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ROOTS & HORIZONS

ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE VOICE

ISSUE 0 | Spring | 2026

EVENTS

FIRST ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH FESTIVAL 2024

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BUILDING BRIDGES, CREATING LEGACY

FROM THE DESK OF MOHAMMAD MOHSEN, PRESIDENT



Mohammad Mohsen, MD - President, Arab Cultural Center St. Louis

Three years ago, we embarked on a journey with a simple yet profound vision: to create a space where Arab culture could flourish in St. Louis while building meaningful connections with our broader community. Today, as I hold the inaugural issue of BRIDGES magazine, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for how far we've come together.

When we opened the doors of the Arab Cultural Center in 2022, we were a small group of dreamers who believed that culture could be a bridge—not a barrier. We believed that by sharing our traditions, our stories, and our heritage, we could enrich the tapestry of St. Louis while helping Arab American families maintain their precious connections to their roots. This magazine represents more than just pages of text and images. It embodies our collective journey from a modest beginning to becoming a vital community institution serving over 500 families. Through these pages, you'll discover stories of resilience, celebration, and unity that define who we are as a community.

Our First Arab American Heritage Month Festival in 2024 brought together thousands of St. Louisans from all backgrounds, proving that when we open our doors and hearts, the entire community responds with enthusiasm and support.

From our ACC United soccer team's championship season to our growing Arabic language school, from our immigration support services to our Dabke classes that echo with the sounds of tradition—each program tells a story of bridge-building in action.

As we look ahead, I see tremendous opportunities for growth. Our Arab Excellence Awards will recognize the outstanding achievements within our community. Our expanded youth programs will nurture the next generation of Arab American leaders. Our cultural events will continue to be spaces where diversity is not just tolerated but celebrated.

I believe that culture is the most powerful force for positive change, capable of transcending boundaries and uniting people across differences. The Arab Cultural Center stands as testament to this belief, and BRIDGES magazine will be our voice—sharing our stories, celebrating our achievements, and inviting everyone to be part of our journey.

To our members, volunteers, partners, and supporters: this magazine is yours. It reflects your contributions, your stories, and your dreams for our community. To those discovering us for the first time: welcome. We invite you to explore, participate, and help us build more bridges.

Thank you for believing in our vision. Together, we are not just preserving culture—we are creating a legacy for generations to come.

With warm regards and gratitude,

Mohammad Mohsen, MD

President, Arab Cultural Center St. Louis

VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

IN THE MELTING POT OF IDENTITIES: WHO ARE WE?

A MESSAGE FROM DR. ZAID N. MAHIR, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Dr. Zaid N. Mahir Vice President, Arab Cultural Center St. Louis

It is, perhaps, a no-brainer to say that the success story of modern America rests on imagining the country as a melting pot in which ethnic, racial, and religious differences melt to produce a cohesive identity.

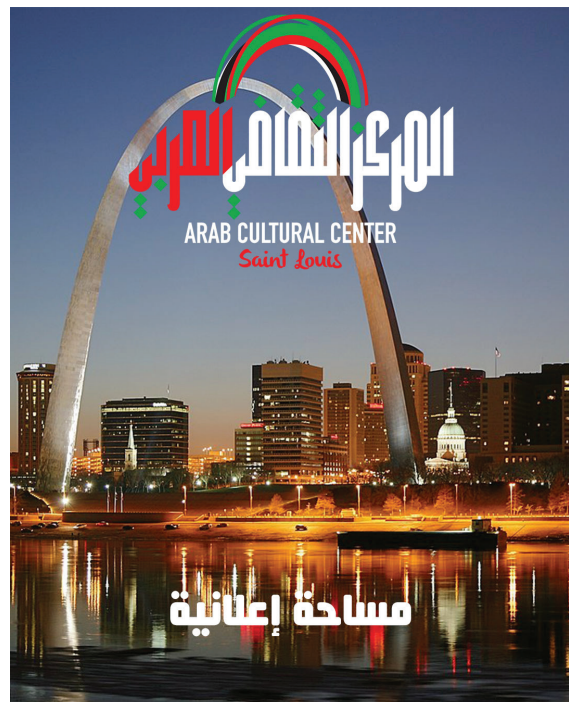
Imagination aside, a careful examination of the American experience in recent history suggests that over the past few decades, our perception of identity as Americans has been increasingly shaped by a culture-specific, at times polarizing, frame-of-thought: that of hyphenated identity.

The term, which is not new, is loaded with implications, expectations, and challenges that complicate the process of identity formation, not only for current first- and second-generation immigrants but also, and in a thought-provoking fashion, for older generations of immigrants.

Arabs in America are no exception to this reality: they are immigrants, or the children of immigrants, from the multicultural society that makes up the Arab world. They have a unique lifestyle and, as befits a people with a rich civilizational heritage, a perception of identity that is closely connected to their roots. This perception is conspicuous in the stories they tell, especially to their children, and the conversations they have with their host culture, about a past that exists both in the individual and collective memory of generations of Arab immigrants.

Hence the importance of roots to the Arabs' experience in America, and to the horizons they strive to reach as a community of immigrants. Hence the title of our magazine—Roots & Horizons, a biannual publication focused, initially, on the Arabic community of St. Louis, but poised to be, over time, a voice for Arab-Americans in the Midwest, as well.

Roots & Horizons is an ambitious project intended to represent the various aspects of the Arabs' experience in America and their different walks of life. Effective October 2026 (which will see the publication of the first issue proper), the magazine will publish on a variety of topics—social, environmental, literary, artistic—and from a variety of genres—essays, poems, stories, while covering events and activities that bring members of the community together and celebrate their accomplishments.



Arab American Heritage Month Festival 2025

The Day St. Louis Discovered the Heart of Arab Culture

BY Magazine Director - PHOTOS BY AHMAD HASSAN



The festival brought together vendors, performers, and community members in a vibrant display of cultural pride. Local Arab-owned businesses showcased their products, traditional musicians filled the air with melodies from across the Arab world, and the aroma of authentic Middle Eastern cuisine drew curious visitors who left as new friends.

"What pleases me the most at such a gathering," says Dr. Zaid N. Mahir, "is meeting individuals and families with roots in different Arab countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Yemen, to name a few, bringing to the festival their unique local traditions and sharing them as members of a community."

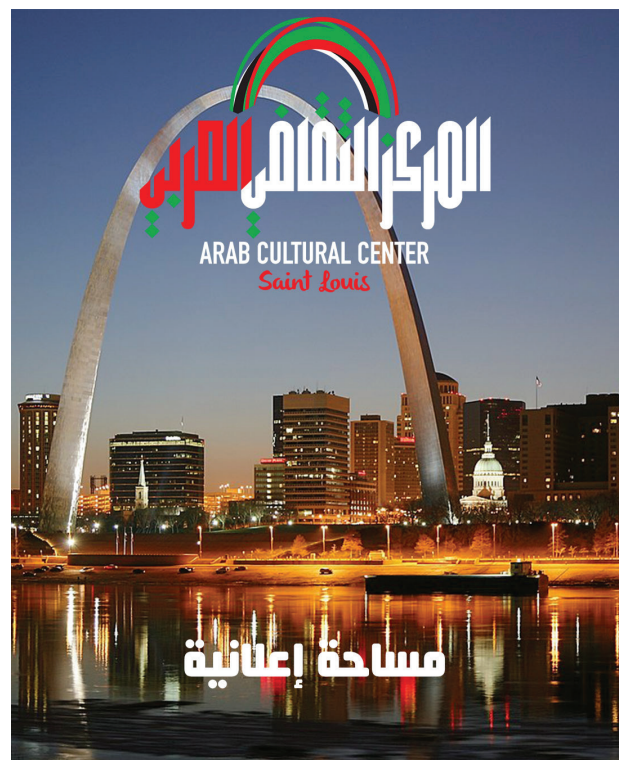
April has become a month of profound significance for St. Louis's Arab American community.

Following the success of our inaugural Arab American Heritage Month Festival in 2024, the Arab Cultural Center St. Louis stands ready to expand this celebration into an annual tradition that brings together thousands of St. Louisans from all backgrounds.

"When we launched our first festival in 2024, we were taking a leap of faith," reflects Mohammad Mohsen, President of the Arab Cultural Center. "The overwhelming response from the community proved that St. Louis was ready and eager to celebrate Arab American heritage."

The Journey Begins: Festival 2024

The inaugural Arab American Heritage Month Festival in April 2024 marked a historic moment for St. Louis's Arab American community. For the first time, the city witnessed a large-scale public celebration dedicated to showcasing the rich tapestry of Arab culture, coinciding with the national recognition of April as Arab American Heritage Month.



