



*Culture  
Heritage  
History  
Language*

**Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota**  
Established 1980

## *MinneHyeLites*

No. 166 Winter 2023

# **ACOM** **GAGHANT (New Year) and** **VALENTINE's PARTY** **Returns for a** **Second Year** **February 10, 2024**



**Location:** Cedarholm Community Room, Roseville, MN

**Date:** February 10, 2024

**Time:** 6:30 pm Social Hour

7:00 pm Dinner (Catered by Mim's Middle Eastern Café)

8:00 pm Short Program followed by Dancing to  
Music Mundial



***Reserve the date***

More details and registration forms will be  
emailed soon

***Don't miss this great event***



# HELP

ACOM has received a **donation of \$110.65** from "American Online Giving Foundation" or "Benevity". We assume the donated total, before fees, may have been \$125 or ???

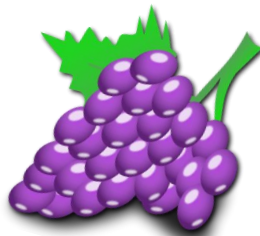
We have tried contacting Benevity and Online Giving by calling, emailing, checking the portal, and have had absolutely no luck finding the name of the donor.

If **YOU** are the **DONOR**, please email the ACOM Treasurer, [yekibdos@gmail.com](mailto:yekibdos@gmail.com) and let her know. ACOM wants to officially thank and credit this person or this family.

## Voski Ashoun (Golden Autumn) 2023

A beautiful fall day for Voski Ashoun this year. Held, again, in Terry and Naïry's backyard, we gathered to celebrate fall and each other.

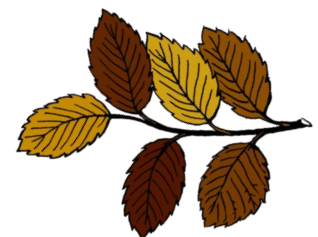
Leroy provided some interesting wines and spirits for tasting.



Snacks were available and there was a fire available for making S'mores.



Everyone who attended had a great time.



**ACOM WEBSITE**

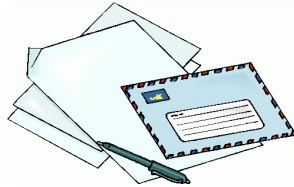
Remember to continue to check our website:  
[www.mnarmenians.org](http://www.mnarmenians.org)

**FROM OUR MAIL BAG**

These are sent by folks who get the ACOM newsletter:

**SPEEDY RECOVERY TO:**

Jennifer Collins  
 Terry McGibbon  
 Lynne Gildensoph  
 Aram & Ruth Charchian  
 Armen Bulbulian  
 Viguen Kardashian

**SUPPORT**

Just wanted to offer my solidarity about the atrocities occurring in Armenia. I am thinking of you and your people and wish for an immediate peaceful resolution. It's such a difficult time observing this level of atrocities happening before our eyes and the world not taking any serious action to stop it! I only hope for the best. (9/25/2023)

**Y.S.**

*Naïry (received from a Work Associate from Iran)*

**SYMPATHY**

We are saddened by the passing of **Sita Ohanessian** on December 20, 2023. She was the last surviving sibling of Arsham and Beatrice. God bless her.

Condolences to Lou Ann Matossian on the passing of her mother, historian **Mary Allerton Kilbourne Matossian** who was a pioneer of Armenian studies. She died on July 9, 2023.

Mary Matossian's groundbreaking 1962 study, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia*, stood virtually alone for two decades as the main Anglophone source on Soviet social reforms in Armenian life. To this day, her chapters about Armenian women remain the historiographical point of reference for contemporary scholars.

Mary Matossian taught History at the University of Maryland for 31 years.

**Richard Hovannisian**, who many of you have heard of, died Monday, July 10, 2023: <https://news.am/eng/news/769848.html>

He came from an extraordinarily accomplished family

(his wife was a physician, and a scholar who wrote an essential book on her family's homeland; their children are very active in Armenian political and cultural life).

Hovannisian created, in essence, the study of modern Armenian history in the United States. He had a fascinating life.

ACOM expresses its sincere condolences to **Leroy Erickson** and his entire family on the passing of his **sister-in-law** in Bismarck, ND.

**ACOM NEWSLETTER 165**

Hi Terry - it looks great. Thank you for doing this!  
 Best wishes  
 Steven U.

**WELCOME TO OUR TWO NEWEST  
ACOM BOARD MEMBERS**

By a majority vote of the ACOM dues-paid members for 2023, the new Board Members for 2024-25 have been elected. Thank you to each and everyone who took the time to return the ballot with their votes. We all appreciate your care about the ACOM organization which is entering its 44th year.

**The new Board Members are:**

President:	Azad Mesrobian
Vice President:	Kat Keljik
Secretary:	Kathleen Daniels
Treasurer:	Naïry Digris
Communications Secretary:	Lynne Gildensoph
Newsletter Editor and Webmaster:	Terry McGibbon
At-Large Members:	Kass Vaubel; Mark Wiersbeck; Phil Asgian
Board Advisor:	Tom Keljik
Past President:	Stephen Usitalo

Welcome to the new members and thank you to all the returning board members who have kindly agreed to serve another term.





