

# THE AFGHAN JOURNAL

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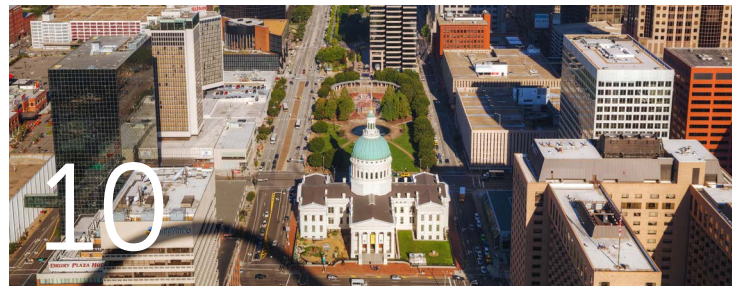
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**CAPTURING COUNTLESS TALES IN A SINGLE SNAPSHOT**



## AFGHAN COMMUNITY CENTER

The Afghan Community Center is a vibrant and inclusive space in Saint Louis that serves as a hub for the Afghan community and fosters connections with the broader community.

The Afghan Community Center seeks to develop a center that reflects the diverse needs, aspirations, and cultural heritage of the Afghan community in the United States. The ultimate goal is to create a welcoming environment that promotes social integration, empowerment, and mutual understanding.

The Afghan Community Center aspires to create a dynamic and inclusive space that celebrates Afghan culture, fosters social cohesion, and empowers individuals and families to thrive within the St. Louis community.

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## CELEBRATING THE 78TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER IN SAINT LOUIS



On October 21st, the [United Nations Association of Saint Louis](#) hosted its annual United Nations Day celebration at the International Institute of St. Louis to mark the 78th anniversary of the United Nations Charter. UN Day, officially October 24th, highlights the contributions of the United Nations and its work to maintain peace, protect human rights, and drive sustainable development.

While conflicts, large-scale natural disasters, and inequities continue to plague our world, this day serves as a reminder of the important work the United Nations continues to conduct in uniting 193 member states together to discuss, resolve, and collaborate to advance progress in humanity.

The event, with the theme “Equality, Freedom and Justice for All” encapsulated the essence of ensuring these principles remain at the center of conversation. It also reminds us of the [75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10th](#).

The day also marked the halfway point to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), a global development agenda agreed to by 193 world leaders in 2015. Tremendous progress has been made since the initiation of the SDGs, but there is still much work to be done. It takes not only the collaboration of governments working together but the strength in numbers of the people, and the businesses that drive development.

So as the community gathered to unite for the purpose of celebrating the United Nations Charter – we were able to accomplish this in collaboration with everyone. The event, which was co-chaired by UNA Saint Louis Board Member and [Little Angels](#)

[Foundation](#) Co-Founder and President Riz Khan and UNA Saint Louis Finance Committee Member and Little Angels Foundation Co-Founder Farah Alam, was a remarkable gathering for the region. Riz and Farah’s passion for the United Nations is due to its commitment to peace and its work in the most vulnerable communities around the world.

A big highlight of UNA Saint Louis’ event was its recognition of Mary T Hall’s honorees. Mary was a staunch advocate for human rights, social justice, and peace. Throughout her life as a social activist, she was highly dedicated to the work of the UNA Saint Louis and the larger UNA-USA national network. She passed away in 2015 at the age of 104, and in 2019, UNA Saint Louis established the Mary T Hall Awards to honor and recognize individuals in the St. Louis region who exemplify her values and actions.

One of the six Mary T Hall honorees included Raz Azizi, recognized in the category of Human Rights. His commitment and dedication at the [International Institute of St. Louis](#), but also beyond in the Afghan community for those who are integrating into American culture, has shown by his involvement with the [Afghan Community Center](#) and his overall support to those who now call St. Louis their home. UNA Saint Louis member and prior Mary T Hall honoree (Inclusion), Moji Sidiqi, was the event’s emcee and united the community through her dynamic presence, and her commitment to peace and women’s empowerment.

These gatherings are a strong reminder of the African Proverb, “If you think you are too small to make a difference, you haven’t spent a night with a mosquito.”