A Day of Cultural Exchange

Morning: Setting the Stage



The 2024 festival opened with traditional Arabic coffee service, welcoming early visitors with the time-honored gesture of Arab hospitality. Volunteers from the Arab Cultural Center, many in traditional dress representing their countries of origin, created an atmosphere that transported visitors across continents while keeping them firmly rooted in St. Louis.

Local schools brought student groups to experience the educational pavilions, where children learned to write their names in Arabic calligraphy, tried on traditional clothing, and discovered the Arab roots of everyday English words like "algebra," "coffee," and "sugar."

Afternoon: Peak Celebration

The main stage came alive with performances that showcased the artistic diversity of Arab culture. The ACC Dabke Troupe, formed just months before the festival, performed the traditional Levantine line dance with an energy that had the crowd clapping along. Their synchronized movements and colorful costumes became one of the festival's most photographed moments. "Dabke is about community," explained troupe leader Rami Kassis. "When we dance together, we're connected to our ancestors and to each other. Teaching it here in St. Louis keeps that connection alive for our children."

Local Arab American musicians performed both traditional and contemporary pieces, demonstrating how Arab culture continues to evolve while honoring its roots.

The fusion of oud and guitar, tabla and drum kit, showed young Arab Americans that they don't have to choose between their heritage and their American identity—they can celebrate both.



Community Voices Rising Business Showcase

The festival provided a crucial platform for Arab American entrepreneurs to connect with the broader St. Louis market. From traditional crafts to innovative tech startups, the business pavilion demonstrated the economic vitality of the Arab American community.

"This festival opened doors we didn't even know existed," says Layla Hassan, owner of a local Middle Eastern catering company. "We made connections that turned into regular contracts. The visibility was invaluable."

The Arab Cultural Center's own booth highlighted its comprehensive services: translation assistance, immigration support, Arabic language classes, youth programs, and the ACC United soccer team. Many visitors signed up for programs on the spot, eager to deepen their connection to Arab culture.

Educational Impact

One of the festival's most lasting impacts came through its educational components. Teachers who attended with their students reported increased interest in Middle Eastern studies, requests for Arab American speakers in classrooms, and a noticeable decrease in cultural misunderstandings among students.

"My students had so many misconceptions," admitted Sarah Thompson, a middle school teacher from South County. "The festival gave them real experiences with real people. That's worth more than any textbook lesson."

The Arab Cultural Center capitalized on this interest by launching its school outreach program, which has since reached dozens of schools across the St. Louis metropolitan area.

Community Voices Rising Business Showcase

Building on the success of 2024, the Arab Cultural Center has announced ambitious plans for the second Arab American Heritage Month Festival, scheduled for Saturday, April 19, 2025, at Tower Grove Park's Stone Shelter Pavilion. The festival will run from 11:00 AM to 7:00 PM, expanding both in scope and duration.

"We're moving to Tower Grove Park to accommodate our growth," explains President Mohsen. "The park's beautiful setting and central location will allow us to welcome even more of St. Louis to our celebration."

The 2025 festival already has confirmed participants including Heal Palestine (a nonprofit organization), Dreamy Design for Modest Fashion and Henna, and Taste Balkan LLC for Bosnian food and beverages. Special showcases will feature Jim Hacking Immigration Law, Oak Street Health Clinic, a book launch by Dr. Zaid Mahir, and an art exhibition by Emily Chatterson.



ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH FESTIVAL 2024

Arab Cultural Center - Saint Louis
Presents Vocalist

NIBAL MALSHI

*Join us for an evening of solidarity,
as music awakens a nostalgic sense,
bringing us together in unity.*

21.04.2024
7:30 PM - 9 PM

LOCATION: CHESTERFIELD FAMILY YMCA
16464 BURKHARDT PL, CHESTERFIELD, MO 63017

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT US AT:
PHONE: +1 314 717 1244 | MAIL: INFO@ACCSTL.ORG

Get your ticket

WWW.ACCSTL.ORG

New Features for 2025

This year's festival introduces several new elements:
Extended Hours: Running from 11 AM to 7 PM to accommodate more activities

Professional Showcases: Including legal, health, and literary presentations

Art Exhibitions: Featuring both traditional and contemporary Arab American artists

Expanded Food Court: Representing cuisines from across the Arab world and Mediterranean region

Youth Talent Show: Highlighting the next generation of Arab American performers

"We want every visitor to leave with a deeper understanding of Arab culture and the Arab American experience," says Vice President Dr. Mahir. "But more than that, we want them to leave with new friends, new favorite foods, and new appreciation for the diversity that makes St. Louis special."



Beyond the Festival: Year-Round Impact *Cultural Programming Expansion*

The success of the Heritage Month Festival has catalyzed year-round cultural programming at the Arab Cultural Center. Monthly cultural nights, art exhibitions, and educational workshops keep the spirit of the festival alive throughout the year.

The ACC United soccer team, launched in 2023, has become another vehicle for cultural exchange. "Soccer is a universal language," says team captain Omar Nasser. "When we play, we're not just representing ourselves—we're ambassadors for our culture."

Building Bridges Through Service

The Arab Cultural Center's comprehensive services have seen increased demand following the festival's visibility. Translation services, immigration support, and Arabic language classes have all expanded to meet community needs.

"The festival showed people we're here and we're ready to help," notes Secretary Shadi Alkhazaaleh.

"Whether someone needs a document translated, help navigating immigration paperwork, or wants to learn Arabic, we're their bridge to those services."

The center's educational programs have particularly flourished. Arabic language classes now run multiple sessions for different age groups and skill levels, while the Dabke dance classes have a waiting list. The youth programs engage dozens of children in cultural activities that strengthen their connection to their heritage while building confidence in their American identity.



Looking Forward: The Future of Arab American Heritage in St. Louis *Cultural Programming Expansion*

Community Recognition

The establishment of the Arab American Heritage Month Festival has brought unprecedented recognition to St. Louis's Arab American community. City officials, business leaders, and educational institutions now actively seek partnerships with the Arab Cultural Center.

"We're no longer invisible," says board member Fatimah Alkhshali, who coordinates youth programs. "Our children see their culture celebrated publicly, officially, joyfully. That validation is powerful."

The ripple effects extend beyond the Arab American community. Interfaith organizations report increased interest in Muslim-Christian dialogue. Local businesses are adding Arabic signage to welcome Arab American customers. Schools are incorporating Arab American history into their curricula.

Economic and Social Impact

The festivals have demonstrated significant economic impact. Arab-owned businesses report increased visibility and sales. The cultural center itself has seen membership growth of over 40% since the first festival. New Arab American entrepreneurs are choosing St. Louis as their base, citing the supportive community environment.

"When people see a thriving Arab American community, it attracts more families, more businesses, more investment," explains board member Rashad Alhachami. "The festival is an economic development tool as much as a cultural celebration." A Message of Unity

As we prepare for the 2025 festival, the message remains clear: Arab American heritage is American heritage. The stories of Arab Americans—as immigrants, as entrepreneurs, as neighbors, as citizens—are woven into the fabric of St. Louis and America. The Arab Cultural Center's journey from its establishment to becoming a cornerstone of St. Louis's cultural landscape demonstrates the power of community organizing, cultural pride, and bridge-building. Through the Heritage Month Festival and year-round programming, ACC is not just preserving culture—it's creating a model for how diverse communities can thrive together.

"Every person who attends our festival, takes our classes, or uses our services becomes part of our extended family," President Mohsen emphasizes. "That's how we build bridges—one connection, one friendship, one shared experience at a time."

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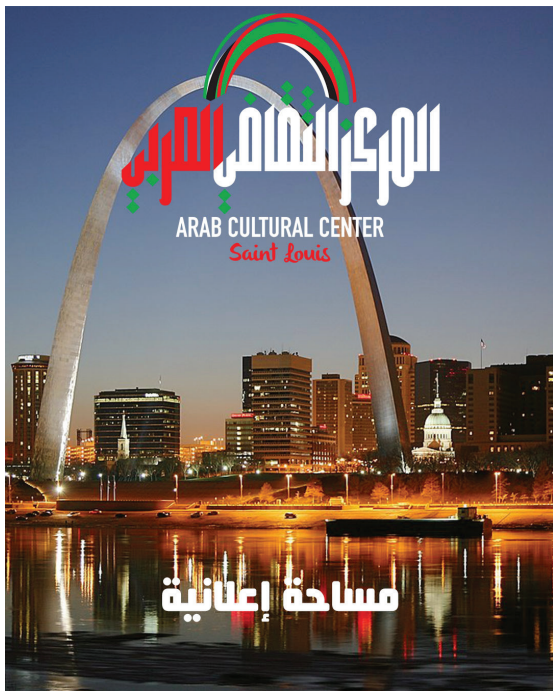
Join Us in 2025

The second Arab American Heritage Month Festival promises to be even more spectacular than the first. Mark your calendars for April 19, 2025, and join us at Tower Grove Park to celebrate the rich heritage of Arab Americans in St. Louis.