## **EGYPT ADVENTURE**

***By: Tom Keljik with Jennifer Collins***

We have been traveling with Jasbir and Frances Singh for a number of years. Vietnam, Russia, Iceland and Egypt have been successful and enjoyable excursions. We had planned our adventure to Egypt to take place February 2022, but we were confronted with the fact that the COVID pandemic was still on the rise and only 20% of Egypt's population was vaccinated. Luckily we had purchased trip insurance and decided to wait a year.

We arrived in Cairo after a brief stop and sleep-over at Charles deGaulle Airport. After clearing customs, we were met by our Egyptian contact who escorted us to a waiting van taking us to our hotel. What we found interesting was that all of our guides with the exception of two were Coptic. As you undoubtedly know, the Copts are an ancient people, much like Armenians, and are proud of their Egyptian and Christian heritage. They claim their Coptic language is that of the Pharaohs. As the original Egyptians, they had adopted Christianity and survived the Arab/Muslim invasion 639 AD. Today, they represent between 10-20% of the population.

Throughout our trip, we were provided expert guides, van drivers and often armed Egyptian security guards. We traveled as a pod of four, other than our trip by boat up the Nile. Yes, we were treated like royalty.

Upon leaving the airport, we witnessed the phenomenon of Cairo traffic. Trucks, cars, motorcycles, bikes all changing traffic lanes (lanes don't seem to exist) and missing collisions by inches. Well, we did see a number of accidents. Surprisingly the city of 20 million appears to not have one traffic control light.

We arrived at our hotel after going through a thorough inspection of the van to check for any explosive devices (this would be a common occurrence upon entering hotel perimeters).

The Marriott Mena House is nestled at the foot of the Giza Plateau, directly beneath the looming hulk of the Great Pyramids. Built as a hunting lodge in the 19th century, it was frequented by royalty and high society. Yes, Churchill and Roosevelt met here to plan the D-Day invasion. From our balcony we could see the pyramids.

Our room, complete with balcony, gave us a great view of the Pyramid of Cheops composed of over 2,300,000 blocks at an average weight of 2.5 tons. Of course, we visited it as well as the Sphinx. The photo here shows us at the base of the Great Pyramid.

In Cairo we visited the citadel and the Mosque of Sultan Hassan with a terrific view of the city. Next we visited old Cairo, home of many Copts. We visited



the Hanging Church. Just outside the church is a water well that the Holy Family drank from while taking refuge in Egypt. Of course we spent time at the Egyptian Antiquities Museum.

We noticed many apartment buildings that looked as though they were half built or perhaps falling apart. We were told that the law restricts rental increases so the building owners have neglected to make repairs. Below is the view of Cairo from the citadel with the Giza Pyramids.



Our guide for our time in Cairo was Ash, a Copt married to an Armenian woman. We bonded and had a great time with him. The photo (on the next page) shows Ash in the front at the restaurant across from the Sphinx.

One night in Cairo, we went on a street food tour. Yes, we literally had our food prepared and we ate as all sorts of traffic passed. We had Koshary (mixture of pastas, chick peas, crispy onions, tomato sauce and garlic vinegar). Also we ate babaghanoush, shawarma, falafel, kebabs and kofta. We passed on the roasted pigeon.

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Our next excursion was north on the desert highway. It is quite clear that beyond the Nile and the Mediterranean coast, Egypt's land is dominated by the desert. We ended up at El Alamein on our way to Alexandria. It was the site of the 1942 battle between Britain and the German Africa Korps. We paid our respects at the British cemetery and then left for Alexandria.

The city is a fascinating conglomerate of history, modern structures and bustling activity. Our guide Zara and driver showed us the sites. She mentioned that they are still looking for the burial site of Cleopatra and suspect they will find her somewhere under a city street. She talked about the city having people of various ethnic backgrounds in the near past - Greeks, Italians, Jews and yes, Armenians. She told us that her mother had a number of Armenian friends in her childhood.

In 1890, my grandfather, Bedros and his older brother Markar were on board of a French ship in the harbor. They had escaped from their home in the Ottoman Empire and were on their way to America. The ship's captain said they should go into the city since they would be docked for several days before they sailed for Marseille. They looked at the city scape and saw men in fez and women veiled and decided it would be unwise to set foot in the city. The

photo shows the first Keljik (me) setting foot in the harbor along with Jennifer, Jasbir, Frances, and our guide Zara.

While traveling by van in the city, we passed a statue of



Nubar Pasha. He was the first Prime Minister of

Egypt, serving three terms. He was born in Smyrna in 1825. He was instrumental in negotiations with the French in the construction of the Suez Canal. His birth name was Nubar Nubarian. I would have thought if the Keljik brothers got into trouble on the streets of Alexandria, they could have Nubar come to their assistance since he was Prime Minister at that time. Nubarian Armenian school was established in a suburb of Cairo in 1924 by Boghos Nubar Pasha.



Our next excursion took us to Aswan by airplane. There, we boarded the Mayflower to sail the Nile. We spent time in Luxor followed by another airplane trip to Abu Simbel. Here are photos of this marvelous part of the trip.



Theban Necropolis and Cleopatra

Of course we had to mount a camel for a tour of the Pyramids





## **BRAZIL ADVENTURE**

***By: Tom Keljik***

Jennifer Collins is a member of the College of American Pathologists. As a member, she is asked to help evaluate labs for procedural accuracy. Generally, these are labs that are involved in drug testing. Occasionally, she is called upon to evaluate laboratories overseas. Most recently she was asked to examine the procedures of a drug testing facility in a small town called Lins which is some 261 miles west of São Paulo, Brazil. As her husband, she asked if I would like to join her on the excursion. Of course, I would also fulfill the roles as baggage handler and bodyguard....