## AFGHAN SUPPORT PROGRAMS USA TOUR: NEW YORK CITY



Last weekend, I embarked on a remarkable journey to New York City, where I had the privilege of visiting 16 Afghan-owned businesses. These establishments ranged from bustling grocery stores and delicious restaurants to stylish fashion boutiques and a heartwarming nonprofit organization called ["Women for Afghan Women."](#) My mission was to gather stories and experiences to support the Afghan Support Program's USA tour, which aims to highlight why St. Louis is the ideal destination for Afghan refugees to resettle in the United States.

New York City, with its iconic skyline and fast-paced lifestyle, is a city that never sleeps. It is a melting pot of cultures and opportunities, but it also comes with a high cost of living that can be a significant barrier to many aspiring entrepreneurs and homeowners. In contrast, St. Louis boasts a lower cost of living, making it a more feasible destination for those looking to start afresh.

As I traversed the diverse neighborhoods of New York City, I had the chance to engage with the Afghan community and hear their stories. The people I met agreed that while NYC is undoubtedly an exciting and vibrant city, it is a challenging place to establish a new life. The competition is fierce, and overhead costs are substantial, especially for those wanting to open businesses or become homeowners.

In St. Louis, however, the odds are more favorable for newcomers. The city provides a welcoming and supportive environment for refugees to rebuild

their lives. With a lower cost of living and numerous resources for immigrants, St. Louis offers a promising future for Afghan families. It's a place where you can settle down, raise a family, and build a prosperous life in tranquility.

During my visits to Afghan-owned businesses, I had the opportunity to share the advantages of St. Louis with the Afghan community. I explained that settling in St. Louis could provide a stable foundation for their dreams and aspirations. Once established, they could explore the country and the world, returning to the safety and comfort of a St. Louis life.

One of the heartwarming experiences of my journey was visiting the nonprofit organization "Women for Afghan Women". This organization works tirelessly to support Afghan women and their families. I discussed with the dedicated individuals there the potential benefits of resettling in St. Louis, emphasizing the opportunities for women and families to thrive in a welcoming and supportive environment.

In addition to exploring businesses and organizations, I also enjoyed the diverse Afghan cuisine. The delicious food served at Afghan-owned restaurants highlighted the rich culture and flavors of Afghanistan. These culinary experiences reinforced the idea that a successful start in a city like St. Louis could allow entrepreneurs to explore and share their culture with the world.



## PROMISING NEWS FOR AFGHAN FAMILIES! ENRICHING YOUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE WITH PASHTO, DARI, NOORISTANI, AND ISLAMIC STUDIES AT THE AFGHAN COMMUNITY CENTER



In the heart of St. Louis, the [Afghan Community Center](#) stands as a beacon of cultural preservation and community unity. At the core of its mission is the commitment to nurturing the younger generation's connection with their heritage. Every Sunday, the center buzzes with activity as passionate Afghan instructors lead language classes in [Pashto](#), [Dari](#), and [Nooristani](#), providing a unique opportunity for Afghan children in St. Louis to learn their native languages from their fellow community members.

**The Significance of Native Language and Islamic Studies:** In a world increasingly interconnected, where diverse cultures intermingle, the preservation of native languages is vital. For Afghan children growing up in America, the ability to speak Pashto, Dari, or Nooristani not only connects them with their roots but also fosters a strong sense of identity. Language is more than just a means of communication; it carries the essence of a culture, its traditions, and its values. By learning their native languages, these children can communicate with their grandparents, understand traditional stories, and engage in the rich tapestry of Afghan literature and poetry.

Furthermore, the Afghan Community Center recognizes the importance of Islamic studies in nurturing moral character and ethical values. In an era where misinformation and misconceptions about Islam abound, it becomes essential to provide accurate, contextually rich religious education. Islamic studies classes at the center serve as a bridge, enabling young Afghans to understand their faith at a deeper level. This understanding not only strengthens their spirituality but also equips them to counter stereotypes and promote interfaith harmony.

**The Community Hub: Fostering Unity and Empowerment:** Beyond its role in education, the Af-

ghan Community Center serves as a unifying force for the Afghan diaspora in St. Louis. It acts as a hub where families come together, forging connections and friendships. The center's initiatives extend beyond classrooms, involving the community in various cultural events, festivals, and charitable activities. By doing so, it creates a sense of belonging, crucial for the emotional and social development of the younger generation.

