

Jewish residents upset when town removes menorah, keeps tree

LAKEWOOD, N.J. (AP) — Some residents of a Jewish enclave in New Jersey are upset that officials removed a menorah from the town square and kept the Christmas tree.

Lakewood has displayed a decorated tree and small menorah for decades.

Mayor Albert Akerman told the *Asbury Park Press* on Wednesday that this year resident Vivian Knight sought to add a nativity scene to the holiday display in the Town Square and that she threatened to sue if the request wasn't approved.

"She wanted to make the distinction that the menorah is a religious symbol and the tree is not," Akerman said.

Knight could not be reached for comment on Wednesday.

Township Attorney Steven Secare reviewed the matter and recommended removing the menorah, as well as one displayed in the town hall, until he could look into an alternative display.

"Why cause litigation when it's costly and time-consuming for everybody?" Secare said Wednesday. "The easiest thing to do was take it down for a year."

The tree remains up because it is not considered a religious symbol under the law.

A Jewish businessman who owns a toy store and frozen yogurt shop in the township, however, said the decision leaves the township promoting Christianity. It makes no sense that a menorah is a problem in Lakewood "of all places," Harold Herskowitz said.

"The way it was set up in Town Square was fine. The fact that we're this Jewish town and have this massive Christmas tree and there's this little teeny menorah is a little weird, but it's fine. I was never going to say a word."

Now, Herskowitz said the community will call for an even bigger menorah next year.

"There should be a 30-foot menorah on Town Square," he said. "It's ridiculous."

BRIEFLY

Newlyweds share at Aglow

WALLA WALLA — Mykel Johnson and Nola Thrasher, a couple who were married last month will share their testimony on how God brought them together during the upcoming Walla Walla Aglow.

Finishing up a year with a focus on "preparing the bride," the meeting is Saturday from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Whitman Court, 305 Ash St., Walla Walla. A freewill offering will be taken for the event, which includes lunch. In addition, to celebrate the holidays, a Chinese auction will be held with each person receiving a gift.

Aglow, which started in 1967, is an international organization that seeks to minister to its members and share God's word in the community. Everyone is welcome to attend.

For more information, call Paula McKee at 509-220-1408 or Darya Tucker at 509-876-1668. For more about Aglow, visit www.aglow.org.

Nazarene church plans Christmas caroling

HERMISTON — All aboard, the Hermiston Church of the Nazarene is embarking on a Christmas

caroling tour.

A bus has been rented and people will head out Wednesday at 6 p.m. from the church, 1520 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston. After caroling, participants will return to the church for hot chocolate and cookies.

For more information, contact 541-567-3677 or hermistonnaz@gmail.com.

M-F church hosts concert, children's program

MILTON-FREEWATER — An evening of fellowship, music and performances by children is planned at the Milton-Freewater First Christian Church.

The music concert and children's program is Sunday at 6 p.m. at 518 S. Main St., Milton-Freewater. The free program is open to the public.

For more information, call 541-938-3854.

U.S. Muslim women debate safety of hijab amid backlash

By RACHEL ZOLL
AP Religion Reporter

NEW YORK — On the night of the California shootings, Asifa Quraishi-Landes sat on her couch, her face in her hands, and thought about what was ahead for her and other Muslim women who wear a scarf or veil in public.

The covering, or hijab, often draws unwanted attention even in the best of times. But after the one-two punch of the Paris and San Bernardino attacks by Islamic militants, and amid an anti-Muslim furor stoked by comments of Donald Trump, Quraishi-Landes, an Islamic law specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, wanted to send a message.

"To all my Muslim sisters who wear hijab," she wrote on her Facebook page. "If you feel your life or safety is threatened in any way because of your dress, you have an Islamic allowance (darura/necessity) to adjust your clothing accordingly. Your life is more important than your dress."

Amid a reported spike in harassment, threats and vandalism directed at American Muslims and at mosques, Muslim women are intensely debating the duty and risks related to wearing their head-coverings as usual.

Sites for Muslim women have posted guidance on how to stay safe. Hosai Mojaddidi, co-founder of the educational group MentalHealth4Muslims, drew nearly 4,000 likes for her Facebook post advising women to "pull out those hooded sweatshirts, beanies, hats and wraps for a while until the dust settles."

Muslimgirl.net posted a "Crisis Safety Manual for Muslim Women," with tips such as wearing a turban instead of a longer more obviously religious scarf and carrying a rape whistle.

Muslim women in several cities are organizing or taking self-defense classes. The ad for one such class in New York features a drawing of a covered woman in a karate stance.

"We're getting so many calls," said Rana Abdelhamid,



AP Photo/Asim Tanveer

Hifza Batool, a relative of Tashfeen Malik, talks to The Associated Press at her home in the town of Karor Lal Esam, about 280 miles southwest of Islamabad, Pakistan on Saturday.

22, founder of the Women's Initiative for Self-Empowerment, which offers self-defense and empowerment classes in several cities for young Muslim and Jewish women who face harassment.

Abdelhamid, a New York native attending the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, said she had studied karate since childhood and started offering self-defense classes for women after a man tried to pull off her headscarf when she was 16 years old.

"Even now when I think about that moment — I

have a lot of anxiety moving through the streets to this day — especially with all of the hateful rhetoric because, I don't know, is it going to happen again?" she said.

The question of whether to wear the hijab is already deeply sensitive for Muslim women. Scholars have debated for years whether women have a religious obligation to dress a particular way. And Muslims disagree over whether the hijab is a symbol of piety or oppression.

Women who wear a scarf or veil say they have many motivations for doing so, including demonstrating devotion to their faith and showing pride in their religious heritage. Their decision makes them among the most visible representatives of Islam, in a way that men with beards aren't. Well before the latest uproar, it was common for American Muslim women wearing the hijab to be stared or cursed at, or have strangers tug at their scarves.

Now, many Muslim women say this is the exact moment when they need to make their presence known by wearing the hijab without any modification as an act of defiance.

Suehaila Amen, a community activist in Dearborn Heights, Michigan, said that was the reaction from women she knows around Detroit. Amen said she would never take off her headscarf, but said she has the advantage of living in an area with one of the largest concentrations of Arabs and Muslims in the country.

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