

Profile of Bosnian Cultural and Education Center

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Address

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History

Most of the members of the small Bosnian community in Portland came here as refugees between 1992 and 1997, during the civil war that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia. Church-sponsored-refugee programs, such as the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (SOAR), played a key role in accommodating Bosnian refugees in Portland. This group of refugees formed a tight-knit community in southeast Portland. During these years, there were no major social outlet – save for a Bosnian soccer team and occasional social events — for Bosnians in Portland.

During Ramadan in 2002, some members of the Bosnian community rented a space for prayer and social activities. After this, they decided that they need a more permanent social center. Shortly thereafter, the Bosnian Cultural and Education Center was founded. The Center began operation with approximately 50 families. It now reports an approximate membership of 100 families.

Activities

The center is located in a storefront in a commercial area. It functions as both a cultural and religious center; rarely is the entire space used for religious activity. The center has a main lounge in which social activities take place. Here, there are tables, chairs, a pool table, and a television. In this lounge, casual socializing as well as group meetings take place.

The lounge leads into a wide corridor that separates two big rooms. One room is a prayer room in which men and women both pray. Men pray in front while women pray in the back. In this room there is a small collection of religious books. The most prominent are copies of the Qur'an in Bosnian. Friday congregational prayers take place in this room and are most often led by the president of the center, who also lectures regularly on religious subjects on Sunday evenings. The other room serves as a recreation room during religious events for kids and those who choose not to participate in worship. It holds a television, tables, and chairs. Down the hallway, there is a kitchen, a storeroom, a bathroom, and an oversized sink that is used for ablution.

Several members take responsibility for opening and closing the center. It is open for Friday congregational prayers. It is also open on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. Activities during these evenings include socializing, ritual prayers, youth meetings, occasional lectures, potlucks, and a Bosnian language school. Bosnian is the main language used for all activities at the center.

During Ramadan, the center is open throughout the week. Eid prayers are performed at the center, while most other Muslims in Portland perform Eid prayers at the Convention Center under the auspices of the Islamic Center of Greater Portland.

Management

A board of directors and a president manage the center. Once a year, all community members are invited to an assembly. Here, members are nominated for the board and voted on. Currently, there are nine board members. Members volunteer to coordinate the center's activities. Two or three volunteers undertake leadership roles for religious activities. They lead prayers and give lectures. The current president of the center, however, leads the lion's share of religious activities at the center.

The Bosnian Cultural and Education Center has a membership fee, which it does not enforce vigilantly. It asks members for monthly donations for the operation of the center.