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Interreligious Council to sponsor Sept. 11 observance

By Amy Faith Lionheart

As the rest of the nation prepares to mark the one year anniversary of the horrific events of Sept. 11, members of the faith-based Interreligious Council of New Rochelle are planning an evening of song, meditation and reflection.

The IRC of New Rochelle will sponsor the city-wide commemorative observance on Wednesday evening, Sept. 11 at 7:30 p.m.

"A Celebration of Life," will take place at Christ United Methodist Church at 1200 North Ave. The program will feature candle lighting and music, with representatives from local houses of worship, city government, fire and police departments, the Rotary Club and Sound Shore Medical Center.

Ruth Kitchen, president of the IRC, said, "More than ever, there needs to be an observance and a celebration that life goes on."

Although other local area events will include moments of silence, "A Celebration of Life," seeks to bring

together communities of all backgrounds in hopes of educating the public and remembering the past. "This is a time not only to rededicate ourselves to remembering, but also to help protect our country by helping to create a world where terrorism will not flourish," said IRC founding member Rabbi Emeritus Ariel Wohl, of Temple Israel of New Rochelle.

According to Wohl, the IRC, which has been in existence since the mid-1970s, was formed with one common goal in mind, "...To promote interfaith cooperation and unity, and to express the essential commonalities of varied religions and heritages."

"We need to stress community and unity," said Mayor Timothy Idomi in a telephone interview. "We must talk to each other and see the humanity in others because we have far more things in common than we have differences." According to Idomi, New Rochelle lost three individuals on Sept. 11: David Silver, Amy O'Donerty and Alex Ciccone.

Rev. Martin Nelson, of Bezer Holiness Church, stressed the need for hope. "We must remember those who gave their lives and the cause for which they gave it."

Mr. and Mrs. Fozia and Arshad Khan of the Westchester Muslim Center and long-time New Rochelle residents, encourage the community to read about other religions and pray every day for those that were lost. "We all believe in one God but we have a different way of praying. It's better to learn from each other than to pick at each other."

The Khans, who have two children, were initially worried about having them attend school after Sept. 11, but were relieved to receive a warm welcome from the New Rochelle schools where their children attend.

"The people of New Rochelle are more aware of their surroundings and are more educated. The more educated you are, the less likely you are to fear what is unknown," said Mrs. Khan. In addition to offering an Islamic prayer at the Sept. 11 event,

the Khans will be speaking throughout the day at various commemoratives in Mount Vernon, Yonkers and Thornwood.

According to Kitchen, "The worst thing about all of this is that religions seem to divide people, they don't bring them together and that is not the basic tenet of any religion I know of, including Islam. It's been taken that way by people who are hurt, angry, alienated for whatever reason."

Rev. Jimmie Brown, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, said, "We must learn the foolishness of terrorism because we are one people... one nation." Brown trusts that this event is a way in which people can join together with their neighbors.

The public is welcome to attend "A Celebration of Life," to commemorate the heroism and self-sacrifice that has taken place in the past year. According to Wohl, what makes this event unique is the feeling of unity through diversity because "what unites us is very central to our being."