

Travel ban impacting local refugee resettlement efforts

By CASEY CHAFFIN
Keizertimes Intern

In the two and a half years since the Salem-Keizer area became a new Oregon hub of refugee resettlement, 220 refugees have been resettled in the area. Refugees, who often arrive in family units, have been aided in their transition to a new country and a new life by Salem for Refugees, a local volunteer organization dedicated to providing support to incoming refugees, or, as co-director of SFR Anya Holcomb refers to this burgeoning community within our community, "our new neighbors."

For resettlement non-governmental organizations (NGO) that receive funding from the government to provide services for new arrivals, immigration changes have cut deeply into budgets and staffing. But for a volunteer-run organization like Salem for Refugees, "The main practical implication for us is the decrease in numbers," Holcomb said.

Since founding the organization in response to a need for support for refugees beyond that offered by governmental agencies and NGOs, Holcomb has seen the flow of refugees to the community change based on policies coming from the Trump Administration. Since President Donald Trump took office, the yearly quotas for refugee resettlement have been slashed—according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in 2016, the last year of the Obama Administration, almost 79,000 refugees from around the world departed to be resettled in the U.S. In 2017, the first year of the Trump Administration, the number of resettlement departures fell to under 25,000.

The lower quotas, paired with three iterations of a travel ban on certain countries, have also impacted Salem for Refugees' and other resettlement or-

ganizations' ability to welcome "new neighbors."

The third and latest version of the travel ban—which the Supreme Court ruled in June to be constitutional and therefore permanent policy for the meantime—restricts admission of refugees and immigrants from Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen. Critics of the ban have derided it as a dressed-up ban on Muslim immigration and refugee resettlement.

Those working in the field of refugee resettlement have found that it targets the system as a whole, considering some of the world's largest producers of refugees are on the list.

Holcomb, who says she's just about lost track of the countries impacted by the shifting travel ban policy over the past year and a half, has seen the effect of the travel ban on their organization. For a solid four months during one iteration of the ban, Salem for Refugees didn't receive any new families at all.

Over the two and a half years of the Salem area's resettlement program, Salem for Refugees has welcomed refugees from nine countries: Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic. However, since the first implementation of the travel ban, the demographic of new arrivals has shifted. The organization now receives virtually no Mid-

dle Eastern refugees, who are often Muslim.

"Since the travel bans have taken effect all of our families are from Africa, particularly the Democratic Republic of Congo," Holcomb said. And the short breaks that have separated different iterations of the travel bans hasn't changed that; even when the travel ban hasn't been in effect, people from Middle Eastern countries still aren't getting into the United States in large numbers.

In addition to added restrictions from the travel ban and quotas, additional "security measures" have been implemented since the onset of the Trump Administration for refugees awaiting resettlement in the U.S., making the refugee screening process—which already took upwards of two years prior to 2017—even longer.

Even with refugee-negative policy coming from the highest branches of government, Holcomb remains positive. "We've just tried to really stay focused on loving and supporting the families who do come," she said.

At press time, there are 270 Salem for Refugees volunteers supporting 17 refugee families in the Salem-Keizer area. Salem for Refugees hosts open meetings for new and continuing volunteers on the first Monday of every month from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Salem Alliance Church. For more information on getting involved, visit SalemForRefugees.org.

Community garden needs help to go solar

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The coordinators behind Keizer's Rickman Community Garden are looking to make it even more self-sufficient.

Earlier this spring, Peggy Moore took to social media to ask for donations of flower starts and pots to add to the garden, then she decided to get bold.

"I put a request up asking for a greenhouse and, within a few days, I had two offers," Moore said.

Now, Peggy and her husband, Jerry, are looking to take the greenhouse solar. Last week, the couple received \$1,270 in matching grant funds from the Keizer Parks Advisory Board to make it happen, but Peggy said the group is still about \$1,000 short of making it happen. The total cost to install six solar panels on an adjacent shed to fuel the greenhouse is about \$2,500.

Jerry said a bid he received to purchase and install the equipment came within \$150 of what it would cost to buy the materials alone at a local hardware store.

"But a lot of contractors don't want to do a project this small," said Jerry. "Adding electricity to the greenhouse will power a fan to control the temperature in the summer and a heater in the winter."

Peggy already has a number of plans for how a solar-powered greenhouse would transform what the garden already does.



"The plants we get from the Marion-Polk Food Share are leftovers from the big box stores and they aren't always in the best shape or we don't get the varieties we want," she said. Being able to raise anything gardeners desire from seed will expand the possibilities exponentially.

With enough lead time, she would even like to see the garden host a give-away of vegetable and flower starts to home-based gardeners each year.

The garden currently has 17 plots and all are currently in use by members, but several of the plots serve large families. Peggy estimated that there are between 80 and 100 people who eat directly from the Rickman garden's produce, but surplus goes to local organizations like Simonka Place, a women's shelter, on River Road North.

If you would like to contribute to the solar effort in some way, contact the Moores at moore5881@comcast.net.

puzzle answers

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ATRIA	TYNE	ADIN							
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	ILLE	ETERNE							
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ARIA	ONYX	RIGOR							
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ELIDE	REDO	AURA							
	ALBAN	DUSTIN							
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LAIC	FOLKS	SINGER							
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ODER	RENA	HALOS							
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