For those interested in participating as vendors, performers, or volunteers, registration is open until April 7, 2025. Visit www.accstl.org or call 314-717-1244 to learn more.

As St. Louis's Arab American community continues to grow and flourish, the Heritage Month Festival stands as an annual reminder of the beauty that emerges when cultures come together in celebration. It's not just about preserving the past—it's about building a shared future where every culture is valued, every story is heard, and every person belongs.

The Arab Cultural Center St. Louis is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting cross-cultural understanding and providing resources for the Arab American community.



Best of 2025: Milestones & Memories

A Year of Growth, Service, and Community Building

BY Compiled by the ACC Editorial Team

The Day St. Louis Discovered the Heart of Arab Culture

As 2025 draws to a close, the Arab Cultural Center St. Louis reflects on a year of meaningful connections, cultural celebrations, and steadfast service to our community. From continuing our essential services to celebrating our heritage through festivals and gatherings, this has been a year of strengthening the bonds that unite us.

WINTER 2025: Continuing Our Mission

Essential Services Never Stop

Throughout the cold Winter months, ACC maintained its commitment to serving the Arab American community with our core services. Our translation services remained busy, helping families navigate important documents for school, work, and legal matters.

The immigration support desk continued to provide guidance to newcomers, offering orientation sessions about life in St. Louis, from understanding the DMV process to finding halal markets and Arabic-speaking doctors. These one-on-one sessions, though small in scale, made enormous differences in individual lives.



Iftar / Dinner Invitation - March 15, 2025
دعوة للإفطار / العشاء - الخميس عشر من مارس 2025

led by:
Imam Youssef Mckawy
Imam Abdelrazek Elghawaby
Organized by:
Furqaan Project



بإشراف:
الشيخ يوسف مكوي
الشيخ عبد الرزق الغوابي
تنظيم:
مشروع الفرقان

Quran Competition
We are excited to host a Quran competition to engage both young and adult participants, starting after Asr prayer.
The competition will be divided into levels:
• Level 1 (Adults, 18 years and older): Surah Al-Kahf
• Level 2 (Ages 14-17): Surah Ya-Sin
• Level 3 (Ages 7-14): Surah Al-Mulk
• Level 4 (Ages 7 and under): Surah An-Naba

Event Date: Saturday, March 15, 2025
Time: 7:00 PM
Location: TASOM (Turkish American Society of Missouri) 664 Lemay Ferry Rd., St. Louis, MO 63125

مسابقة القرآن
يسعدنا تنظيم مسابقة القرآن للمشاركة من جميع الأعمار بدءاً من صلاة العصر. المسابقة مقسمة إلى مستويات:
• المستوى 1 (بالبالغون، 18 سنة فما فوق): سورة الكهف
• المستوى 2 (الأعمار من 14-17 سنة): سورة يس
• المستوى 3 (الأعمار من 7-14 سنة): سورة الملك
• المستوى 4 (الأعمار حتى 7 سنوات): سورة النبا

تاريخ الحدث: السبت، 15 مارس 2025
الوقت: الساعة 7:00 مساءً
المكان: الجمعية الأمريكية التركية في ميزوري (TASOM) 664 Lemay Ferry Rd., St. Louis, MO 63125

Please scan the QR code. الرجاء مسح رمز QR.



"Every family we help feels like a victory," notes Dr. Zaid N. Mahir, Vice President. "Whether it's translating a birth certificate or explaining how to enroll children in school, these services are the foundation of what we do."

Arabic Language Classes Continue

Our Arabic language school maintained steady enrollment, with dedicated teachers ensuring that children and adults alike could maintain their connection to the Arabic language. Saturday morning classes became a gathering point for families, with parents sharing coffee and conversation while their children learned.



THE FESTIVAL

APRIL: THE HEARTBEAT OF HERITAGE

How Tower Grove Park became a home for Arab culture, unity, and celebration.

APRIL: THE HEARTBEAT OF HERITAGE

A Spiritual Start: The Joy of Eid al-Fitr

The spring season began with a profound sense of unity. Early in April, as the holy month of Ramadan concluded, the Arab Cultural Center of St. Louis (ACCSTL) took on a vital coordination role for Eid al-Fitr. Across the city, thousands of Muslims gathered for prayer, but the spirit extended far beyond the mosques. It was a time of open doors and generous hearts. By centralizing information on prayer times and locations, ACCSTL ensured that no family felt isolated. The celebration set a tone of gratitude and togetherness that would carry us through the rest of the season.

The 2nd Arab American Heritage Festival: A Historic Gathering

On April 19, 2025, history was made at Tower Grove Park. If our first festival was an introduction, this second edition was a declaration: the Arab community is here, vibrant, and essential to the fabric of St. Louis.

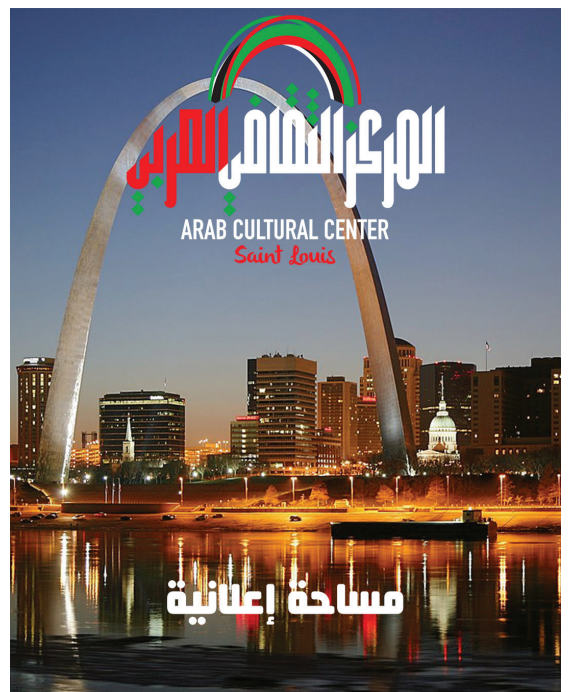
From the moment the gates opened at 11:00 AM, the park was transformed. The air was thick with the scent of cardamom-spiced coffee and grilling kebabs, drawing in curious neighbors and proud community members alike. The sound of the Tabla and the rhythmic stomping of the Dabke dancers echoed through the Stone Shelter Pavilion, creating an infectious energy that had people of all backgrounds clapping along.



More Than Just Celebration

This wasn't merely a party; it was a bridge. We saw local Arab-owned businesses showcasing their products, from handmade crafts to culinary delights, demonstrating the growing economic power of our demographic in Missouri. Families from Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and beyond mingled with native St. Louisans, breaking down stereotypes through the simple act of sharing a meal and a smile.

The success of the festival lies in its diversity. We proved that we can celebrate our specific heritage while being deeply embedded in the American experience. As the sun set over Tower Grove, the message was clear: St. Louis is our home, and our culture is a gift we are proud to share with it.



ARTS & INTELLECT

From ancient astronomy to modern cinema, April was a month of intellectual exploration.



BEYOND THE FESTIVAL: A CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

"Ancestral Lines": Art as History

While the festival celebrated the present, our special art exhibition, "Ancestral Lines," invited the community to reflect on the deep roots of our past. Held as a Silent Auction & Art Show, the event featured the evocative works of artist Emily Chatterson.

The collection was more than aesthetic; it was a narrative journey. Pieces such as "The Eye of Horus" and "Hegra" transported viewers to the ancient sands of the Middle East, connecting the history of civilizations like Palmyra to the modern Arab American identity. The auction provided a unique space for dialogue, where art lovers could discuss the preservation of heritage through visual expression. The funds raised during this event are a crucial support for our center's future programs, proving that art can sustain community.

The Silver Screen: Reclaiming Our Narrative.

April also marked a significant milestone for ACCSTL: our Special Film Screening for Heritage Month. For too long, Arabs have been portrayed in cinema through the lens of others. This event was about reclaiming that lens.