We left for Brazil on July 28 winging our way to Atlanta where we then boarded a 10 hour flight to São Paulo. Traveling mostly South and through two time zones East, we landed at a very busy airport. We grabbed a cab and proceeded to our hotel. Traffic was somewhat reminiscent of the traffic snarls in Cairo, with motorcycles weaving between cars and trucks in a seemingly dangerous way.

Before leaving, I contacted Bruno (native son of Brazil now living in Minnesota), someone I had met while working for Honeywell. He was excited to hear about my travel and told me to enjoy the food, which is truly meat centered. He also admonished me to be very guarded since crime was a major concern. He even suggested I carry two wallets, one I could fork over with a few Reals enclosed if confronted.

São Paulo is a city in Brazil that numbers 20 million people making it the largest city in South America. It also holds the title of the largest Portuguese speaking city in the world as well. They claim there are more people of Italian descent than there are Italians in Rome. Also, it has the largest Japanese community outside of Japan. We also found out that it has about 35-40,000 people of Armenian descent.

We made it safely to our hotel destination on Avenida Paulista, the historic and majestic shopping, museum, and restaurant street in the city. Later that day, we met up with Silvia Oler. She is the lab director for Albert Einstein Hospital in São Paulo and would be Jennifer's colleague in examining the lab. Our rendezvous point was the art museum which we visited. Later we visited a Japanese museum that featured little models of statuary art. We ended the evening with a fabulous dinner on the avenue.



The next morning we traveled to the regional airport to fly to São Jose do Rio Preto - an hour and a half flight. The three of us met up with our chauffeur Juan, who worked at the lab. We traveled through the countryside dominated by sugar cane fields. The road was heavily used by trucks, and being single lane in each direction, there were many harrowing passing events. About two hours later we arrived in Lins and went to our motel.

The next three days, Jennifer and Silvia were engaged in the inspection some two blocks away. I roamed the city visiting the central plaza, markets, and neighborhoods. The city of 78,000 was orderly, clean and reminded me of an Italian city in Tuscany. One thing that was prevalent was concertina barbed wire strung along tall walls enclosing people's properties. Throughout my visit in Lins, I felt safe without incident.

During dinners, we had a chance to learn more about Silvia. She described herself as a blend of Indigenous, African and Italian heritage. Her husband was working in Portugal and they found themselves crossing the Atlantic Ocean frequently. We met up with our chauffeur Juan for the return trip to the regional airport and flight back to São Paulo.

Silvia returned to her duties at the hospital and we began exploring the city. Walking distance from the hotel was the site of amazing graffiti. Here I am with Batman.



Across from Graffiti Alley was a cemetery. We visited and to our surprise found head stones with Armenian names. The next day we took an excursion on the metro, a very modern and efficient subway and ground train. We visited the beautiful city park Ibirapuera and had another fantastic meal. The following day we joined a free walking tour of the old town. We were cautioned to keep close tabs on our phones. Later, we headed to the Mercado Municipal. This city market was massive and exciting.

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ing. While we stopped for a bite and a drink, we were asked if we wouldn't mind being filmed for a promotion piece on the market! Of course we said yes! The cameraman took our photo toasting the



event. Maybe we are movie stars in Brazil?? Notice my shirt. It was given to my friend Steve Michener when Pele (famous Brazilian soccer player) visited The 1997 USA Cup in Blaine. His wife Cathy gave it in remembrance of Steve.

Our adventure to Brazil ended August 6. A short stay, but memorable. In all of our street strolls and metro trips, we had not a single threatening incident. Upon our last day we ran into an Armenian restaurant. Here is the menu if you would like to order for home delivery!



## ART KOURAJIAN and HIS MUSIC December 2023

I have had the privilege of playing the clarinet since I was ten years old....some 70 years! I started in fourth grade, then played through high school, then college (on a partial scholarship for music), and then played in the US Army band for two years—one year in Texas; one year in Vietnam. After all that, I began my professional career as a computer person, working with airline computer systems all over the world. I visited 40 countries on business trips, and lived in six countries for extended periods, on long-term assignments. In each of those countries where I lived, I found and took music lessons on indigenous musical instruments—such as the didgeridoo in Australia, the bagpipes in Canada, the tin whistle in Ireland, and the erhu in China. Of course, I purchased one of each of the instruments that I learned! It's a nice collection.

All during my adult life, I always made time to take part in my favorite hobby: music. When I began my computer career in the Twin Cities after my military service, I found community bands and orchestras to play with. I have played in community groups all through my adult life, and I continue to play in community groups to this day. My current orchestras are the St. Paul Jewish Community Orchestra and the UofM Health Sciences Orchestra; in addition, I am the sub for four orchestras—playing, as needed.

In addition to the community groups, I also play clarinet in three small chamber music groups, and I am the manager and booking agent for all three. We have:

The Splendid Woodwind Trio : clarinet, flute, bassoon;

The Clarinet Trio—Music on a Stick : three soprano clarinets;

The Gnu Woodwind Quintet : clarinet, flute, bassoon, oboe, French horn;

Pictures of these three chamber groups are attached.

