

Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago

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MAHEBER Newsletter

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Dear Parents and families,

Although we haven't done a census tailored only for Ethiopians in Chicago and its vicinity, it's obvious that the population has grown by 10 to 15 fold since the inception of ECAC. The growth in population is the result of the suitability of the city for new immigrants; the friendly nature of the host population and mainly the welcoming assistance and support of the Ethiopian Community Association that makes it much easier to resettle for new immigrants from all over the world and all walks of life.

Vast majority of Ethiopian settlers establishes a family and raise their kids peacefully in their new home away from home. The number of graduating kids from different levels is increasing tremendously year after year. ECAC believes that the future and existence of ECAC and our country is dependent upon the value that we teach our children at their early stage so they can be productive. It's also incumbent upon us to bring all together to celebrate and honor the achievements of the graduates in order to have a positive impact on the younger kids.

This vision can only be achieved with the participation of parents. So, ECAC is requesting parents and families to forward the names of kids who are graduating from kindergarten, elementary, secondary school and Universities. We hope to get the names of all graduates for the year 2012 in advance to plan ahead and have a successful preparation for the ceremony.

Thank you,

Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago

Capital Campaign Commencement

Some four years ago, Ethiopian Community Association's leaders convened to explore the possibilities of a new place to host our expanding services and a venue to promote the rich Ethiopian heritage. New immigrants continued to arrive, but their needs had changed as they sought employment skills training, workforce literacy (as an expansion of our English as a Second language classes), and more resettlement services (such as housing referrals). Parents and children sought after-school, child care and youth programs as a structured alternative to the street.

By 2010, ECAC had begun the process of sharing our heritage by acquiring 1730 West Greenleaf as our new home. Greenleaf provides a central location for service delivery, cultural gatherings and a repository for Ethiopian arts, and the future addition of child care (a new agency program) and the ability to host cultural events.

The acquisition of 1730 West Greenleaf has also prompted us to undertake a \$2 million, three year effort to build the nation's first Ethiopian community and cultural center. Those wishing to donate are urged to visit www.ecachicago.org to ensure the well-being and stability of Ethiopian families.

Samuel Assefa, Senior Urban Designer for the City of Boulder, Colorado and a long-time member of the Ethiopian community, favors the new center because it is "realizable and the scale was not too overwhelming. Greenleaf helps to advance our goal to house new and expanding services as well as focus on sharing and developing the cultural aspect of being Ethiopian, and as a center for other African and immigrant populations to find a unique cultural space. Assefa, who fled his native Ethiopia in 1980, notes that "this building will now serve as a bridge to other communities, certainly throughout Chicago. And we would like to see other cities look at it as a model."

ECAC has already achieved some major milestones with the building, including roof replacement, masonry repair, the build-out of offices, a secure space for the cultural collection and, most recently, property tax exemption. Perhaps the most valuable asset has been the pro-bono services of Perkins + Will, which is among Chicago's largest and most celebrated architectural firms. Perkins + Will chose ECAC in 2010 as part of its social responsibility program in Chicago where it donates 1% of its billable time to local charities.

The firm has developed an innovative design for 1730 West Greenleaf, calling for staff offices and the Ethiopian cultural collection to be housed on the 2nd floor, along with a meeting space to accommodate about 160 people. The 1st floor would also accommodate staff offices, along with a proposed child care center and small meeting rooms. The lower level would feature storage for furniture and household goods to shelter refugees and immigrants and a center for literacy, computer and job training.

According to Perkins + Will architect John Schweder - "the idea was to see if we could help out in the planning process. Our first order of business was to come up with a scope document (for budgeting purposes), but also to develop full-scale drawings to promote the marketing of the community and cultural center. Right now, we have entered the value engineering phases, deciding what ECAC really

needs for this project, and what we can live without." Concludes Schweder: "My knowledge of the association and what it does has also grown. It's amazing what they are able to do with limited resources - a place to help you learn the language, getting your first job, helping family members through this process. It's great to know that our work will be a part of the growth of the Ethiopian community."



ECAC Fire

On Monday, June 6th, our agency was afflicted with an electrical fire. The electrical company, ComED, promptly responded to the fire by sending trained technicians to the agency to cut the lights. Though work for many of our staff

members who needed access to a telephone or computer was delayed due to the week-long loss of electrical power, we are all very blessed that the fire was quickly contained, thus ensuing in minimal damage, and that the hazard occurred during non-working hours when clients or staff could not have been harmed. Following the fire, Yohannes Tegegne, our employment manager and EMAT instructor, held a brief fire safety course for the staff.