### Building a Strong Afghan Community in St. Louis

The Afghan Community Center's Sunday schools are not merely educational institutions; they are the cornerstone of a vibrant, united Afghan community in St. Louis. By imparting the knowledge of native languages and Islamic studies, the center empowers young Afghans to embrace their identity proudly. In learning the languages of their ancestors and understanding the teachings of Islam, these children become ambassadors of their culture, fostering understanding and appreciation among their peers.

In essence, the Afghan Community Center's Sunday schools are sowing the seeds of cultural preservation, understanding, and unity. As the young generation learns the languages spoken by their forefathers and imbibes the teachings of their faith, they become torchbearers of Afghan heritage. Through their efforts, the rich tapestry of [Afghan culture](#) continues to thrive, not just within the community but also in the diverse mosaic of St. Louis. The Afghan Community Center stands as a testament to the strength of diaspora communities and the power of education in preserving cultural identity and heritage for generations to come.

## AFGHAN CRICKETING LEGEND'S REMARKABLE JOURNEY

[Rashid Khan Arman](#), a cricketing icon hailing from the war-torn region of Nangarhar, Eastern Afghanistan, has emerged as a prominent figure in international cricket, leaving an indelible mark with his extraordinary skills and determination. Rashid embarked on his cricketing journey alongside his brothers in Jalalabad, displaying a natural talent for right-arm leg spin and right-handed batting.

Rashid's international debut occurred in 2015, making a memorable entry into One Day International (ODI) cricket against Zimbabwe. His prowess in T20 Internationals (T20Is) was highlighted in a historic match against Ireland in March 2017, where he achieved a remarkable five-wicket haul, a feat unparalleled in two overs in a T20I game.

His career reached new heights during the 2018 Cricket World Cup Qualifier when he captained the international side at the young age of 19 years and 165 days, setting a record. In the final against the West Indies, he became the fastest bowler to claim 100 ODI wickets, breaking Mitchell Starc's previous record.

Rashid's Test debut against India in June 2018 marked a significant moment for Afghanistan, despite the challenges he faced. His resilience shone in subsequent matches, notably during the one-off Test against Ireland, where he showcased his prowess by taking five wickets for 82 runs.

Beyond international cricket, Rashid Khan's brilliance extended to domestic and T20 franchise leagues, including the prestigious Indian Premier League (IPL), where he played for Sunrisers Hyderabad and later served as the vice-captain for Gujarat Titans in IPL 2022. His consistency was evident in other leagues such as the Caribbean Premier League, Big Bash League, and Pakistan Super League.

His exceptional achievements led to accolades like the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Decade and the ICC Men's T20I Player of the Decade. Despite challenges and changes in the Afghanistan national team's leadership, Rashid Khan's unwavering talent and determination have consistently established him as a formidable force in international cricket.

Rashid Khan's influence transcended borders, making a significant impact on T20 leagues worldwide, including England's T20 Blast and the United States' [Major League Cricket](#). His remarkable journey in cricket stands as an inspiration to aspiring cricketers, a testament to his steadfast commitment and outstanding proficiency in the sport.

In a sport where talent meets perseverance, Rashid Khan Arman embodies the spirit of cricket, showcasing the power of resilience, determination, and skill, and inspiring generations of cricketers around the world. His story continues to inspire and serve as a shining example of what can be achieved with talent, hard work, and unwavering determination.



## CELEBRATING YALDA NIGHT, A CHERISHED AFGHAN TRADITION



Yalda Night, also referred to as Chelleh Night, is a revered festival steeped in ancient customs, celebrated across regions including Iran, Iraqi Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkey during the winter solstice, typically falling on the night of December 20/21. This festival holds profound cultural significance, marking the transition from the last day of the ninth month (Qaws) to the first day of the tenth month (Jadi) in the Persian solar calendar.

In areas deeply influenced by Persian culture, such as Azerbaijan, Iraqi Kurdistan, Balochi regions, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, families and friends unite on this longest and darkest night of the year. They participate in communal activities like feasting, reciting poetry, and reading ancient texts, notably the works of Hafez and the Shahnameh, well into the late hours. The night is adorned with a variety of fruits and nuts, with special importance given to pomegranates and watermelons due to their red hues, symbolizing the colors of dawn and vitality. This cultural celebration has gained such significance that it was officially recognized as a national treasure in Iran in 2008.

