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WELL DONE

Islamic Center barbecue helps ease a difficult week

OPEN HOUSE | Just days after two Muslim men were arrested in Seattle on terrorism charges, mosque works to welcome neighbors and “demytify” their faith.

BY EMILY HEFFTER
Seattle Times staff reporter

Confronting stereotypes is nothing new to Muslims at the Islamic Center of Eastside. It's the very reason they have an open house every few months — to invite in neighbors and “demytify” themselves.

Saturday's scheduled open house came just two days after two Muslim men were arrested in Seattle and accused of planning a terrorist attack on a Seattle military building. Disheartened but expecting questions, present-

ers at the Islamic Center in Bellevue worked up an extra PowerPoint slide to address terrorism.

“The stereotype is always there,” said Bahiyya Hassan, adding that the arrests feel “external” to a congregation more focused on the day-to-day aspects of faith and community. “This was planned a month ago. It doesn't really matter, because we're just hoping we can talk about what Islam is actually about.”

A short presentation at the open house reviewed the



COURTNEY BLETHER RIEFFKIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Zeeshan Baqir, right, talks with a guest at the Islamic Center of Eastside's open house Saturday.

basic beliefs of Islam, followed by a frank and casual question-and-answer session

that covered how Muslims fit prayer into their workday and why they wear hijabs on

their heads.

“If I wake up with a bad hair day, actually, it doesn't matter,” laughed Leslie Taylor, of Bellevue. “You're not going to know, because I can put this on.”

The women met separately from the men in the upstairs of the mosque, chatting and eating barbecue sandwiches and kebabs.

While they find the media's focus on Muslim terrorism puzzling, Muslims at Saturday's event said they also know their faith is misunderstood.

They waited patiently Saturday while non-Muslims unfamiliar with the religion's See > **OPEN HOUSE, B5**

mosque.

DAVID LEE/STAFF

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FOR GET-TOGETHER**

**Neighbors welcomed;
questions, too**

terminology struggled to find the right way to ask questions. They tried to explain the deep sense of community they feel during prayers and described a God who is compassionate and gracious.

In one exchange, a Muslim woman described the ins and outs of the mosque's weekly prayer service to a visiting Presbyterian, and then asked the woman to describe her church's service.

Several of the visitors Saturday were from the Mormon church next door, which shares a parking lot with the mosque.



COURTNEY BLETHEN RIEKIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Mohammad Bakr, center, serves up food on Saturday to guests at the Islamic Center of Eastside, which invited friends and neighbors of all faiths to a big barbecue and an open house for the neighborhood.

"I always like to learn about other cultures," said Bonnie Stowell, who said several Islamic women attended an event this spring at her church.

Some Muslims said they blamed themselves, in part, for the stereotypes about Islam that followed the attacks

of Sept. 11, 2001. Perhaps they didn't do enough to get out into the community before then, they said.

"If you don't know each other, then this gives rise to all these misconceptions," said Zeeshan Baqir. "Nitty people can be any religion." By hosting regular open

houses, he hopes, the mosque can be a resource "whenever some kind of Muslim does something—a nutty Muslim—they can come straight to us and ask us what's going on, and ask us to clarify."

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