By hosting this intimate community screening, we brought authentic stories to the forefront. The selected films offered a window into the nuanced reality of Arab life—stories of family, resilience, humor, and love. The post-screening discussions were vibrant, allowing community members to dissect the themes and share their own experiences. This event laid the groundwork for our future collaborations with cinema institutions in St. Louis.

Science & Legacy: The Wednesday Lecture Series

Our heritage is also one of intellect and scientific discovery. During the Wednesday Lecture Series, we explored the "Golden Age" of our ancestors. The session on "Islamic Arabic Astronomy" was particularly impactful. It reminded the younger generation that the stars were mapped by Arab scholars, and that scientific inquiry is a fundamental part of our DNA. These educational nights ensure that our youth know they come from a lineage of thinkers, astronomers, and innovators.

MAY & JUNE: STRENGTH IN SOLIDARITY

Honoring our families, our graduates, and our shared struggles for freedom.

By Compiled by the ACC Editorial Team



The Class of 2025: Dreams Realized

As spring turned to summer, the focus shifted to the future. In May, ACCSTL proudly celebrated the Graduates of 2025. For an immigrant community, graduation is not just an academic milestone; it is the realization of the "American Dream."

We saw young men and women receiving their diplomas from high schools and universities across Missouri. We specifically highlighted the achievements of families like the Issa family (congratulating Noor Issa), who represent the hard work and dedication of the new generation. These graduates are the doctors, engineers, and leaders of tomorrow, and celebrating them is our greatest joy.

The Pillars of Home: Mother's Day

No community can thrive without the strength of its mothers. Our official Mother's Day tribute was a moment to pause and say "Shukran" (Thank you). In the Arab household, the mother is often the keeper of language and the preserver of faith. We honored their silent sacrifices and their loud love, acknowledging that ACCSTL stands on the foundation they build every day in their homes.

June: Standing with the Displaced

St. Louis is a city of new beginnings. On World Refugee Day (June 20), we reaffirmed our core mission. Many of our members arrived here seeking safety, and ACCSTL remains a sanctuary for them. We highlighted the resilience of refugees, offering support services to help them navigate their new lives. We reminded the city that a refugee is a survivor who brings immense strength to our society.

Juneteenth: Shared Freedom

Finally, we stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our African American neighbors to celebrate Juneteenth. Recognizing the shared struggle for dignity, freedom, and civil rights, ACCSTL emphasized the importance of solidarity between minority communities. Our freedom is interconnected, and by celebrating Juneteenth, we honor the resilience of the human spirit against oppression.

VOICES OF WISDOM: DR. ZAID NUMAN MAHIR

A distinguished member representing our values on the public stage.



The Power of Representation

In the life of any cultural organization, there are voices that resonate with clarity and wisdom. Dr. Zaid Numan Mahir is one such voice for the Arab Cultural Center of St. Louis. As a distinguished member of our community, Dr. Mahir has taken on the crucial role of representing ACCSTL in public forums, bridging the gap between our internal community and the broader society.

Delivering the Message

Recently, Dr. Mahir delivered a pivotal speech on our behalf (as noted in our recent archives). His address was not just a formality; it was a testament to the intellectual depth of the Arab American community in St. Louis. Whether speaking on cultural heritage, the importance of civic engagement, or the values that bind us, Dr. Mahir articulates the Arab American experience with dignity.

Why It Matters

Having leaders like Dr. Mahir represents a shift in how we are perceived. We are not just a community that celebrates festivals; we are a community of thinkers, doctors, and eloquent speakers contributing to the intellectual capital of Missouri. His contributions ensure that when the Arab Cultural Center speaks, it speaks with authority and grace..

A PILLAR OF INTEGRITY

How ACCSTL serves as the official voice for the community in times of joy and crisis.

More Than Just Culture

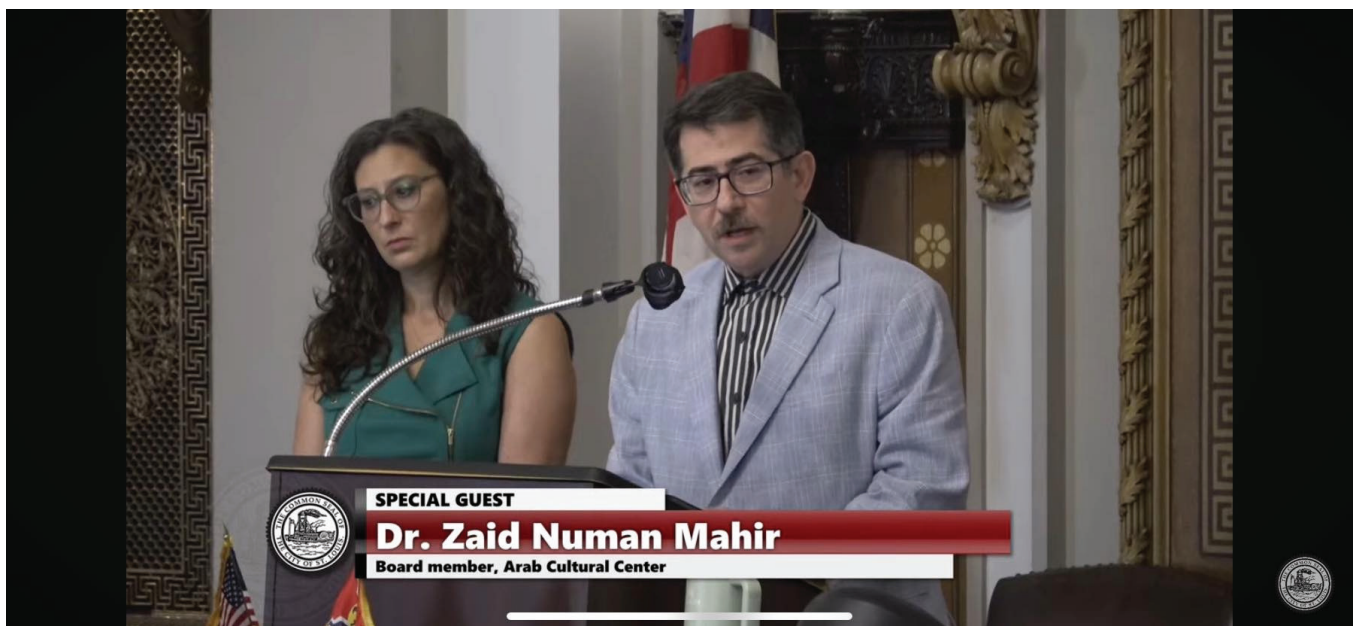
The Arab Cultural Center is often the first line of communication for our community. Throughout 2024 and 2025, the Board of Directors has worked tirelessly to issue official statements that protect and inform our people.

Navigating Challenges

From issuing "Official Warnings" to protect our members from scams or misinformation, to releasing "Condolence Statements" during times of loss, the Center operates with a high level of responsibility. We are not just an event organizer; we are a guardian of the community's well-being.

Building Trust

This year, our leadership has focused on transparency and rapid response. Whether it is clarifying legal misunderstandings or standing against hate speech, ACCSTL ensures that the Arab community in St. Louis is never voiceless. This official capacity is what distinguishes us as a true institution, earning the respect of city officials and partner organizations alike.



THE ARAB EXCELLENCE AWARDS

A historic initiative to honor the silent heroes of St. Louis.

A MESSAGE FROM DR. ZAID N. MAHIR, VICE PRESIDENT



A Milestone for St. Louis

2025 marked the launch of one of our most ambitious projects: The Arab Excellence Awards. For years, Arab Americans in St. Louis have been driving innovation, healing the sick, and building businesses, often without recognition. ACCSTL decided it was time to change that.











The Vision

The Awards were created with a simple mission: to shine a spotlight on success. We wanted to show the wider world—and our own youth—what Arab excellence looks like in practice. It is about moving from "surviving" to "thriving."

The Community Decides

What made this initiative special was the process. We opened the floor to Nominations, allowing the community to tell us who inspired them. The engagement was overwhelming. We saw nominations pouring in for dedicated teachers, philanthropic business owners, and tireless volunteers. The Voting Phase (which concluded in early 2025) turned into a community-wide conversation about merit and service.

LIVE RESULTS
Top 5 Leaders - Updated Instantly

Individual Excellence	Business Excellence
<p>#1  Muath Sadi Alkhiyari 51 votes</p> <p>#2  Leen Al Sayyed, MD 18 votes</p> <p>#3  Tahar Abou Chleih 11 votes</p> <p>#4  Mhd Rajeh, MD 9 votes</p> <p>#5  Fida Ahmad Barakat 6 votes</p>	<p>#1  Qahwates Coffee 3 votes</p> <p>#2  Sheesh Restaurant 2 votes</p> <p>#3  Mr. Pita Mediterranean Grill 1 votes</p> <p>#4  Sultan Mediterranean Restaurant 1 votes</p> <p>#5  Original Shawarma House 1 votes</p>

Support your favorites now!