Modern celebrations involve elaborate dinners featuring an assortment of fruits, including watermelons, pomegranates, nuts, and dried fruits. Superstitions abound, such as consuming watermelons to protect against summer ailments or eating garlic to alleviate joint pain. Another cherished tradition is "Fale Hafez," where divination using Hafez's poetry guides individuals' fortunes.

The term "Chelleh" stems from the forty-day period marking the onset of winter. "Yalda," borrowed from

Syriac-speaking Christians, translates to "birthday." This phrase became a part of Persian culture, signifying the sun's birth and the arrival of winter. While the festival's origins trace back to ancient Iran, its evolution intertwines with Christian practices, bridging diverse religious and cultural traditions.

Historically, Yalda Night was a sacred event integrated into the ancient Iranian calendar during the rule of Darius I in 502 BC. Early societies acknowledged the significance of the winter solstice, recognizing the symbolic birth of the sun and the gradual lengthening of days. This concept of light triumphing over darkness became central to various belief systems, ultimately leading to the establishment of the Persian calendar by Hakim Omar Khayyam. His Solar Hijri calendar, still in use today, ensures precise calculations and accounts for leap years without the need for additional days.

Yalda Night's customs are deeply rooted in Zoroastrian traditions, originally intended to protect people from malevolent forces during the longest night. Families and friends would gather, sharing the last fruits of summer and staying awake together, fostering unity and safeguarding against misfortune. While the religious aspects have diminished, the tradition of late-night gatherings persists in Iranian culture. Despite its ancient origins, Yalda Night continues to brighten the darkest nights, nurturing connections and preserving cultural heritage. As families gather, sharing laughter, stories, and delicacies, Yalda Night stands as a testament to the enduring power of tradition and the human spirit's ability to find light even in the deepest darkness.



## FIRST THANKSGIVING CELEBRATIONS ARE TIME-HONORED TRADITION AT IISTL



As year-end celebrations quickly approach, the International Institute of St. Louis prepares to celebrate the annual tradition of hosting a First [Thanksgiving](#) celebration. For many new arrivals, they have never celebrated a traditional Thanksgiving celebration, including turkey, side dishes, pies and most importantly, community.

For many years, Education classes have focused the week before Thanksgiving around curriculum themed to the holiday with activities like counting corn husks, learning the melody to "This Land is Your Land," writing out personal essays of what the students are thankful for and more. On the day of celebrations, the organization invites community members, stakeholders, and volunteers to come



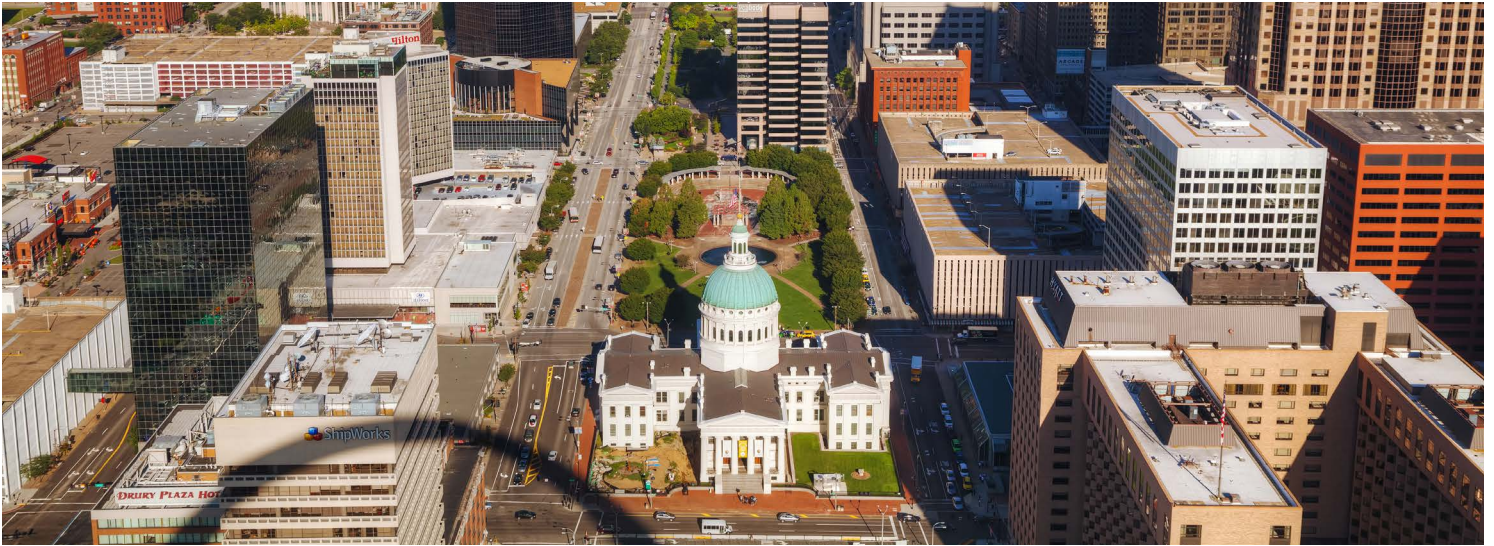
celebrate the holiday with those who may be celebrating Thanksgiving for the first time.