These three groups play at senior residences all over the Twin City area. The three groups play a total of 6-10 performances per month. We also occasionally play weddings, funerals, recitals, conventions, banquets, and private parties. Of course, lots of rehearsals go into the preparation for these performances.

Music has been a lifetime joy for me, and I truly feel it has been a privilege to make music, to meet the wonderful people who have this similar interest, and to feel the joy of playing in an ensemble of accomplished musicians.



Brazilian samba school presents Armenian Culture and history at São Paulo Carnival





**"Music on a Stick"—Clarinet Trio**  
Together since 2015

Players: David, Bill, Arthur



**The Splendid Woodwind Trio**

Together since 2014

Players : Brian, Harriet, Art



**The Gnu Woodwind Quintet**

## **ACOM CINEMA SATURDAY** **IS BACK IN SESSION**

**In person !!!**

We have already met 4 times and it feels really good to get together and socialize, watch a movie, drink wine or tea, and munch on various goodies.

The event takes place on the third Saturday of the month (usually) at Naïry and Terry's home. It starts at 7 pm and the evening ends with a review of the movie (or not) but definitely with a lot of snacking going on. Anyone is welcome to join. Once you receive the email announcing the movie, you need to respond if you plan to attend. See you at the next one!



**ACOM Cinema Saturdays**



## **A SPECIAL HONOR FOR** **BAYSIDE's PASTOR, NY**

Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan known to many of us as Deacon Manuk, is now the pastor of **Holy Martyrs Church** in [Bayside](#), NY. He received a special honor from His Holiness Karekin II at Holy Etchmiadzin on December 18, 2023



The occasion was Fr. Malkhasyan's formal presentation of his doctoral dissertation to the Catholicos of All Armenians. In the spring of 2020, on the strength of his dissertation, he had earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fordham University. In his presentation to the Catholicos, Fr. Abraham explained that his academic work is to identify challenges that impede young families from participating in church life, and to find ways to overcome them. In addition to his pastoral duties, Fr. Abraham currently teaches Theology at St. John's University.

Catholicos Karekin II [commended](#) Fr. Abraham for his work, and honored him with a pectoral cross. Fr. Malkhasyan was in Armenia to participate in one of the ongoing seminars of international Armenian clergy at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

*ACOM community members lovingly remember Deacon Manuk during his stay in the Twin Cities and congratulate him and wish him the best in all his future endeavors.*



## **REV. BARKEV DARAKJIAN**

### **MEMORIAL REMEMBRANCE\***

*from Daughter Khoury Darakjian Vitale*



***On April 6, 2023, in Glendale, California, Rev. Barkev Darakjian bid farewell to his earthly life and joined his heavenly Father. He leaves behind his wife, Agnes Andreassian Darakjian; and daughters Dr. Ani Darakjian (Dr. Nazareth E. Darakjian) and Mrs. Houry Darakjian***

***Vitale (Mr. Michael Vitale.)***

***As we mourn the passing of Rev. Barkev Darakjian, we rejoice in his life and find consolation in the hope of***

***By: Ani Darakjian, M.D.***

My father, Barkev, was the youngest of five boys born to Pastor Nazareth and Mrs. Arousiag Darakjian. Pastor Nazareth died from malaria when my father was 18 months old leaving his mother, Arousiag, to raise five boys on her own. My father is said to have been a fairly chubby schoolboy and was called "Tomboulig" or "Tombig." Many years later he would write a children's book called *The Adventures of Tombig*, based on his childhood memories.

After father finished elementary school at the Bethel Armenian Evangelical Church of Aleppo, he could not continue his education because of the family's financial situation. He spent his teenage years being apprenticed first to a tailor and then to a goldsmith, but he was not suited to either of these trades. He subsequently opened a bookstore, which was closer to his heart. He loved to read. His motto was not to sell a book, be it in Armenian or in English, without having read it first. During these years, Barkev stayed close to the church, teaching Sunday school and serving as a youth group leader. His bookstore became the hangout place for the church youth. His friends at church saw in him the potential for a future pastor, and urged him to attend a Bible college, but he had neither the money nor the high school diploma necessary to attend college.

By this time my father had married Armine Andreassian, daughter of Rev. Dikran Andreassian, who was the Chair of the Mussa Dag Defense Council

which defended the population against the Turkish hordes whose aim was to wipe out Armenians in the area. I am the first child of the couple. Father was not a very good businessman. It has been told that a customer walked into his bookshop and asked the price of an item. Thinking that the man would bargain with him, he gave him an inflated price. The man did not bargain. He paid the money and left with his purchase. Father's conscience bothered him so much that he ran after the man, apologized for overcharging him and returned the amount he had overcharged.

My mother soon realized that if her husband did not attain his goal of serving the Lord as a pastor, he would be miserable for the rest of his life. She encouraged him to study for, and take the exams for the British high school equivalency test called the GCE. This is where Barkev's extensive reading and self-education, as well as his wife's and sister-in-law's (his present wife's) tutoring, paid off. He passed the exams and together with my mother, they went to see President Dr. John Markarian at the newly opened Haigazian College in Beirut. Dr. Markarian agreed to give my father a chance and thus he became enrolled as a college freshman at the age of 33. After successfully completing his year at Haigazian College, he took additional exams and was accepted to the American University of Beirut and the Near East School of Theology. He graduated with Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity degrees in 1965, at the age of 40.