ECAC bids Zeleke farewell

On June 10th, 2011, ECAC Staff and past and current board members gathered to bid Zeleke Gessesse farewell. Zeleke has chosen to move back to Ethiopia, taking with him the Wild Hare establishment. The Wild Hare has also been an integral part of the Chicago community, a beacon for Ethiopians and a landmark entertaining reggae lovers living in and visiting Chicago for the last 25 years. On Sunday May 15th, a full house of fans said their farewell to the Wild Hare during one last night of live reggae. We will miss you both and we look forward to visiting Wild Hare Ethiopia in the future.

Zeleke's support of the Ethiopian community in Chicago will also be missed. In addition to being a committed ally to ECAC and a consistent donor to Chicago's Blue Nile Ethiopian Soccer Team, Zeleke was instrumental in facilitating the Blue Nile Scholarship Program through Ann Lurie and Robert H. Lurie Foundation, which provided financial support for 5 Chicago Blue Nile soccer players to

attend colleges and universities. Three of those original 5 recipients have since graduated.

ECAC extends its gratitude to a great friend and wishes him much success in this planned endeavor.



The African Refugee Crisis in Libya

It can take volumes to recount the long and horrific journey African refugees had to brave throughout time. Immediately after independence in the 1960s, the African refugee crisis went unabated and every

year since, the humanitarian and population displacement crisis changes from one region to another. In the earlier times, Southern Africa attracted the most attention for its very visible crisis. But by the late 1970s, unrest befell Eastern Africa, particularly Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan. Turmoil later struck Western Africa, hitting Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria particularly hard. It then shifted back to Eastern Africa, mainly targeting Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. But after the Algerian War of Independence, Northern Africa remained relatively calm. Other African regions also saw a refugee crisis, though at reduced levels.

Fast forward several decades and Sub-Saharan immigrants and refugees have since suffered many hardships on their journeys to Yemen and Libya. While many seek better economic opportunities in Libya, others make Libya a transition point to Europe, where they are in pursuit of freedom and a more secure lifestyle. For many Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Somali youths who were able to cross the burning Sahara desert, they faced time in prison where they were locked up, mistreated and beaten, while women had to endure the emotional and physical pain of rape. Only after such abuses are do some finally manage to board a boat taking them either to Italy or Malta.

As the North African uprising commenced in Tunisia, civil war erupted in Libya, and then, even the precarious life that the migrants knew, disappeared. Migrants became trapped in their

host countries when embassies closed and Libyan landlords evicted the African tenants, leaving them with no way home. Bishop Giovanni Martinelli, the Italian cleric who runs the Tripoli church reported that the UNHCR were alarmed by reports of increasing violence and discrimination against the sub-Saharan Africans who were caught up in Libya's conflict. East African refugees and West African immigrants sent SOS messages to their governments, International community, families, and friends. Although many African governments responded to the call and rescued some immigrants, the cry for help fell upon deaf ears regarding the cases of the Eritrean, Somali, and Ethiopian refugees. It was at this critical point that some Ethiopian refugees contacted ECAC for help. It is to our regrets that our efforts in helping rally their plight to authorities, Ethiopian Diaspora and humanitarian agencies not accrue the results necessary to save more lives.

Therefore, In order to save themselves, African migrants flocked to the Mediterranean, where they paid smugglers between \$2,000 and \$3,000 to cross. Migrants spend years scraping together the money for the fees by washing windows, baking bread and cleaning dirty streets around the Libyan capital and surrounding cities. The refugees' journey across the Mediterranean could be characterized as "**jumping from the pan to the fire**" because hundreds of refugees lost their lives in the high sea.

At this point, we would like to share some true stories of some of the immigrants who have risked their lives on this dangerous journey. These heart-wrenching stories told from survivors put to test the moral standards and behavior of humanity. The inhumane neglect of these migrants brings to question the humanitarian conduct of our civilization.

On May 10, 2011, Vivienne Walt wrote "Did NATO Pilots leave 72 Africans to die at sea off Libya?" The survivors, whose story was broken in Britain's *Guardian* newspaper, told of a group of 72 African migrants-men, women, and children- from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Nigeria, who were left drifting on the Mediterranean for 16 days in late March and early April. The migrants watched as their water and food supplies steadily dwindled as the days passed. The supplies had been dropped onto their boat, they said, by a helicopter marked "ARMY," after its Ghanaian captain had called a refugee organization in Rome for help. The survivors said that a helicopter pilot signaled to the passengers that a rescue vessel was on its way, but the rescue vessel never arrived. Days later, two

helicopters lifted off a nearby warship- believed by *Guardian* reporters to have been France's Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier- and flew low over the refugee boat. In desperation, the passengers held up the two babies onboard, but the pilots ignored the plea and flew away.