In 2022, the International Institute of St. Louis hosted a large celebration, one to welcome many backs in person after the pandemic. The event was hosted in the gymnasium but made to feel like a welcome space for all. Live music and entertainment helped occupy the children at the event, while adults were welcome to mingle, hold conversations with each other and community members, and enjoy the spirit of togetherness.

A First Thanksgiving celebration offers a new foundation for those new to the St. Louis community. It gives a warm, welcoming environment for families to interact with each other, volunteers, and service-provider agencies. When the community comes together as one, it can create bonds and long-lasting relationships that make the transition to a new home easier.



## THE RICH LEGACY OF THE OLD ST. LOUIS COURTHOUSE



The [Old St. Louis Courthouse](#), located in the heart of St. Louis, Missouri, stands as a remarkable testament to the city's historical richness and architectural brilliance. Originally planned as a joint federal and state courthouse, this iconic structure has been a witness to centuries of American history.

In 1816, [Judge John Baptiste Charles Lucas](#) and St. Louis founder [Auguste Chouteau](#) generously donated the land for the courthouse. The federal style masterpiece, designed by the pioneering architecture firm Laveille & Morton, was completed in 1828. [Joseph C. Laveille](#), the city's street commissioner, created the unique street grid, shaping the city's future development.

Following Missouri's statehood in 1821, St. Louis experienced a population boom, leading to the need for a new courthouse. Over the years, the courthouse underwent various renovations, including the addition of an exquisite Italian Renaissance cast iron dome in 1861, inspired by St. [Peter's Basilica](#) in Vatican City. This dome became an iconic symbol of both the courthouse and the city.

The courthouse gained historical significance as the site of the infamous [Dred Scott citizenship case in 1857](#), highlighting the deep-seated issues of slavery and citizenship in pre-Civil War America. During the Great Depression in 1935, St. Louis initiated the creation of the Gateway Arch National Park, incorporating the courthouse as a central element. Despite challenges, the courthouse retained its historical importance.

Through meticulous renovations, the courthouse has been preserved for future generations. Today, operated by the [National Park Service](#), it offers vis-

itors a glimpse into the city's past through historical exhibits and events. Notable cases like *Dred Scott v. Sandford* in 1857 and *Minor v. Happersett* in 1875 have left a lasting impact on its legacy. Additionally, the courthouse has appeared in popular culture, featured in TV shows and disaster films.

The courthouse has become a focal point for architectural enthusiasts and is a prominent stop in St. Louis' architectural tours. Its grandeur and historical significance continue to captivate visitors, transporting them back in time and connecting them with the rich heritage that defines St. Louis

as a city of enduring cultural importance.



In essence, the Old St. Louis Courthouse stands not only as a physical monument but also as a living testament to the city's vibrant history, embodying resilience and the passage of time. Visitors exploring its halls are transported back in time, connecting

with the rich heritage that makes St. Louis a city of enduring cultural importance.

## THE CITADEL OF HERAT LIVING LEGACY AND MODERN HUB OF HERITAGE



Nestled in the fertile valley of [Hari-Rud](#), the Citadel of Herat stands as a testament to Afghanistan's rich history and enduring legacy. Dating back to the sixth century B.C.E., this architectural marvel has weathered the sands of time, witnessing the rise and fall of empires, from the days of [Alexander the Great](#) to the modern era.