The Categories of Success

The Arab Excellence Awards focused on two distinct pillars that sustain our community:

1. Individual Excellence

This category honored those who have gone above and beyond in their personal capacity. These are the individuals who volunteer their weekends, mentor the youth, or have achieved significant professional milestones in fields like medicine, engineering, or education. Their stories are a reminder that one person can indeed make a difference.

2. Business Excellence

Small businesses are the lifeblood of the Arab American economy in St. Louis. From the restaurants that introduce our culture through food, to the tech startups and service providers, these finalists represent economic resilience. By honoring them, we encourage a network of mutual support—Arabs supporting Arabs.

Looking to the Future

As we celebrated the Finalists of 2025, we established a tradition that will last for generations. These awards are not just trophies; they are benchmarks of quality and integrity. We congratulate every nominee and finalist for setting the standard high.



A NIGHT OF PRIDE, PURPOSE & PEOPLE

Arab Excellence Awards 2026

On Valentine's Day, the Arab community of St. Louis filled a hall — and proved that excellence has a face, a name, and a story worth celebrating.



We wanted to show the wider world — and our own youth — what Arab excellence looks like in practice. It is about moving from surviving to thriving."

Individual Excellence :

Five finalists, five winners , Five stories of dedication, leadership, and impact — chosen by the community.

01

Muath Sadi Al-Hiyari
Youth Mentorship & Development

A dedicated and inspiring figure who has devoted his efforts to mentoring and empowering Arab-American youth in St. Louis — supporting their academic, professional, and personal development. Through leadership, guidance, and relentless community engagement, he has become an indispensable reference point for a generation of young Arab Americans navigating two worlds at once. His commitment to nurturing the next generation earned him the community's overwhelming confidence.

02

Leen Al Sayyed, MD
Community Leadership & Service

A respected physician and community leader who has consistently combined professional excellence with civic service. Dr. Al Sayyed has been actively involved in health-related initiatives and community programs that promote awareness, care, and social responsibility — demonstrating that medicine, at its finest, extends well beyond the clinic. Her presence has made the community both healthier and stronger.

03

Talal Abou Chleih
Cultural Preservation & Education

A strong and steady advocate for preserving Arab cultural heritage and advancing cultural education across generations. Through his support of educational and cultural initiatives, Talal Abou Chleih has contributed to strengthening collective identity and fostering the kind of intergenerational dialogue that turns heritage into a living, breathing presence — not merely a memory to be preserved, but a culture to be practiced.

04

Mhd Rajeh, MD
Professional Excellence & Innovation

A distinguished physician recognized for his exceptional professional standards and innovative approach in his medical field. Dr. Rajeh has demonstrated a deep commitment to continuous improvement and to delivering the highest quality of care. Beyond the operating room, his positive presence within the Arab community of St. Louis reflects a physician who understands that his responsibility does not end with his patients.

05

Tarek Alhamad, MD
Humanitarian & Social Impact

A compassionate physician known as much for his humanitarian work as for his medical expertise. Beyond his practice, Dr. Alhamad has actively supported initiatives aimed at assisting individuals and families facing hardship — embodying the principle that those who have benefited from a society carry a special obligation to give back to it. His recognition reflects a community that values human dignity as much as professional achievement.
Finalist

A NIGHT OF PRIDE, PURPOSE & PEOPLE

Arab Excellence Awards 2026

Business Excellence

Three winning businesses — and the broader field of Arab-owned enterprises that made this vote a competition worth having.

01

Sheesh Restaurant

Business Excellence & Customer Service

Sheesh Restaurant has established itself as a leading Arab dining destination in St. Louis, delivering high-quality food and exceptional service that has earned the trust and loyalty of the broader community. It has become, for many St. Louisans of all backgrounds, their first encounter with Arab culinary culture — and a lasting one.

02

Qahwatea Coffee

Cultural Authenticity & Community Engagement

Distinguished by its authentic cultural atmosphere, Qahwatea Coffee has become far more than a café. It is a gathering place — a space where community members connect, conversations happen, and Arab culture is experienced not as a museum artifact but as a living daily practice. Its support for community events has made it an informal cultural hub of the city.

03

Mr. Pita Mediterranean Grill

Innovation, Growth & Economic Impact

Mr. Pita has successfully introduced an innovative approach to Middle Eastern cuisine, maintaining cultural authenticity while embracing the demands of a modern urban market. Through job creation and sustained expansion, it has contributed to local economic growth and demonstrated that Arab-American entrepreneurship is a powerful engine for the broader community.

All finalists recognized

Before the winners are named, it is worth acknowledging every Arab-owned business that entered this inaugural competition. From the nominees that captured the community's imagination — Sheesh Restaurant, Qahwatea Coffee, Mr. Pita Mediterranean Grill, Sultan Mediterranean Restaurant, and Original Shawarma House — each represents a story of entrepreneurial courage in an adopted city. The fact that these businesses exist, thrive, and compete speaks to the vitality of Arab economic life in St. Louis.

When the last award was presented and DJ AMEER reclaimed the stage, the room did not empty — it deepened.

Guests lingered, conversations continued, photographs were taken and shared.

The evening had accomplished something that a simple ceremony rarely does: it had made people proud, publicly and collectively, of who they are and what they have built together in this city.

The Arab Excellence Awards are now a tradition.

The second edition will carry the weight of a first year well done — and the expectation of a community that has seen what recognition can do for its morale, its cohesion, and its ambition.

As the ACCSTL declared to close the night: "Together we grow. Together we inspire. Together we lead."

That is not a slogan. It is, after February 14, 2026, a documented fact.

"The success of this night belongs to all of you — and this is only the beginning."

PHOTO ALBUM

Arab Excellence Awards 2026



IMMIGRATION SUPPORT: BUILDING A NEW LIFE, STEP BY STEP

From evaluating foreign diplomas to finding emergency shelter, ACCSTL provides a comprehensive safety net for newcomers.

The Challenge of Arrival

Arriving in St. Louis is a moment of immense hope, but also significant confusion. For many of our members, the first month is a maze of paperwork and bureaucracy. ACCSTL has evolved from a cultural center into a first-response unit for immigrants. Our "Immigration Support Desk" doesn't just hand out flyers; we sit down with families to map out their new lives.

1. Career & Education: The WES Gateway Program

One of the biggest tragedies of immigration is "brain waste"—engineers driving taxis because their degrees aren't recognized.

This year, ACCSTL highlighted the WES Gateway Program. We assist qualified immigrants in getting their foreign credentials evaluated for free. This critical step allows professionals to reclaim their careers, return to university, or obtain professional licensing in Missouri. We believe your past achievements should fuel your American future.

2. Expanding Horizons: Support for African Immigrants

St. Louis is changing, and so is our demographic. We have launched a dedicated initiative for Immigration from African Countries. Whether you speak Arabic, French, Swahili, or local dialects, our support system is adapting. We provide specific orientation sessions that address the unique cultural and legal challenges faced by North African and Sub-Saharan communities, ensuring that no group is left behind.

3. Crisis Response: Shelter and SNAP Benefits

Life doesn't always go according to plan. When storms hit or hard times fall, ACCSTL is there.

Emergency Shelter: During the freezing months, we connected vulnerable families to the St. Louis County Winter Warming Shelter, ensuring no one in our community was left out in the cold.

Food Security: Following severe weather events, we guided eligible families on how to apply for SNAP Replacement Benefits, helping them restock lost food supplies. We act as a bridge between the government safety net and the families who need it most but may fear the paperwork.



YOUR DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

Planning a visit to our Immigration Desk?

To help us serve you better, please bring the following:

- Identification:** Passport or I-94 Arrival Record.
- Proof of Address:** A utility bill or lease agreement (essential for State ID).
- Educational Records:** Original diplomas (for WES evaluation).
- Medical Records:** Vaccination cards for school enrollment.

Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments are recommended for complex cases.

Did You Know?

ACCSTL also assists with specific medical logistics, such as our initiative to assist in transporting Palestinian patients arriving for care.

We coordinate with local healthcare providers to ensure language and transport are never barriers to healing.

JUSTICE & PROTECTION

YOUR LEGAL SHIELD

From exclusive consultations with top attorneys to fighting hate speech, we stand guard for our community's rights.