One by one, the passengers died of starvation as the boat drifted across the Mediterranean, until only 10 were left alive. "Every morning we would wake up and find more bodies, which we would leave for 24 hours and then throw overboard," Abu Kurke, an Ethiopian survivor, told the *Guardian*. By the end, he said, "Everyone was either praying or dying."

The tragedy of the 72 migrants who died at sea was just one incident within a mounting death toll of Africans who risk the trip across the Mediterranean. But what made the fate of the passengers of the 72 migrants on the boat from Tripoli especially troubling was the claim that they were spotted on two occasions by coalition aircraft. "There was an abdication of responsibility," said Moses Zerai, a Rome-based Eritrean priest called upon by the boat captain for help before his satellite telephone's battery went dead.

On June 20th, 2011, The United Nations Human Rights Council called for a comprehensive inquiry into several claims relating to the rescue of migrants. Despite the alleged ability of ships in the vicinity to rescue sinking boats, the migrants and asylum-seekers fleeing unrest in North Africa were abandoned to their fate at sea anyways, resulting in myriads of lost lives.

Other high sea calamities reports are:

An estimate of about 800 African migrants have drowned trying to flee the conflict, according to U.N refugee officials.

Two separate boats, each believed to have been carrying hundreds of people each, have vanished at sea.

On April 6th, about 250 people drowned when their boat sank off the Italian island of Lampedusa.

Early last month, the U.N High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that nearly 600 people may have drowned when a boat broke off the coast of Libya.

In a resolution adopted by the U.N Human Rights Council in Geneva, the body grieved for the hundreds of people, mostly

Africans, who have lost their lives at sea. Accounts of survivors and family members also state that more than 1,200 other bodies remained unaccounted for.



World Refugee Day Chicago 2011

World Refugee Day was held this year at Loyola University Chicago's Mundelein Auditorium. With over 400 refugees representing various agencies in attendance, including Heartland Alliance, Catholic Charities, Refugee One, World Relief and ECAC, the theme is most appropriately selected as "A New Home in Chicago." In addition to singing and dancing, there were also some amazing spotlight stories accompanied with photographs of some of the refugees at the event.

Hung along the hallway and in the back of the auditorium were posters from the art contest held for our honored guests. Different age groups submitted their posters of what it meant to be home and the winners' posters were proudly displayed among the spotlight stories in the auditorium. Agencies such as the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago, Refugee One, Golden Door Coalition, Loyola Refugee Outreach, Heartland Alliance Human Services, Heartland Alliance Heartland Health, and World Relief, also set up tables with information about the programs offered at their agencies to educate and intrigue the community members who attended the event. ECAC had numerous posters and pamphlets displaying our programs, such as the EMAT training, Health Outreach, Job Development, ESL classes and our After School Program.

This year's event was a great success and we have indeed, achieved our goal of helping our community members feel at home right here in Chicago.

**Summer Camp Program
and
EAKC Heritage Camp**



Summer Camp Program

From July 5th to August 26th, the ECAC will be hosting an 8- week long Summer Camp. The program exposes children to the different educational benefits of art, science, math, reading, Amharic and Ethiopian History. The children will also be taught traditional Ethiopian dances as well as have a chance to watch movies, play soccer, swim, garden, and attend fieldtrips to the Zoo, museums, and etc. Guest speakers will also give educational speeches to the youths in the program.

EAKC Heritage Camp

On Friday, July 29th- Sunday, August 1st, the EAKC will be hosting their annual Heritage Camp. EAKC (Ethiopian-American Kids Community) is an organization created by parents who have adopted Ethiopian children. This camp will help Ethiopian children and their American parents learn more about Ethiopia and the merging of the Ethiopian and American cultures. The EAKC hopes to see more Ethiopians attend this year's Camp. Any and all support will be greatly appreciated.

If you are interested in attending, please register online at www.eakc.org. Registration closes on July 8th. If you would like to attend one day only (Saturday), you will only need to pay \$10.00 per person. The cost will cover breakfast, lunch, and an Ethiopian dinner. If you have registered for 3 children, you will not be charged for any additional children. Traditional Ethiopian clothing is preferred for Saturday attendance.

If you would like more information about the program and the activities at the Camp, please visit www.eakc.org or call M'aza Dowling-Brown at 773-508-0303 ex. #118 from Monday to Friday 9:00 am-5:00 p.m



ECAC Annual Picnic

The ECAC invites all community members to our annual picnic on August 6th at the Foster beach from 12:00 p.m - 7.00 p.m. There will be a variety of foods, drinks, music, games, and activities to entertain kids and young adults. We look forward to seeing you all there.

We hoped you had enjoyed this edition of the MAHEBER Newsletter. Thank you for your time and we look forward to sharing our upcoming news and events with you.

Sincerely,

ECAC

Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago

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