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Staten Island's Muslim Americans to be honored at Wagner College

by TOM WROBLESKI

The borough's Muslim American community on Monday will be feted for its five decades of civic and business involvement here, during a celebration marking Staten Island Immigrant Heritage Week at Wagner College.

The program, "Muslim Americans of Staten Island: Leaders & Neighbors for 50 Years" features an awards ceremony hosted by Borough President James P. Molinaro, a photo exhibit, a panel discussion with Muslim leaders and a song and dance exhibition.

"I really want this exhibit to tell our stories," said Noor Hussein, a student organizer of the event and president of the Wagner College Muslim Student Association, "from our parents or grandparents or great-grandparents migrating to New York to us in college now working to be active and successful members of our respective communities."

The program will open at 5:30 p.m. with a reception in the Horrmann Library's Spotlight Gallery, where a photo exhibit will highlight the story of the borough's diverse Muslim community.

The exhibition combines contemporary images by photographer Willie Chu with family and historic photos highlighting 50 years of Staten Island's Pakistani, Albanian, West African and Palestinian Muslim communities.

"This is a country of immigrants who, once they see opportunities, will not stop working," said Shah Hamim Syed of Pakistan, owner of Turkish Seaside Restaurant, South Beach, one of those photographed for the exhibit.

A musical and dance performance will then be held in Spiro Hall 2, followed by a panel discussion with Muslim business and community leaders, including businessmen Jawaid Syed and Ismet Capric, Dr. Shamim Salman, former Marine Ahmed Kargbo and College of Staten Island student Islam Allen.

The panel will be moderated by Ameena Ghaffar-Kucher, associate director of international education at the University of Pennsylvania and an expert on Muslim youth and education.

The program will conclude at 7:30 p.m., when Molinaro presents awards recognizing exemplary service to the Island's immigrant community. Dr. Salman Zafar will be honored with the "Outstanding Immigrant Award," while Gene Prisco will receive the "Lavelle Award for Immigrant Advocacy."

Staten Island Immigrant Heritage Week is co-sponsored by the Wagner Muslim Student Association; Wagner's history department and Center for Intercultural Development; the Albanian Islamic Cultural Center; the Staten Island Immigrants Council, and the Council on the Arts and Humanities of Staten Island: Folklife.

The program is part of the 9th annual New York City Immigrant Heritage Week.

For more information about the Wagner event, email LRWeintr@wagner.edu, or call 718-390-3309.