Partnership with Power: The Jim Hacking Series

Navigating the labyrinth of U.S. immigration law is one of the most stressful experiences for any family. One wrong form can lead to years of delay. That is why ACCSTL forged a strategic partnership with renowned attorney Jim Hacking.

This year's exclusive legal consultations were not just "Q&A" sessions; they were lifelines. Hundreds of community members attended to get clarity on complex issues such as:

- **Writ of Mandamus:** How to sue the government to force a decision on delayed visa applications.
- **Family Reunification:** Strategies to bring spouses and parents to the U.S. despite consular backlogs.
- **Citizenship Obstacles:** Overcoming background check delays.

By bringing top-tier legal expertise directly to the center, we saved our members thousands of dollars in consultation fees and, more importantly, gave them peace of mind.

Defending Civil Rights & Dignity

ACCSTL's legal mission extends beyond paperwork; it is about dignity. We have been vocal and vigilant against hate speech and discrimination.

- **Condemning Racism:** When incidents of hate occur, such as the racist behavior of ex-diplomat Stuart Seldowitz, ACCSTL issued strong Official Statements of Condemnation. We actively monitor hate speech to ensure that anti-Arab sentiment is challenged publicly and legally.

- **Justice for All:** Following the tragic killing of Imam Hassan Sharif, we joined national calls for justice, reminding local authorities that the safety of our faith leaders is non-negotiable.

Community Protection: The "Warning" System

In an era of misinformation, predatory scammers often target vulnerable immigrants. ACCSTL serves as a watchdog. We regularly issue "Official Warnings" (as seen on our website) to alert the community about:



The flyer features a portrait of Lawyer Akram Abu Sharar, a QR code, and contact information: 714-535-5600 and 501 N. BROOKHUR ST SUITE #202, ANAHEIM, CA 92801. It also includes the Arab Cultural Center logo and website: www.acctl.org.

يتشرف المركز الثقافي العربي في مدينة سانت لويس - ميزوري بلقاء افتراضي مع محامي الهجرة غداً يوم الخميس 11/09/2023 في تمام الساعة السادسة مساءً بتوقيت سانت لويس ميزوري.

- Fraudulent "guaranteed visa" schemes.
- Phishing scams targeting new arrivals.
- Unlicensed "notaries" posing as lawyers.

By centralizing this information, we stop exploitation before it starts.

VIRTUAL LEGAL CLINICS

Legal aid from the comfort of your home.

We understand that work schedules and transportation can be barriers to justice. That is why we expanded our Virtual Meeting Program with immigration lawyers.

How it works:

Enter to the ACCSTL online portal.

Submit your questions anonymously if preferred.

Connect via Zoom with qualified attorneys for general guidance.

This initiative ensures that even parents with young children or those without cars can access vital legal counsel.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

3+ Official Statements issued this year to protect civil rights.

A lot of Families assisted with legal orientation.

Zero Cost for initial community orientations.

ACCSTL.ORG: Where rights are respected and voices are heard.

BREAKING BARRIERS

SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENCE

From the road to the digital cloud: giving our community the tools to navigate St. Louis safely and professionally.

Language as a Lifeline: 24-Hour Translation

In a medical emergency or a roadside interaction, a language barrier can quickly turn into a crisis. Recognizing this urgent need, ACCSTL established its 24-Hour Instant Translation Service.

This isn't just about translating documents; it is a rapid-response system. Our volunteer network is on standby to ensure that no member of our community faces a critical situation alone.

Crisis Support: Immediate interpretation for hospital visits and police interactions.

Certified Documentation: We also provide certified translations for birth certificates, marriage licenses, and academic transcripts—essential paperwork for anyone seeking to work or study in Missouri.

The Road to Freedom: Driving Classes

In a sprawling city like St. Louis, public transportation is often limited. Without a car, simple tasks like grocery shopping or getting to a job interview become monumental struggles.

Our Provision of Driving Classes is one of our most impactful programs, particularly for women who may not have driven in their home countries. We connect learners with patient, Arabic-speaking instructors who understand the anxiety of navigating American roads.

The Goal: Obtaining a Missouri Driver's License is more than a legal requirement; it is a badge of independence. It means a mother can drive her sick child to the doctor, and a father can accept a job shift across town.

The Digital Future: IT & Technology Training

ACCSTL believes that the future of our community lies in the digital economy. We have moved beyond basic computer literacy to offer professional-grade technical training.

Through our Online Learning Courses, we are preparing our members for high-demand careers:

Linux Essentials: A comprehensive course introducing the operating system that runs the cloud.

Network Essentials: Training that opens doors to IT infrastructure jobs.

By providing these specialized skills (and the ACC IT Form for hardware assistance), we are helping immigrants leapfrog entry-level jobs and aim for careers in St. Louis's growing tech sector.

TECH SUPPORT & JOB SEARCH

Bridging the Digital Divide

Technology is the new literacy. ACCSTL offers:

- Online Workshops: Specialized sessions on "Job Search Strategies" in the digital age. We teach members how to optimize their LinkedIn profiles and navigate online job portals like JobNewsUSA.

- Hardware Help: Our IT Assistance Program helps families set up essential home networks for school and remote work.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

"Before the driving classes, I felt trapped in my apartment. Now, I drive my kids to school and I have a part-time job.

The car key was my key to freedom."

— A participant in the 2024 Driving Program.



BUILDING WEALTH

JOBS & ECONOMY

From filing taxes to launching businesses, we empower families to achieve financial stability in St. Louis.

Financial Literacy: Mastering the Tax System

The American tax system can be a maze, especially for newcomers. Missing a deadline or misunderstanding a credit can cost a family thousands of dollars.

In February, ACCSTL tackled this challenge head-on with our Tax Educational Classes. These workshops were designed not just to help members file returns, but to enhance their overall understanding of tax matters. We covered essential topics like the Child Tax Credit, filing status implications, and how to avoid common penalties. By demystifying the IRS, we put money back into the pockets of our community members.

The St. Louis Premier Hiring Event

Finding a job is about more than just a paycheck; it is about dignity and integration. Throughout 2025, ACCSTL actively partnered with major recruitment platforms like JobNewsUSA.com to connect our members with the region's top employers.

The St. Louis Job Fairs (held in both Winter and June) were pivotal. ACCSTL prepared job seekers with resume reviews and interview coaching before sending them to meet recruiters. We bridged the gap between skilled Arab professionals and companies hungry for talent.

Entrepreneurship: The Economic Consultation Service

St. Louis has a rich history of immigrant entrepreneurship, and we are keeping that tradition alive. Our Economic Consultation Service provides a roadmap for aspiring business owners. Whether it is opening a restaurant, a logistics company, or a tech startup, our advisors help members navigate:

- LLC Registration: The legal steps to start a business.
- Market Analysis: Understanding the local customer base.
- Grant Opportunities: Finding funding to grow.

Health is Wealth: Medicare Education

Financial stability is impossible without health security. That is why we partnered with Oak Street Health to host the Medicare Education Event. We helped seniors and families navigate the complex world of U.S. health insurance, ensuring they receive the benefits they are entitled to without draining their life savings.



ONLINE WORKSHOPS: JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES

Adapting to the Digital Job Market

The way we find work has changed. ACCSTL responded with Online Workshops specifically focused on modern job search strategies.

We taught members how to:

- Optimize LinkedIn profiles to attract recruiters.
- Use digital keywords to pass automated resume filters.
- Network effectively in the virtual space.

Result: Dozens of members secured interviews within weeks of attending.

ECONOMIC IMPACT 2025

- 2 Major Job Fairs promoted to the community.
- Countless Tax Returns filed correctly thanks to our education.
- Growing Network of Arab-owned businesses supported by ACCSTL.

ACC UNITED

THE PRIDE OF THE FIELD

More than just a game—how a soccer ball became a symbol of unity for the St. Louis Arab community.

A Season of Growth: The 2024-2025 Squad

Since its inception, the ACC United Soccer Team has been the heartbeat of our youth engagement. What started as a way to stay active has evolved into a competitive and disciplined organization. The 2024-2025 season marked a turning point. We saw a record number of registrations, expanding our roster and deepening our talent pool.

A Mosaic on the Pitch

ACC United is a microcosm of our center. Our players hail from Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Morocco, Jordan, and beyond. We sometimes refer to our spirit as the "Lions of Mesopotamia," honoring the deep roots of many of our players while embracing the diversity of the entire Arab world.

On the field, dialects may differ, but the goal is the same. When they put on the ACC jersey, they represent one united community.

Discipline & Training

Success doesn't happen by accident. Our First Training Sessions of the season set the tone: hard work, punctuality, and respect.