After graduation, he became the Director of the Christian Endeavor Society, the youth organization of the churches of Syria and Lebanon, and eventually the Editor of its three publications *Chanasser*, *Badanegan Artsakank*, and *Louys*. He was well suited to the position of youth director, because he had so recently been a college student himself. He was loved and respected by the youth whom he served.

Despite the fact that he had grown up in a Turkish speaking Aintabtzhi household, he had acquired a depth and breadth of knowledge in Armenian language, literature, and history, through extensive reading and self-education. He was asked to fill the position of Armenian language teacher for four upper classes in a local high school. During these years, my father was not the pastor of a particular church. But I remember him getting up early on Sun-

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day mornings, and taking some form of public transportation – since we did not own a car – to preach to shut-ins at the Armenian old age home, or the tuberculosis sanatorium located in the eastern suburbs of Beirut. He would also accept invitations from different churches to preach on special occasions.

In 1974, Barkev was invited to become Pastor of the Armenian Congregational Church in Chicago. He was almost 50 years old then. During his 21 years in Chicago, he served not only his church, but the entire Armenian Community. He established close ties with the clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Churches. He taught Armenian language classes at the request of the local AGBU chapter. He mobilized his church to help the Armenian refugees arriving in Chicago from Baku, by providing everything from furniture and clothing, to orientation and help with filling out forms. His love of learning led him at age 60 to attend Mundelein College, a Catholic college where my mother served for many years as Registrar (now part of Loyola University) in Chicago. He subsequently received a Master's degree in Religious Studies specializing in Historical Theology.

My father began to write at the age of 15, and his love for literature led him to a career of writing along with his pastoral work. He has written extensively on various subjects, such as, Armenian Evangelical church history, theology, ecclesiology, philosophy, literature, and on issues of educational and national interest. He has translated several mystery and detective story books for young readers into Armenian under the pen-name Never. One of the books that

he authored, *The Adventures of Tombig*, won an award for best Armenian children's book in modern times. His more serious works include: *The History of Protestant Thought: From Luther to Our Times*; *Armenian Evangelical Identity: Historical and Theological Perspectives*; *Indispensable Heritage*; and a Prayerbook for worship services.

My father began his service as editor of the FORUM, a bi-lingual quarterly publication of the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America (AEUNA), in the 1980s, while he was still in Chicago. After his retirement in 1996, the family moved to Glendale, California, where he continued as editor for a number of years and continued to write articles in the FORUM and other publications, such as the AMAA NEWS and the UACC HERALD.

In 2000, my father became the Founding Pastor of The First Armenian Evangelical Church of Glendale. After losing his wife to leukemia, he married Agnes Andreassian in August of 2004.

Looking at the life of this fatherless and penniless young man who attained his goals of continuing his education and serving God as a minister, one might say that he was lucky, or that he was smart, or that he married the right woman, who worked to support him for many years as he went to school. But we Christians don't believe in luck. We believe in God's providential care for us, and "we know that all things work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28 Vartsked gadar, hayrig.

- A generous donation to ACOM was made in Memory of Reverend Darakjian

## **NEWS OF COMMUNITY INTEREST**

### **CANCELATION ANNOUNCED FOR THE FESTIVAL OF NATIONS**

August 24, 2023 - The International Institute of Minnesota and the Festival of Nations, the Midwest's oldest and longest running multicultural festival, announce with sadness the conclusion of this beloved event.

The decision to discontinue the Festival was not taken lightly. The Institute recognizes the disappointment this announcement brings to the dedicated staff, volunteers, families and community organizations who contributed their time and effort to making the Festival a cherished event since 1932.

While the Institute remains steadfast in its commitment to celebrating Minnesota's diverse cultures,

it must prioritize its urgent day-to-day work of serving New Americans with their successful transition to a new community. Refugee services, immigration and citizenship support, education and workforce development are essential not only for newcomers, but they also benefit the wider community by building a stronger Minnesota.

### ***The Process of Reimagining and the Decision to Discontinue***

The Festival was canceled in 2020 and 2021 due to public health restrictions and concerns for the well-being of attendees and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the global refugee

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## NEWS OF COMMUNITY INTEREST

*(Continued from page 10)*

crisis persisted at unprecedented levels, requiring the Institute's undivided attention on delivering its primary services for refugees and immigrants.

The Institute spent the last two years carefully considering how we could proceed with the Festival. Options to reimagine the Festival included potential community partners, a new venue and other changes. As a strong partner did not emerge, it became evident that it would be impossible to sustain the event.

### ***The Institute's Gratitude to the Festival Community***

Since its inception, the Festival of Nations has aimed to unite people from diverse cultures through celebration and education.

The Institute commends and expresses gratitude to the countless individuals and ethnic organizations that have tirelessly contributed to promoting cultural awareness and fostering a sense of togetherness in a multitude of ways.

