

Vancouver Profile – version 3 – Aug 13 2004
Islamic Center of Southwest Washington

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This profile was researched and written by student Muntasir Sattar of Reed College, under the direction of Dr. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri.

The Islamic Center of Southwest Washington (ICSW) is based in a commercial-industrial area of Vancouver, just across the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon. The economy and social life of Vancouver, WA are in many ways tied to Portland; it is not unusual for residents of one city to work in the other. There are many activities in Portland in which members of ICSW participate. Further, there are some Muslims in Portland who work in Vancouver and frequent the ICSW. However, the Center generally services the 100 families or so in Vancouver who associate with it and rely on it for Sunday school, congregational prayers, and the officiating of marriage contracts.

Demographics

The Vancouver Muslim community is largely made up of immigrants who, starting in the late 1970s, came from the Middle East, South Asia, and more recently (in the 1990s), from the Balkans.

History

Vancouver Muslims at one time relied solely on mosques and Islamic centers in Portland. By the mid-1990s, a small group of Muslims in the Vancouver area rented a space in the Bagley Community Center in downtown Vancouver for Friday congregational prayer. A year later, Muslims rented an office, again in downtown Vancouver, for evening prayer and Sunday school. The decision to establish a mosque was made on a Friday that fell on 4th of July. The community center, which they rented, was closed and the Muslims were unable to perform their congregational prayer. In 1997, they leased a house which they converted into a mosque and community center. This involved refurbishment and consultation with Islamic scholars in order to set the direction for prayer (towards Mecca). In the late 1990s, the center began to be used for Sunday school and other community gatherings.

The founding of ICSW was facilitated by the proximity of the Portland Muslim community as evidenced by their fundraising efforts in Portland. The community has recently purchased a house on a large lot on which it plans to build a permanent Islamic center.

Description

There is an entrance for both men and women on the ground floor of the mosque. The first floor has several spacious rooms that are fully carpeted and a kitchen. Friday prayers and educational events take place on the first floor. The women's prayer room is also on the first floor.

Activities

The Center is generally open for Friday prayers as well as early morning and evening prayers during the week and on weekends. Friday prayer draws up to 100 persons to the center, mostly men. On Sunday mornings, a Sunday school is held. Religious activities are led by volunteers. The Center does not have an imam. Friday prayers are led by one of five regular volunteers, none of whom have formal religious training. The ICSW organizes Eid prayers at a local community center.

The events of 11 September 2001 spurred the ICSW members of the community to become more involved in the Vancouver and Portland communities. ICSW now has relationships with the local media in Washington and Oregon (e.g. the *Columbian*, the *Oregonian*). The Center fields questions and inquiries about Islam from members of the public and from the press. Periodically, it hosts open houses for neighbors. Members of the ICSW are involved in police advisory and oversight in Vancouver as well as in Portland. They are also engaged in interfaith activity in both cities. They host interfaith visitors, some of whom have attended the Center for the breaking of fast during Ramadan. Members of the center have also visited synagogues and churches in both cities. They also periodically visit Muslims in hospitals and prisons.

Management

Membership in the ICSW is not strictly monitored. However, new attendees at ICSW may fill out their contact information in order to be in touch with news and activities at the mosque. The day-to-day management of the Center falls on the shoulders of four volunteers who sit on the Board of Directors as president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. The smaller Board of Trustees, constituted by three different members, is more involved in the long term planning of the Center. There are annual elections for the positions on the Board of Directors.