Under the guidance of our dedicated coaches, the team has implemented rigorous Football Training Schedules. These weekly sessions are about more than just dribbling and shooting; they teach leadership, teamwork, and resilience—skills that our young men carry into their schools and workplaces.

Community Gatherings

The impact of ACC United extends to the sidelines. Our matches have become impromptu community gatherings. Families come out with folding chairs and thermoses of tea to cheer on their sons, brothers, and friends. In a city where we are spread out, the soccer field becomes our village square.



Health is Wealth: Medicare Education

BECOME A SPONSOR

Support a Winning Team

We launched a major campaign this year: "**Become a Sponsor of a Winning Team.**"

Local businesses have the unique opportunity to see their logos on our jerseys and banners.

Sponsoring ACC United is not just marketing; it is an investment in the health and future of our youth.

Visibility: Your brand at every match and tournament.

Community Love: Show St. Louis that you support diversity.

JOIN THE SQUAD

Do you have what it takes?

We are always looking for new talent.

Who: Youth and Young Adults.

How: Fill out the Member Registration Form on our **website:** <https://accstl.org/sports-training/>

Why: Fitness, Friendship, and Fun.

See you at the next practice!



ROOTS & RHYTHM

PRESERVING OUR IDENTITY

From Saturday Arabic classes to the energetic beats of the Dabke, we are teaching the next generation who they are.

The Arabic Language School: More Than Words

For many immigrant families, the greatest fear is that their children will lose their mother tongue. ACCSTL has turned that fear into action. Our Arabic Language Classes have become a Saturday ritual for dozens of families across St. Louis.

Expanding Our Reach

The demand for our curriculum has been incredible. This year, we proudly announced Opening the Registration for Arabic Language Classes in West County. This expansion ensures that families living further out don't have to choose between a long commute and their heritage. We bring the school to you.

A Curriculum for Everyone

Our classrooms are diverse. We have native speakers polishing their grammar and beginners starting from scratch. We also introduced "Books for Non-Arabic Speakers," a specialized resource to help mixed families or non-Arab spouses connect with the language. It is about building bridges within the home.

Dabke: The Heartbeat of Tradition

While language is learned with the mind, culture is felt with the feet. Our Dabke Classes have exploded in popularity. This traditional Levantine folk dance is a symbol of solidarity and joy. Under the guidance of experienced instructors, our youth are learning the synchronized steps, the hand-holding, and the collective energy that defines Dabke.

Why It Matters: In an era of screens and solo gaming, Dabke forces our youth to hold hands, move together, and listen to the same rhythm. It is physical education with a soul.

THE SATURDAY SPIRIT

Students gathering for Arabic class, keeping the connection to their heritage alive in St. Louis.

ENROLL TODAY

- **Language:** Classes available for Kids (Levels 1-3) and Adults.

- **Dance:** Dabke sessions held weekly. Where: ACC Center & West County Location.

Register: Visit accstl.org to secure your spot for the next semester.



ARAB CULTURAL CENTER
Saint Louis

Dabke Classes Starting Sunday 02/11/2024
دروس الدبكة تبدأ يوم الاحد ١١/٢/٢٠٢٤

JOIN OUR **Dabké** CLASSES
For kids and Adults +6 years old

Braveheart Debka Classes

Learn basic dabké steps and experience the variations of this timeless dance tradition.

REGISTRATION BY PHONE OR EMAIL
314-717-1244
info@accstl.org

NURTURING OUR COMMUNITY HEALTH & CONNECTION

From empowering women to partnering with top medical institutions, we prioritize the physical and social health of our families.

The Arab Women's Meeting: A Space of Our Own

One of the most vibrant additions to our calendar this year was the Arab Women's Meeting in St. Louis (Ladies Only).

Immigrant women often face a unique kind of isolation, juggling family responsibilities while navigating a new culture. These gatherings provide a safe, welcoming space for women to connect, share experiences, and support one another.

- **The Vibe:** Held in a spirit of sisterhood, these meetings are not just social; they are therapeutic. They create a network of mentorship where established members help newcomers navigate everything from schools to shopping.

- **The Impact:** When women gather, the community becomes stronger. These sessions have birthed ideas for new programs and volunteer initiatives that now serve the entire center.

Health Partnerships: Saint Louis University & Beyond

Access to quality healthcare is a priority. ACCSTL has strengthened its ties with major medical institutions to serve you better.

- **SLU School of Medicine:** We highlighted our collaboration with Saint Louis University School of Medicine, facilitating access and trust between the medical community and Arab patients. This partnership aims to reduce health disparities and ensure cultural competence in care.

- **Oak Street Health:** Through our Medicare Education Events sponsored by Oak Street Health, we brought vital information directly to our seniors. Navigating insurance options is complex, and these sessions ensured our elders receive the benefits they deserve without confusion.

Mental Health & Support Services

Migration is stressful. We recognize the need for holistic support. Our leadership held a strategic meeting with the President of Bilingual International Assistance Services.

This collaboration focuses on the often-overlooked aspect of immigrant life: mental wellness. By working with bilingual professionals, we are opening doors for members to seek counseling and support in their native language, removing the stigma often associated with mental health.

SENIOR SUPPORT

Respecting Our Elders

ACCSTL is committed to our seniors. We have promoted Special Programs and Services Available for Seniors in St. Louis, ensuring they stay active and connected.

- Social gatherings to combat loneliness.
- Assistance with medical transport logistics.
- Translation support for doctor's appointments.



UPCOMING HEALTH EVENTS

Keep an eye on our calendar for the next Health Screening Day and the next quarterly Women's Breakfast. Your health is your wealth.



BUILDING BRIDGES

FAITH & UNITY

From the halls of government to the sanctuaries of our neighbors, we are weaving a tapestry of coexistence in St. Louis.

A Historic Iftar at City Hall

This year, the Arab Cultural Center brought a cherished tradition into the heart of St. Louis's civic life. The Ramadan Iftar at St. Louis City Hall was more than a meal; it was a symbol of acceptance.

Gathering city officials, community leaders, and diverse families under the dome of City Hall, we broke bread together. The event was a "Celebration of Unity and Culture," proving that our traditions have a respected place in the public sphere. It was a moment where the call to prayer resonated not just as a religious act, but as a song of diversity in our city.

Christian-Muslim Brotherhood: The Coptic Connection

The Arab identity is diverse, embracing both Muslim and Christian heritage. ACCSTL has strengthened its bonds with our Egyptian brothers and sisters.

We highlight the warm Invitation from the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church (Saint Mary) and the significant Meeting with Father Raphael.

When our President met with Father Raphael, the message was clear: we share a language, a history, and a future. These interactions remind us that before anything else, we are neighbors and kin.

Solidarity Across Borders: The Turkish American Society

Our bridge-building extends to our cultural cousins as well. ACCSTL actively engaged with the Turkish American Society of Missouri (TASOM).

Whether sharing grief during difficult times or celebrating shared values, this partnership demonstrates that our community is "Stronger Together." By collaborating with other ethnic organizations, we amplify our voice and resources to serve all immigrants in St. Louis better.



STANDING AGAINST HATE

Solidarity in Action

Building bridges also means standing up when they are attacked. Following the tragic killing of Imam Hassan Sharif, ACCSTL issued a strong Statement of Condemnation.

We stood shoulder-to-shoulder with faith leaders across the nation to demand justice and safety for our clergy.

An injury to one is an injury to all.

MOMENTS OF UNITY

ACCSTL leadership exchanging handshakes and smiles with Father Raphael, symbolizing the enduring bond between our communities.



SUCCESS STORY

A Dialogue on Community Guardianship with Mr. Abdul Qader Ali

Interviewer: Editorial Board of Roots & Horizons Magazine

As part of our mission as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to community service and cultural empowerment, we sit down with our "Partners in Success." These are the visionaries who believe that supporting cultural initiatives is not just a donation, but a vital investment in the social fabric. Today, we are honored to interview Mr. Abdul Qader Ali (Abu Mahdi), owner of Florissant Furniture and a lead sponsor of Roots & Horizons Magazine.



Culture as an Asset, Not a Burden

The Magazine: Why is it crucial to support cultural initiatives in fostering identity and belonging today?

Mr. Abdul Qader: As the saying goes, "He who has no past, has no present." Cultural support is not a luxury; it is the strongest tool for preserving identity. We often see immigrants trying to hide their roots to "blend in." Our goal with initiatives like Roots & Horizons is to flip that equation—to turn heritage from a perceived "burden" into a "distinction" and a source of pride.

