legacy with a scholarship given annually to a female student at LAU studying Social Sciences.

“After my grandfather died, my grandmother made arrangements with the local school that my father, George, the eldest, and his brother attend classes in the morning, and then leave school in the afternoon to work and support the family,” Mitchell said. “Education was of utmost importance. Grandma managed to get all seven kids through high school and her oldest daughter through teacher’s college. Later in her life, she became involved in local politics and the school board. I thought this was a special way to honor her legacy.”

A resident of New York State herself, Georgiana Mitchell has visited LAU’s New York Academic Center several times, attending public events and lectures there. When her son was

pondering studying Arabic abroad for the summer, she inquired about LAU Beirut’s Summer Institute for Intensive Arabic & Culture (SINARC), a six-week program that involves both classroom study, guest lecturers and cultural excursions. He enrolled in the summer of 2016, and she personally escorted him to Beirut, visiting her ancestral land for the very first time. “I needed my son’s education to give me the opportunity to visit,” she says.

“We selected LAU (for the scholarship) because of the fantastic experience my son had there. The program opened up a whole new part of the world to him,” she said, adding that the university’s history as a women’s college also encouraged her to choose LAU.

Her vision is for the recipient to be a civic-minded student, one who wants to lead and be a role model for her peers.

“Supporting women in the Middle East is very important to me,” she said. “Realizing the journey that my grandmother had, the hardship she faced, and seeing first-hand the hardship people in Beirut face now ... I’m just trying to support them in my small way.”

Breast Cancer Awareness Program

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South Lebanon, with 8-10 more planned for this year. A partnership with the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) allows Doumit to use their health clinics free of charge.

“The next step is to start training MOPH personnel in every location she (Doumit) goes to, so the villagers can come directly to the trainer with questions and concerns,” said Yazbeck.

In the coming years, she hopes to expand the program to incorporate lessons on nutrition, exercise, and mind-body alignment. Also in her sights are a mobile clinic, and the incorporation of volunteer students from LAU schools of Nursing, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Arts & Sciences, to reach as many places in Lebanon as possible.

So far, the clinics have been a great success.

“The audience participation and their eagerness to learn are proof of the great demand for this health education and awareness program in Lebanon, specifically in rural areas,” says Yazbeck. “We are helping women break the cultural boundaries that bind them from understanding and forming relations for their physical well-being.”

Let’s Say It Correctly!

- Alumna:** feminine singular
- Alumnae:** feminine plural
- Alumnus:** masculine singular
- Alumni:** masculine plural; also accepted plural for mixed genders

Vos scitis (now you know – Latin)



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Leona Mattoni

Leona Mattoni, a microbiologist by academic training, is now retired after serving for 16 years as Chief Administrator of the UCLA Brain Mapping Center. She is a former science faculty member of BCW (Beirut College for Women) where she taught from 1962-1964.

How did you end up teaching at BCW (now LAU)?

I was living in Colorado with my then-husband, who was very interested in living and teaching abroad. He applied to the Chemistry Department at AUB, but there was no opening, so we made plans to go on a Fulbright to Peru. Then, out of the blue, a letter came from AUB saying they had a position. Once we arrived in Beirut, I got a job at BCW as a biology and plant physiology teacher. I can't

imagine a 24-year-old walking in with no experience and being hired, but I taught there five semesters and loved every minute of it.

What did you enjoy about teaching at BCW?

I loved the international flavor of the student body. I had grown up in rural Colorado in a rather closed society, so Beirut was incredibly exciting for me. I had students from Iraq, Jordan, Armenia, we had one girl from Saudi Arabia, a couple from Pakistan, one Dutch, and a lot of Ethiopian students.

Do you have any special memories of BCW that stand out?

I have so many! One time, we had a mock Lebanese village wedding. The bride came in on a donkey, and we

had traditional food and dancing. It was fantastic. I used to take the girls horseback riding, I remember the May Day celebrations, which entailed a May pole, dancing and a May queen.

My husband and I used to take students on hikes on the weekends in the Barouk cedars. There was so much natural beauty and such a diversity of people.

How did the experience impact you?

It was a turning point in my life because I learned that not everyone thinks the same way. My experience living in Lebanon and working at BCW also gave me deep appreciation for how profoundly the family played a role in Middle Eastern culture.