Located in the heart of Afghanistan, the Citadel of Herat, also known as [Qal'a-ye Ikhtiyar al-Din](#), boasts a storied past. It was once a fort constructed by Alexander the Great in 330 B.C.E., following his conquest of the Achaemenid city known as Artacoana or Aria. Over the centuries, it served as a stronghold for various rulers, including the Seleucids, Parthians, Kushans, Sasanians, and Umayyads, among others.

The Citadel, with its imposing presence, has been an integral part of Afghanistan's historical and cultural landscape. It played a crucial role in the flourishing Silk Road trade, connecting the Levant, India, and China. Despite facing destruction and restoration multiple times, the Citadel has stood resilient, symbolizing the enduring spirit of the Afghan people.

In addition to its historical significance, the Citadel of Herat plays a vital role in contemporary Afghan society. It serves as a venue for government events, providing a backdrop for important political gatherings and discussions. Furthermore, it acts as a hub for regional events, fostering cultural exchange and dialogue among diverse communities.

The Citadel's importance is underscored by its

dual role: preserving Afghanistan's heritage and serving as a dynamic space for modern activities. Its walls have echoed the footsteps of ancient warriors and modern leaders alike, making it a living museum of Afghanistan's past and present.

Restored meticulously by [UNESCO](#) between 1976 and 1979, the Citadel of Herat comprises two walled enclosures. The "Upper Citadel," an older compound to the east, offers glimpses into the region's ancient history. Its semi-circular towers and rectangular layout tell the tale of centuries gone by. The "Lower Citadel," an addition by the Kart dynasty, adds depth to the Citadel's narrative. With its circular towers and polygonal plan, it represents the architectural evolution of the site.

Today, the Citadel stands not only as a historical marvel but also as a vibrant venue for various events. Its role in government functions emphasizes its continued significance in the political landscape of Afghanistan. Simultaneously, its use for regional events highlights its ability to foster cultural exchange and collaboration.

Visitors to the Citadel of Herat are not merely stepping into the past; they are engaging with a living heritage. It is a space where history and modernity converge, where ancient stones whisper tales of bygone eras, and where contemporary voices shape the future. As Afghanistan's cultural gem, the Citadel of Herat stands tall, reminding the world of the nation's enduring legacy and its unwavering spirit.

**STUDY FINDS POSITIVE HEALTH BENEFITS WITH JUST 5,000 STEPS A DAY**

In a groundbreaking revelation, recent research has challenged the long-standing belief that 10,000 steps a day is the gold standard for good health. A comprehensive study examining the daily routines of over 226,000 individuals worldwide has demonstrated that taking as few as 4,000 steps daily significantly reduces the risk of premature death. Surprisingly, the study also suggests that 5,000 steps can yield substantial health benefits. Even more astonishing is the finding that a mere 2,300 steps a day can promote heart and vascular health.

This research, conducted jointly by experts from the [Medical University of Lodz](#) in Poland and [Johns Hopkins University](#), has far-reaching implications. The study reveals a direct correlation between the number of steps taken and the reduction in premature mortality. For every additional 1,000 steps taken within the range of 4,000 to 20,000 steps a day, the risk of premature death decreases by an impressive 15 percent.

Professor Makij Bunch from the University of Lodz emphasizes the importance of lifestyle choices in maintaining good health. "While modern drugs have their place in treatment, they are not the sole path to wellness," he states emphatically. "We must underscore the significance of lifestyle changes, encompassing diet and exercise. These changes can act as powerful shields, warding off serious illnesses such as heart disease and coronary artery disease.

Embracing these changes can pave the way for an active and enduring life."

The study's findings resonate strongly, especially in the context of the [World Health Organization's](#) data, which reveals a sobering truth. Lack of physical activity claims the lives of 3.2 million people annually, making it the fourth leading cause of death worldwide. As this new research underscores, taking even a modest number of steps each day can be a simple yet potent strategy to combat this alarming trend.

In a world increasingly dominated by sedentary lifestyles, these findings serve as a beacon of hope. They remind us that the power to enhance our well-being lies within our daily steps, encouraging everyone, regardless of age or gender, to embrace the benefits of walking for a healthier, longer life.