The Power of Nonprofit Partnerships

The Magazine: What does partnering with a 501(c)(3) nonprofit mean to you, and how do such collaborations create sustainable change?

Mr. Abdul Qader: It is a partnership of values before it is a partnership of funds. A nonprofit's goal is people, and as a merchant, my goal is also to serve people. They serve the community through education and culture, and I serve it through quality products and financial support. This synergy creates a lasting impact, especially in empowering our youth and supporting new talents.

A Message to Fellow Business Leaders

The Magazine: Given the challenges faced by many newcomers and refugees in St. Louis, what is your message to the business community regarding giving?

Mr. Abdul Qader: My message is simple: "Giving is the ultimate insurance for your own prosperity." In light of the influx of Arab refugees to St. Louis, we have a moral obligation to stand by them. We must remember that wealth is a trust from God, and we are merely stewards of it to benefit others.

Roots & Horizons: A Journey Since 2008

The Magazine: Welcome, Mr. Abdul Qader. To begin, could you introduce yourself to our readers and share the story behind your journey in the business world?

Mr. Abdul Qader: In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. My name is Abdul Qader Ali, of Palestinian origin. I consider St. Louis my home and the heart of my business. In 2008, my brother Majed Ali (Abu Ali) and I established Florissant Furniture. We specialize in providing both modern and classic furniture, but from the very beginning, we viewed our business as more than just a commercial enterprise; we saw it as a way to serve the families within our community.

The Drive for Philanthropy

The Magazine: As a successful business owner, what motivates you to provide such dedicated support to a cultural initiative led by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit?

Mr. Abdul Qader: It stems from a profound sense of belonging and responsibility. As a Palestinian living in St. Louis, I see culture as the vital bridge between the Arab and American communities. When we support art and heritage, we aren't just preserving our past; we are presenting ourselves to the broader public in a sophisticated and honorable way.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The Magazine: How do you view the role of business leaders in community service alongside commercial success?

Mr. Abdul Qader: The community is the very "market" in which we succeed. Therefore, giving back is a duty, not an option. A true businessman knows that reputation is his real capital. People buy from those they trust, and this level of trust cannot be bought with advertising dollars—it is earned through genuine community engagement and social impact.



A NIGHT TO REMEMBER LAND OF CANAAN

In November 2025, we made history at the Chase Park Plaza with a sold-out World Premiere.

A Cinematic Milestone

As we closed the chapter on 2025, ACCSTL achieved one of its most significant cultural milestones. On Friday, November 7, 2025, we proudly partnered with Cinema St. Louis for the World Premiere of the documentary "Land of Canaan".

The atmosphere at the historic Chase Park Plaza Cinema was electric. The event was completely sold out, a testament to the power of our community when we mobilize. For one night, the most prestigious screen in the city belonged to the Arab narrative.

The Film: Roots & Resilience

The documentary, "Land of Canaan," captivated the audience. It was a visually stunning and emotionally powerful tribute to the deep-rooted connection between Palestinian farming families and their ancient olive trees. The film beautifully portrayed these trees not just as agriculture, but as timeless symbols of heritage, harmony, and resilience.

Official Recognition & Leadership

The Arab Cultural Center was represented at the highest level. Our President, Dr. Mohammad Mohsen, and Secretary, Mr. Shadi Alkhazaaleh, attended the premiere to deliver the closing remarks on behalf of the Arab community.

In a moving ceremony following the screening, Dr. Mohsen presented an official Certificate of Appreciation to filmmaker Maggie Lemere and her production team. This certificate, signed by the President, recognized their outstanding work and contribution to cultural storytelling and human rights awareness.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Date: November 7, 2025

Venue: Chase Park Plaza Cinema

Status: SOLD OUT

Impact: This event solidified ACCSTL's partnership with major St. Louis arts institutions, proving that Arab stories draw massive, diverse audiences.

#LandOfCanaan #PalestinianCulture #CulturalHeritage #SoldOutEvent

HELLO 2026: OUR NEXT CHAPTER

The success of "Land of Canaan" has set the stage for this new year. As we step into 2026, our goals are clear:

- More Arts: We are actively planning the next film festival and art exhibition.

- Expansion: With the momentum from 2025, we are expanding our youth programs and aiming for a permanent cultural hub.

-Join Us: The energy from the premiere is just the beginning. 2026 belongs to us all.



VISION 2026

BUILDING A PERMANENT LEGACY

We have spent three years laying the foundations. Now, it is time to build the house.

From Startup to Institution

In just three years, the Arab Cultural Center has grown from a small group of volunteers into a vital organism serving Hundred of families. We have proven that the need is real and the community is ready.

As we step into 2026, we are moving from our "startup phase" to becoming a permanent institution in St. Louis.

Goal 1: A Physical Cultural Hub

Our programs—from the Arabic School to the Legal Clinics—are bursting at the seams.

Our primary vision for the near future is to establish a permanent, dedicated Cultural Center.

We envision a space that includes:

- Classrooms for our growing language school.
- A community hall for weddings, Iftars, and events.
- A library and resource center for immigrants.
- A home where our children can always feel they belong.

Goal 2: Professionalizing Our Impact

To sustain this growth, we aim to transition towards a more professional organizational structure. By empowering paid staff alongside our incredible volunteers, we can ensure that our services—like the 24-hour translation and immigration support—remain reliable and high-quality for decades to come.

Goal 3: Expanding Our Reach

We have already begun expanding geographically with the West County Arabic Classes. In 2026, we aim to reach every corner of the Greater St. Louis area, ensuring that no Arab family, whether in the city or the suburbs, is too far from their heritage.

Goal 4: Putting St. Louis on the Map

With the success of the "Land of Canaan" premiere and our Heritage Festival, we aim to make St. Louis a national hub for Arab American culture, rivalling cities like Detroit or Chicago in the quality of our cultural output.

BE PART OF THE DREAM

We cannot build this future alone.

1. DONATE:

Your financial support is the brick and mortar of our future center. Visit accstl.org/support to become a monthly donor.



2. VOLUNTEER:

We need your skills. Whether you are an architect, a teacher, or an organizer, your time is valuable.



3. PARTNER:

We invite local businesses to join our Corporate Sponsorship Program and grow with us.



BE PART OF THE DREAM

The best way to predict the future is to create it.

Together, we are creating a legacy for our children in St. Louis.

— Dr. Mohammad Mohsen,
President.



ACCSTL FUN ZONE

LEARN & PLAY

Challenge your mind and learn a new word in Arabic!

CONNECT THE WORDS

Instruction: Draw a line to match the Arabic word with its English meaning.

سَلَام (Salam)	A. Coffee
عَائِلَة (A'ila)	B. Roots
قَهْوَة (Qahwa)	C. Peace
أَمَل (Amal)	D. Family
جُدُور (Juthour)	E. Hope

DID YOU KNOW? ARAB HERITAGE QUIZ

Test your knowledge about Arab history and contributions to the world.

Question 1: Coffee Culture

Legend says that coffee beans were first discovered by a goat herder named Kaldi in which region, before becoming popular in Yemen?

- A) The Alps
- B) The Ethiopian Highlands / Yemen
- C) The Amazon

Question 2: Mathematics

The word "Algebra" comes from the Arabic book Al-Jabr, written by which famous scholar?

- A) Al-Khwarizmi
- B) Ibn Sina
- C) Rumi

Question 3: Geography

Which Arab city is known as "The City of Jasmine"?

- A) Cairo
- B) Damascus
- C) Beirut

Question 4: Architecture

The "Petra" treasury, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, is carved into rose-colored rock in which country?

- A) Egypt
- B) Morocco
- C) Jordan

ST. LOUIS ARAB SEARCH

Instruction: Find the words hidden in the grid

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| ACCSTL | HUMMUS |
| ARAB | OLIVE |
| DABKE | RAMADAN |
| FALAFEL | SAHARA |
| FESTIVAL | SOCCER |
| HABIBI | TOWERGROVE |

T	O	W	E	R	G	R	O	V	E	S	T
H	A	B	I	B	I	X	A	R	A	B	Y
U	C	F	E	S	T	I	V	A	L	O	P
M	C	D	A	B	K	E	X	Y	Z	C	D
M	S	A	C	C	S	T	L	J	K	C	A
U	T	R	A	M	A	D	A	N	F	E	B
S	L	S	A	H	A	R	A	G	O	R	K
X	F	A	L	A	F	E	L	Q	O	Z	E
Y	O	L	I	V	E	Z	P	M	D	T	R
Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
S	O	C	C	E	R	L	M	N	O	P	Q
W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H



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