

## ▣ Multiculturalism as it's meant to be

### *Program has Canadian Jewish community helping Canadian Somali community*

By Eric Heino



**A PARTNERSHIP IS BORN: Mark Persaud (left), Howard English and other organizers of the Jewish-Somali Project share a laugh at the program's launch.**

With racial and religious conflict storming through the world, the Bayview Mills community has been given a chance to stand out as a beacon of hope.

On Oct. 28 the Jewish-Somali Project, the first project of its kind between the Canadian Muslim and Jewish communities, was launched by a quartet of diverse groups and spearheaded by the Canadian International Peace Project.

Its president and CEO Mark Persaud explained the main focus of the project is to help Somali youth find meaningful employment, which is often difficult for refugees new to Canadian culture.

“As a relatively new refugee community fleeing the civil war in Somalia, the Canadian Somali community has many challenges as they seek to establish themselves in Canada and provide a bright future for their youth,” said Persaud. “Being poor, black and Muslim adds to these challenges.”

Persaud had been involved in other projects involving the Somali community and understood their need for mentorship. He met with the Canadian Jewish Congress to begin discussions on ways they could reach out to Somalis.

The result was the Jewish-Somali Project.

With assistance from the Canadian Somali Congress, the Canadian Jewish Congress and the United Jewish Appeal of Greater Toronto, the project will pair young Somali professionals and university students with mentors from the Jewish community. The idea is these youth will be given a helping hand and be able to teach the next generation.

Persaud says the project should make Canadians proud.

“It is the first time that these two very diverse Canadian communities are embracing each other,” he said. “The fact that one is Jewish and the second is one of Canada’s largest Muslim communities should remind us how lucky we are to be Canadians.”

And the benefits are not just one-sided.

“By working towards the betterment of another community we are strengthening the city and the country as a whole, and we are strengthening the Jewish community as well,” said Howard English, Vice President of Corporate Communications for the United Jewish Appeal of Greater Toronto.

His organization’s job is to find mentors and he says there is a great deal of interest.

“So far a number of people have already volunteered to be mentors in a number of fields,” he said. “We are now in the midst of spreading the word about mentorship possibilities to the community.”

Despite cultural and religious differences he said building bridges across common ground is needed to strengthen the relationship between communities.

“Those who are mentors will gain a tremendous insight into the challenges of a newer community,” English said. “(The Somali community) is much the same as the Jewish community was decades ago.”

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