**Fawzia Shahab**  
Afghanistan National Radio TV  
Former Anchor



Haroon Safi  
St. Louis

## PRESERVING CULTURAL BONDS IN A NEW LAND

Afghan families arriving in the United States face a multitude of challenges as they attempt to rebuild their lives in a vastly different cultural environment. The transition from a close-knit, conservative society to the fast-paced lifestyle of America can create significant stressors, particularly for families. In the wake of the collapse of the Afghan regime in August 2021, a staggering number of Afghans, approximately [122,000](#), were airlifted to the United States. These families were dispersed across various parts of the country, introducing them to a new way of life with limited knowledge of American culture and language.

Adjusting to life in a foreign land is daunting for anyone, but it becomes even more arduous when families, accustomed to living together, find themselves scattered due to resettlement. Among the myriad challenges faced by these families, one of the most pressing is maintaining the traditional family structure and values in a society where these principles are rapidly eroding. The breakdown of family units in the United States, marked by high divorce rates and the prevalence of single-parent households, stands in stark contrast to the cohesive Afghan family dynamics.

In this context, the preservation of family bonds and the empowerment of Afghan families take on profound significance. Strengthening these relationships becomes a cornerstone for these families' adaptation and integration into American society. A strong family unit provides emotional support, a sense of belonging, and a safety net during times of crisis. In the face of adversities, having a supportive family can make all the difference, offering solace and encouragement to overcome challenges.

Moreover, the benefits of a cohesive family unit extend beyond emotional support. Numerous

studies have shown that individuals with strong family ties experience improved mental and physical health. The presence of a supportive family network can alleviate stress, reduce the risk of mental health disorders, and enhance overall well-being. Additionally, within a family, there is a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experiences that can be shared, providing a foundation for personal and collective growth.

The resilience of Afghan families lies not only in their ability to adapt to a new culture but also in their capacity to preserve their familial bonds. By embracing the values of mutual respect, understanding, and support, these families can navigate the challenges of their new lives in the United States. Through community support, cultural exchange programs, and access to resources that promote family empowerment, Afghan families can not only survive but also thrive in their adopted homeland.

In conclusion, the empowerment of Afghan families in the United States is essential for their successful integration into American society. By recognizing the unique challenges they face and offering targeted support, communities can help these families preserve their cultural heritage and strengthen their familial bonds. As we celebrate the diversity of our nation, it is imperative that we provide a nurturing environment where all families, including those from Afghanistan, can flourish, ensuring that the fundamental pillar of society, the family, remains unshaken and resilient.

## A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF BAMYAN AND BAND AMIR - TRAVELOGUE



Under the gentle caress of a Friday morning sun, our journey to [Bamyan](#) began. The clock's hands whispered of 10:30 a.m., a perfect moment to embark on an adventure into the heart of nature's grandeur. The vehicle hummed to life, carrying us away from Kabul's bustling embrace, and the world outside unfolded like a story waiting to be written.

As we traversed the winding roads, nature unveiled its masterpiece. I couldn't resist the temptation to lean out of the car window, inviting the crisp air to dance with my hair and kiss my cheeks. Inhaling deeply, I embraced the fragrant melody of the countryside, a symphony orchestrated by rustling leaves and flowing rivers.

Majestic mountains stood tall, their peaks touching the cerulean sky. Some wore cloaks of emerald, adorned with fruits that hung like ornaments from ancient trees. Rivers, like liquid silver, wove through the valleys, their harmonious tunes a soothing balm for my soul. A young shepherd guided his flock, a picturesque scene that embodied simplicity and harmony. Amidst this natural poetry, laughter bubbled forth from a group of enchanting children. Their eyes sparkled with innocence, their smiles illuminating the world around them. My heart swelled with joy; their happiness became mine, and I pledged silently to protect such precious moments.

Amidst this scenic marvel, I found a sage companion in Haji Masih Wali. We delved into discussions about the cosmos, our Earth, and the intricate dance of the universe. Haji shared pearls of wisdom, shaping my thoughts like a potter molds clay. His advice, a beacon in the wilderness of my mind, would forever guide my

path. Upon reaching Bamyan, the sun dipped below the horizon, painting the sky in hues of gold and lavender. We stood before the awe-inspiring idol, a monument that whispered secrets of civilizations long past. Nearby caves, once homes to ancient souls, stood as silent witnesses to the passage of time, a poignant reminder of our humble origins.