We encourage the community to continue embracing and celebrating Minnesota's rich tapestry of cultures, communities and connections. We remain optimistic that these passionate cultural organizations will adapt and create new traditions of celebration and education in the future

*Since 1919, the International Institute of Minnesota has delivered critical services and resources to help New Americans transition to their new lives in Minnesota. From language learning and job training to immigration and refugee services, the Institute offers New Americans a pathway for a strong start to a new life. Once stability is achieved, we're there for next steps, too: from college preparation and career advancement to citizenship support and financial coaching toward home ownership.*

**Armenians were among the first participants at the Festival of Nations in 1932 with John Basmadjian and a few others. Armenians continued to participate until the end.**

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### DER SAHAK KAISHIAN BIO

Rev. Fr. Sahak M. Kaishian

*Where were you born?*

I was born in West Allis, Wisconsin. It is a suburb of Milwaukee which had a lot of industrial manufacturing in its day.

*Where else have you lived?*

I have lived in Franklin and Greendale, Wisconsin; Etchmiadzin, Armenia; New Rochelle, Yonkers and Bronxville, New York; Jerusalem, Palestine; Haverhill, Massachusetts; Visalia, California; St. Paul, Minnesota; Worcester, Massachusetts and Greenfield, Wisconsin.

*Talk about your family:*

My father was the youngest child of poor immigrant refugees. He always had to fight with the other school kids to prove himself. He was industrious from a young age. As a child he had several paper routes and a bicycle repair business. Later he became an auto mechanic and built a race car. As a young adult he became a speedway promoter and owner and has had numerous successful businesses.

My mother was perhaps a typical all-American woman of German and English heritage. She earned a teaching degree. She did not use her degree professionally but she taught everyone she could how to swim or how to dance Armenian folk dances. Although she was not Armenian, she embraced the Armenian faith and culture. She was the Director of the

Armenian Dance group "Yerevan Dancers". She was involved in the Church's choir and Women's Guild. She volunteered at the Midwest Regional Hye Camp. And she was a member and former Dirouhi of the local chapter of the daughters of Vartan Organization. I have one sister, Kathy. She is a nurse who currently specializes in home care.

I am one of four brothers. At six foot one, I was the shortest of my brothers. My brother, James, operates a concrete pump truck. My other two brothers Kenneth and Peter, passed away prematurely. My siblings and I felt close to and looked up to our cousins, and especially our Armenian cousins. Most of them were full Armenian and they had darker skin and hair. I was jealous that they could grow a beard in a week, while it took me almost two months. Also, they had Armenian mothers who cooked Armenian food all the time.

My earliest memory is of my Armenian Grandfather, Yeghia. He was the only older man I would approach as a toddler. That made him feel proud. In World War I he joined the French Foreign Legion so he could fight against the Turks. My grandmother, Armenouhi, was a survivor of the 1915 Genocide. She lost an eye to infection when she was on a march through the desert. As a young girl, she escaped from the death march and made it to safety on her own. Despite her experience, she was a kind and gentle woman. She was very loving and nurturing. She was an excellent cook. When we went to visit

*(Continued on page 12)*

*(Continued from page 11)*

her, Grandma Kaishian always had a tasty treat whether it was madzoon, paklava or even lemon drops from her candy dish.

*Where in Armenia did your ancestors come from?*

On my father's side, my grandfather came from Tomarza, which was a small village about twelve miles from Caesarea in Cappadocia, Turkey. My grandmother was from the larger city of Marziban.

On my mother's side, my grandmother's parents came from the Alsace Lorraine area which was German at that time. My grandfather's heritage traces back to the Mayflower and England. When Armenians ask me about my ethnic background, I like to say, "I am 50 percent *odar* (foreigner) and one hundred percent Armenian."

*Have you learned anything interesting or unique about that area and/or your ancestors?*

St. Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia grew up in Caesarea. He was a contemporary and friend of Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus. They were great theologians known as the Cappadocian Fathers. Caesarea was a significant Christian Theological center and was only twelve miles from Tomarza.

*Was there an Armenian community in the area where you grew up?*

Yes, but it was dispersed. In the Village of Greendale, where I grew up, out of a population of 15,000 people, there were only three Armenian families. The Armenians gathered from all around the Greater Milwaukee area

*Did you take part in any Armenian events while growing up?*

I attended St. John the Baptist Armenian Church which was originally established in West Allis and later moved to Greenfield. I became an altar server when I was 14. I was a member of the Yerevan Dance Group which performed at various venues around Southeast Wisconsin including the Annual International Folk Fair.

I attended the Midwest Regional Hye Camp as a camper and later as a staff member. I attended area Church Picnics and dances, as well as the St. Nersess Armenian Seminary Deacons Training Programs and Summer Studies Conferences

*Did you go to Armenian schools?*

I attended the AGBU Saturday School which was supported by all the Wisconsin Armenian Churches.

*What schools did you attend?*

I attended Greendale Public Schools, Marquette University, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, majoring in Linguistics. I attended the Theological Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin, St. Nersess Armenian

Theological Seminary, earning a certificate in Advanced Armenian Church Studies, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, earning a Master of Divinity Degree, New York Hospital - Cornell Medical Center - Westchester, New York - Clinical Pastoral Education Program, The Seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, UW Milwaukee- Master of Library and Information Science

*Did you grow up speaking Armenian?*

No. My mother did not speak it at all. My father understood but did not speak so we did not get much reinforcement in the home. I learned a few phrases in Armenian School and at Hye Camp Armenian classes. I really started to learn Armenian when I got involved with the Church as an altar server. My Armenian became stronger after years of self study, taking classes at the university and getting instruction and tutoring at the Diocese of the Armenian Church and then after living and studying for two years at Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia.

