



Presidents Report 2019

Ahlan Wa Sahlan,

For the first time ever the Lebanese government appointed a Consul, Henriette Nakhle, to New Zealand and the event was celebrated with the opening of the consulate in Auckland in February. The Lebanese Foreign Minister Gibran Basille was present, as was the Australian Ambassador and the Mayor of Auckland Phil Goff. I was invited to represent the Dunedin Lebanese community and asked to speak about what our club had achieved by way of leaving a footprint in Dunedin, which I was very proud to do. Even though the event was held in Auckland there were so many faces of people who previously called Dunedin, home. Our achievements have motivated other Lebanese organisations to follow suit and publish books about their communities, oral histories and other initiatives that will create an historical record for future generations. It was encouraging to hear from Gibran Basille that he had been told what our club had done to leave a permanent record of the existence of the Lebanese community in Dunedin.

In September a handful of our community attended an event at the Dunedin Public Libraries to promote the digitisation centre that our community gifted to the city. It was a very interesting and informative address which explained the purpose of the centre, how to upload information onto the site, developments that had occurred since it was first opened and future plans. Eighty thousand dollars has been put aside for the next financial year to further develop the site. I was very pleased that the presentation began with how the site came to be and the next ten minutes were spent talking about our community, past and present. The address was so informative I asked the library if they would run a special session for our community early in the new year. Once the date has been agreed we will inform all members.

Our community was very proud when Afife Harris was chosen to be the Good as Gold recipient for the work she has done to raise money for worthy causes and more particularly for the selfless and ongoing work she has done to help the Syrian refugees settle into Dunedin. She has done unpaid, charitable work for many years and was rewarded with ten thousand dollars from ASB so she could go back and see her family in Lebanon which her and Bill did recently. A more worthy, selfless person I couldn't think of. Congratulations Afife.

Afife's husband Professor William Harris, known to his friends as Bill, retired from his role as Professor of Middle Eastern Political Studies at Otago University this year. He has had a stellar career both in NZ and abroad. He is a recognised international author having sole-authored four books on the Middle East as well as being published in numerous international journals. One of his books *Fractured Mosaic*, won an Outstanding Academic Title award from Choice Magazine in the United States. Our best wishes go to Bill for a happy retirement and congratulations on an outstanding career.

On the 20th September Joseph (Joe) Michael, who is the son of Peter and Sheila, lit up the United Nations General and Secretariat buildings in New York with an artwork titled *Voices for the Future*. It featured the work he did down at Antarctica ahead of UN's Climate Action Summit. Well the accolades don't come much bigger than that, but for all the international acclaim Joe has received for his work from all over the world, he remains a very modest person whose feet are firmly on the ground.

Joe and I shared a rental car from Christchurch when our flight to Dunedin was cancelled and I had the pleasure of hearing how he got started and how his passion for photography grew and how to take an outstanding photograph, which I have since forgotten. On behalf of the Dunedin Lebanese community Joe we wish you continued success for the outstanding work you are doing while at the same time raising the consciousness of climate change.

The talent that has been spawned out of our tiny community is remarkable given its size. It was announced earlier this month that two of Emma Farry's (John & the late Pamela's daughter) had won awards at the New York Big Book Awards. Her book titled *Beloved* won gold and her other book *Freedom Song* won silver. Anyone who knows Emma knows that she personifies love. She is entirely aligned with the subject matter she writes about. We were privileged to have her come to Dunedin to launch *Beloved* at De Novo Gallery earlier this year. Privileged but not surprised because that's just the humble, authentic person Emma is. She had a second launch in Auckland, but she wanted the city which has given her so much and holds many precious memories, to be the place to have her first launch.

If you want to taste exquisite Lebanese food Gemmayze Street restaurant (named after a street in Beirut) in Auckland is a must visit. It was started by Samir Allan (son of Liane & Richard Allan and grandson of the great Tommy & Pauline Farry). You can imagine how many advisers Samir had when preparing his recipes for the restaurant, but he is first to acknowledge the wonderful apprenticeship he was lucky to have watching his grandmother Pauline and many aunties and cousins when he was a youngster. Samir is another humble young achiever originally from our community. He doesn't have to tell the world what an outstanding chef he is, his reputation and string of awards within only two years of opening speak for themselves. This year alone Gemmayze Street was:

- Announced as the winner of Food for Good awards.
- Listed by Metro magazine in the Top 50 restaurants in Auckland.
- Named Best Specialist Restaurant at the Cuisine Food awards.
- Named Best Specialist Restaurant by For the Love of NZ Food.
- Had numerous articles written about it in a variety of food magazines.

Keep up the great work Samir and best wishes for your continued success.

There are many other outstanding achievers amongst our greater community, but rarely do we get to hear about them. The people I have mentioned above have all had some sort of public exposure so we would love to hear about our people who are doing great things in their career of choice.

Lyn and I represented our community at the Otago Anniversary Day Dinner in March. We had the annual laying of the wreath on behalf of the Dunedin Lebanese community at the ANZAC Dawn Service in April. The Lebanese flag was flown from the Civic Centre on 22nd November to commemorate Lebanon Independence Day. This year has seen the passing of more of our loved ones, both young and old. As a result, we are now a less defined, highly integrated community, but there is still some life left in the old club yet, so I am going to propose that we take it out of recess so that we can be more proactive in initiating events and projects for the community.

Alah Ecun Makon



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