Our journey continued to [Band Amir](#), beneath a night sky adorned with stars that glittered like diamonds strewn across velvet. The cold kissed our skin, reminding us of nature's untamed beauty. Gathering in a cozy hotel, we feasted on delicious fare and reminisced about days gone by. Laughter echoed through the night, weaving a tapestry of cherished memories.

With the dawn, I found myself alone, embraced by the solitude of the early hour. Sipping tea, I stepped outside, greeted by a vast sky sprinkled with stars that now faded into the gentle light of morning. The nearby 'band,' its waters a crystal-clear blue, mirrored the heavens above. Beside my father, I watched a playful fish dance beneath the surface, a testament to life's simple yet profound joys.

On a boat, we floated upon the river, the azure water blending seamlessly with the sky above. The world seemed to blur, merging the boundaries between water and air, earth and heaven. Each breath I took felt like a sip of pure serenity, and in that moment, I found peace.

As the day drew to a close, we reluctantly bid farewell to the enchanting beauty of Bamyan and Band Amir. The memories we carried were not just ink on the pages of a journal; they were imprints on our hearts, reminders of the beauty that exists in the simplest of moments.

## WEAVING UNITY AND EMPOWERMENT IN ST. LOUIS - A TALE OF IMMIGRANT SUCCESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP



In the heart of St. Louis, one man's dream is weaving a tapestry of unity and empowerment for the Afghan community residing here. Meet Gul M. Totakhil, a resilient soul whose journey from Paktia, Afghanistan, to the bustling streets of St. Louis has been marked by a steadfast commitment to fostering a sense of togetherness and progress among his fellow Afghans.

Having called St. Louis home since 1991, Gul has not merely adapted to his new surroundings; he has thrived, becoming a beacon of hope and a catalyst for change within the Afghan community. Married and a proud father of three, his personal success story is intertwined with his devotion to creating a strong, united Afghan community in the city.

Gul's pivotal moment came in the early 2000s when he recognized the need for a unified Afghan presence in St. Louis. At that time, there were fewer than 30 Afghan families in the area. With a vision and determination, he organized a gathering for Afghan New Year celebrations, an event that laid the foundation for the establishment of the Afghan community organization. Since then, regardless of the numbers, the community has celebrated national holidays together, preserving their rich culture and heritage.

Gul's mission is clear: unity is the key. He firmly believes that strength lies in unity, a sentiment echoed by many. By consolidating their efforts, the community can achieve remarkable feats. Through financial assistance, cultural events, and educational initiatives, Gul has been the driving force behind the community's progress. His latest responsibility is the president of the [US-Afghan Chamber of Commerce](#), is a testament to his unwavering commitment.

"The newly inaugurated Community Center stands as a symbol of the Afghan community's resilience. Furnished to meet their needs, it offers a myriad of services, all provided free of charge," said Gul. Additionally, the Chamber of Commerce, under Gul's dedicated leadership, assists aspiring entrepreneurs in realizing their dreams. From business plans to financial aid, the Chamber supports every step of the journey.

One of Gul's most ambitious projects, the Afghan Weekend School, aims to address a pressing concern faced by many immigrant families - preserving their cultural identity amidst the fast-paced American lifestyle. With professional educators, a comprehensive curriculum, and a nurturing environment, this initiative ensures that Afghan children learn about their heritage, language, and religion. English classes are also available for those eager to integrate fully into their adopted homeland.


The [Afghan Community Center](#) in St. Louis invites everyone to join the US-Afghan Chamber of Commerce in celebrating the official meeting of this great initiative on November 5th, 2023 from 2 pm to 4 pm, the doors will be open, offering a glimpse into the vibrant tapestry of Afghan culture and unity. This event is not just a celebration; it's a call for support, a plea for togetherness, and an invitation to shape a brighter future for generations to come.

As Gul often emphasizes, their success hinges on mutual support. The community needs each other - their presence, their involvement, and their partnership. By standing together, they can overcome challenges, preserve their identity, and build a stronger, more empowered Afghan community in St. Louis. Today, they extend that invitation to the entire city, welcoming everyone to be a part of their journey toward unity and progress.



Afghan Journal is thrilled to announce that our newspaper is now open to submissions from talented local authors. Share your captivating stories with us and let your voice be heard. Send us your articles today!

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