*Do you continue to do so?*

I try to speak and read Armenian on a daily basis. My father has even recently begun to recall the Armenian of his youth and has started speaking Armenian with me.

*Did you grow up eating Armenian foods?*

I enjoyed eating shish kebab, sarma, pilaf, madzoon, yalanchi, lahmajun, fasoolia, tass kebab, which we called madagh, paklava, bourma and any other Armenian delicacies I could get a hold of.

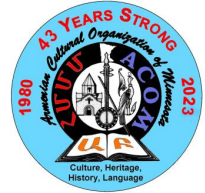
*Recall your experience. How has being Armenian affected your life? Did you ever feel different, put down or rejected because of it? Are there any specific events:*

I remember when I was a boy scout, I was in a canoe race and one of the other scouts called me "The Mad Armenian". I did not mind that though. I kind of took it as a compliment. Besides, I won the race. In school, one kid called me "Toucan Sam". One of my friends used to pretend that my nose was blocking out the sun whenever I stood behind him. Later, I heard that people refer to Armenians as "Camel Jockeys" or "Fresno Indians".

*What people specially stand out in your memory in terms of being Armenian?*

I was influenced by the older generation, who were survivors of the Genocide. Also, I was impressed by numerous Armenian Clergy including: Torkom Srpazan, Tiran Srpazan, Hayr Shunork and Der Yeprem.





## **ACOM CALENDAR OF EVENTS Jan. - mid Mar. 2024**

Questions, Suggestions, email: [azadmesrobian@hotmail.com](mailto:azadmesrobian@hotmail.com)  
or call ACOM President Azad at: 507-382-1838

DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
1/8/2024	Mon.	5:30 P	ACOM Board Meeting (ZOOM)
1/18/2024	Thu.	7:00 P	ACOM Book Club
1/20/2024	Sat.	7:00 P	ACOM Cinema Saturday
1/28/2024	Sun.	1:30 P	Armenian Dance Class (ZOOM)
2/5/2024	Mon.	5:30 P	ACOM Board Meeting (ZOOM)
2/10/2024	Sat.	6:30 P	ACOM Gagham/Valentine Party
2/16/2024	Thu.	7:00 P	ACOM Book Club
2/25/2024	Sun.	1:30 P	Armenian Dance Class (ZOOM)
3/11/2024	Mon.	5:30 P	ACOM Board Meeting (ZOOM)
3/17/2024	Sun.	1:30 P	Armenian Dance Class (ZOOM)
3/21/2024	Thu.	7:00 P	ACOM Book Club

**NOTE: dates and times are accurate at the time of publishing. For an up-to-date calendar, please visit our website: [mnarmenians.org](http://mnarmenians.org)**



### **ARMENIAN DANCE REHEARSALS**

Sunday afternoons, at 1 pm in Roseville. If you are interested in joining the group, email [yekibdos@gmail.com](mailto:yekibdos@gmail.com)



*Men dancing Yarkhushta*

### **ACOM BOOK CLUB NEWS**

Contact Leroy if you are interested in participating:  
[leroy.erickson@minnmicro.com](mailto:leroy.erickson@minnmicro.com)  
The club meets monthly on the third Thursday of the month at a location we all agree upon.



### **ACOM BOARD MEMBERS 2022-23**

<b>President:</b>	Steven U.
<b>Vice President:</b>	Azad M.
<b>Past President:</b>	John P-D B.
<b>Secretary:</b>	Kathleen D.
<b>Communications Secretary:</b>	Lynne G.
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Nairy D.
<b>Members at Large:</b>	Kassian V., Alarica H., Kat K.
<b>Webmaster &amp; Newsletter Editor:</b>	Terry M.
<b>Board Advisor:</b>	Tom K.

Any ACOM dues-paid member who is interested in serving on the Board is welcome to contact us:

**[www.mnarmenians.org](http://www.mnarmenians.org)**

Likewise, get in touch with us if you have comments, suggestions or would like to submit an article for an upcoming ACOM Newsletter.



## ARMENIAN DANCE ENSEMBLE OF MINNESOTA

### *Highlights*

The Armenian Dance Ensemble brought 2023 to a close with 15 performances for the year. Aside from dancing twice at the Minnesota State Fair, members of the group entertained audiences at various Festivals, including the Black Sea Odyssey at Landmark Center, the International Festival at the Ukrainian Center, different Community Centers and Senior Residences.

We were saddened when two long time ADE members, Mari D-M. and Cathy R., moved out of Minnesota and left the group: Mari moved to Texas and Cathy moved to Georgia to be with her daughter. Then, early Fall, Rachel K. took a three-month trip to the Middle East and Armenia, but we are happy to hear that she is returning to the US mid-December and will rejoin ADE in 2024.

We are quite pleased that three new women have recently joined the ensemble: Jyni K., Valerie E. and Rae E. They are in the process of learning the dances and will be a great addition to ADE.

My most sincere gratitude to the remaining ADE members for their dedication and commitment to attend rehearsals, work on costumes and go to performances with the main goal of enhancing Armenian culture through music, dance, costumes and narrations.

THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH ! *Nairi*



**ADE Performance Pictures from the Ukrainian Festival, MN State Fair, Village Shores & Landmark Center**



The Armenian Dance Ensemble has been representing Armenian Culture through Dance and Music for over 25 years. If you have an interest in Armenian dance, if you have danced in the past, or have never danced but really would like to learn and participate, this would be a good time to give it a try. All the dances are taught, and costumes provided. It is a volunteer activity and we only ask for your time commitment. Rehearsals are typically held on Sundays at 1:00 pm in person. Remember: you do not need to be Armenian to become a member of the dance group, just a desire to learn and enjoy Armenian music and dance.



## ACOM 2023 PAID MEMBERS

If you do NOT SEE your name below, then you have NOT renewed your 2023 membership. You can still send in your membership by filling in the form on the back of the newsletter and mailing it to the address on the form. You can also use PayPal, accessible from the website.

Andeweg, George, Jeanne  
 Aram, Connie & George  
 Aroutiunian, Margarita; Usitalo, Steven  
 Asgian, Phil  
 Bell, Robert  
 Bulbulian, Francis, Barbara  
 Cafesjian, Kathie; Baradaran, Jaff  
 Charchian, Aram, Ruth  
 Daniels, Kathleen; Myers, Marcie, Mari  
 Digris, Naïry; McGibbon, Terry & Hassetts  
 Erickson, Bradley  
 Erickson, Cynthia, Leroy  
 Favre, Margaret, Jim  
 Gauro, Boghos, Lana  
 Gildensoph, Lynne  
 Hajinian, Peter, Brooke & family  
 Hakobyan, Artur; Papyieva, Nina & family  
 Hayes, Jackie; Nelson, Mike  
 Izmirian, Peter  
 Johnson, Andrea, Lowell  
 Kelegian, Der Yeprem, Judy  
 Keljik, Kat; Earley, Matt  
 Keljik, Mark; Grantz, Caren  
 Keljik, Jeff, Susan  
 Keljik, Tom; Collins, Jennifer  
 Kourajian, Art  
 Lents, Nicholas  
 Lind-Sinianian, Gary, Susan  
 Manthei, Hank  
 Matossian, Lou Ann  
 Meketarian, Martin, Mara & family  
 Mesrobian, Azad, Karen  
 Ohannesian, Judy; Tiffany, Doug  
 Parker-Der Boghosian, John; Pounds, Jim  
 Poritsky, Joan  
 Rynda, Kelly  
 Savayan, Peka, Maria; Anderson, Stephen  
 Vaubel, Kass, Carol, Jamaica P.  
 Wiersbeck, Mark  
 Wiersbeck, Sarah  
 Ylitalo, Caroline, David & family

## ARMENIAN CULTURAL ORGANIZATION OF MINNESOTA — ACOM

### MISSION STATEMENT



- 1) To provide programs and events which encourage its members to learn Armenian culture, language, history and heritage.
- 2) To provide programs of Armenian culture, language, history and heritage for the general Minnesota area.
- 3) To provide an environment which encourages participation of all Armenians, their relations and friends who have an interest in Armenian culture, regardless of religious, political or social differences, and to promote harmony among its members.
- 4) To provide periodic gatherings and meetings for the cultural furtherance of the Armenian people, their relations and friends who have an interest in Armenian culture within the general Minnesota area.

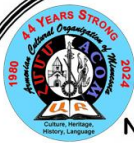
### CONSTITUTION

The Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota (ACOM) preserves and promotes Armenian culture, language, history and heritage in Minnesota and the upper Midwest. Founded in 1980 and headquartered in St. Paul, ACOM is the oldest and largest Armenian organization in the state.

ACOM welcomes everyone, regardless of ethnic, religious, or political affiliation, who takes an interest in Armenia and Armenians. Our members include first-generation through fourth-generation Minnesota Armenians, their families, and non-Armenian friends of the community.

ACOM's numerous cultural and social events include Armenian dance parties (Gaghant), guest speakers, folk dance lessons and performances by the Armenian Dance Ensemble of Minnesota, Genocide commemorations, summer picnics, and series of Interviews of Presenters talking about their heritage. ACOM also sponsors all Armenian activities at the International Institute's Festival of Nations, a major regional folk festival held annually in St. Paul. Minnesota Armenians were founding participants in 1932; today, the Festival is ACOM's most visible public venue.

As an independent, 501 (c)3 non-profit organization, ACOM is supported primarily by membership dues and private donations. Gifts to ACOM are tax-deductible to the extent permissible by law.



## ACOM MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Valid January 1 to December 31, 2024

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (    ) -    -    E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Household Membership ..... \$35.00  
Includes all members of one household

☐ Out Of State ..... \$15.00  
(Newsletter Only)

☐ Contributing ..... \$100.00

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**==>Please Make Your Check Payable to ACOM<==**



Complete this form and  
Return it with your check to



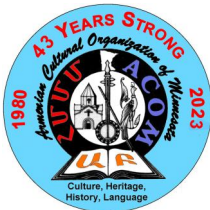
Nairy Digris, Treasurer  
1703 Skillman Ave. W.  
Roseville, MN 55113

We appreciate and count on your continued support

**MinneHyeLites** is emailed to all and distributed via USPS only to those who request it. This saves ACOM considerable printing and mailing costs. If you would like to receive your newsletter via email, just send your email address to [hyebar@yahoo.com](mailto:hyebar@yahoo.com)

1703 Skillman Avenue West

Roseville, MN 55113



**We're on the Web**

[www.mnarmenians.org](http://www.mnarmenians.org)