

Long Island Traditions

NEWSLETTER

www.longislandtraditions.org

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Bay House Tour June 30th

On Sunday, June 30th Long Island Traditions will sponsor its annual Bay House Tour to the Remsen bay house. In memory of Richard Muldowney, a fireman and one of the primary caretakers of the Remsen house who died in the September 11th attacks. All proceeds will benefit his family.

Don't miss this opportunity to visit these reminders of Long Island's nautical past that are still used today by the area's baymen. A comfortable passenger boat will leave from Freeport for three 1½ hour trips to the houses. The tour will be led by director Nancy Solomon. Those on board will be treated to a brief history of the bay houses, the first of which were built in the 1700s. Bay houses were traditionally used by fishermen who harvested clams, oysters, crabs and other species from local waters. The surviving houses date from the period between 1870 and 1950. Each tour will visit the Remsen Bay House, built in 1954, which belongs to the Remsen family of Freeport, who have owned bay houses since the early 1900's. You will have a taste of the house's famous clam chowder, and be able to meet current bay house owners. The boat will then proceed to other nearby bay houses.

For an excellent preview of the bay houses and their environs, visit the Long Island Marine Education Center, 202 Woodcleft Avenue (Nautical Mile) in Freeport, where a diorama by Jeff Blossom is on permanent exhibit. The center's number is 516-771-0399. You can also buy or read at your local library On The Bay written by Nancy Solomon which document the history of the bay houses in the Town of Hempstead. Copies can be purchased at the Sea Horse Gift Shop on Woodcleft Avenue in Freeport or by calling the Old Bethpage Gift Shop at 516-572-8415. **Reservations are required** (sorry, but this trip cannot accommodate children under the age of 10.) Tickets cost \$25 per person and \$40 per couple. Members of Long Island Traditions will receive a \$5 discount. For more information call Long Island Traditions at 516-767-8803. ■

Reem Hussein, Long Island Islamic Calligrapher

By Sydney Hutchinson

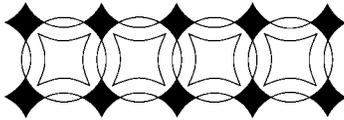
The Islamic Center of Long Island (ICLI) in Westbury boasts a diverse congregation of approximately 500 members – among them Indians, Pakistanis, Iranians, Afghanis, Egyptians and Sudanese, to name just a few. Besides being a place of worship, it also functions as a community center for Muslims in the area and a K-8 school for 140 children. In addition to the usual subjects, students also study Qu'ranic recitation and Islamic art.

ICLI member and former art teacher Reem Hussein was born in New Jersey to Egyptian parents; she now lives in Hicksville. Since most Muslims learn to read the Qu'ran in its original language, Reem began to study written Arabic at age 7. She recalls being fascinated by the language's beautiful cursive letters: *"Even when I was young, they always were shapes to me. I wasn't always writing; it was more I*

See **Reem Hussein** on page 3



Remsen's bay house



Long Island Traditions Inc.

Dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Long Island's living cultural heritage.

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Ortega Accordion Apprenticeship

Master *vallenato* accordionist Eugenio Ortega and his son, Juan, recently completed an apprenticeship funded by the New York State Council on the Arts and coordinated by Long Island Traditions. Eugenio leads *Los Macondos*, a group specializing in the *vallenata* music of Colombia's northern coast, and Juan plays bass for the 7-member ensemble. Juan spent fourteen three-hour sessions at Eugenio's home in Valley Stream learning to play traditional melodies on the three-row button accordion and to sing the accompanying lyrics. He also studied the basics of composing *vallenato* songs. Juan will show off his new skills in a performance at the Freeport Memorial Library later this year. ■

Shinnecock After-School Project Completed

After many weeks of intensive arts projects, students who live on the Shinnecock Indian reservation in Southampton have completed some outstanding artworks with master artists David Martine, Denise Silva Dennis and Ina McNeil. For over 15 weeks they created murals, portraits and quilts that document their cultural and community traditions including the reservation's annual Pow-Wow on Labor Day. ■

Architecture and History Program for Schools

Long Island Traditions has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant to develop a curriculum for the Freeport School District that will help Social Studies teachers use architecture to teach history. The teachers will examine different kinds of traditional buildings including farmhouses and barns, industrial workers' houses, cape-cod houses built in the 1950s, and bay houses and summer bungalows. Teachers will be developing lesson plans for their students and innovative research and design projects as part of their programs. There will be field trips to selected sites around Long Island that reflect specific kinds of buildings practices as well as historical periods. Project directors and consultants include Long Island Traditions director Nancy Solomon, design educator Julie Maurer and preservation specialist Kathleen Kane of the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (SPLIA). This model project will take place during 2002-04. ■

was drawing the characters.” Teachers often complemented her penmanship. She also began to read about Islamic art and its six unique styles of calligraphy.

Reem’s family encouraged her artistic aspirations and she went on to study interior design in college. At the same, however, she was becoming increasingly interested in her own heritage as a Muslim, and searched for a way to reconcile her beliefs and her artwork. “*In Islam, any figures – animals, people – are prohibited. Most Islamic art is usually abstract: geometric designs, floral designs, and calligraphy.*” Calligraphers use pen and ink to reproduce God’s name and verses from the Qu’ran in pleasing forms; sometimes bright colors and gold leaf are added in a process called *illumination*. Reem decided to dedicate herself to calligraphy in 2000.

Today, it is unusual to find a female practitioner of Islamic calligraphy (Reem has met only one other), but it was not always so.

When the Qu’ran came into revelation people were first just memorizing it. After that they started writing it in different styles, the most important thing being that it had to be written carefully. Every character, every accent mark, every word has to be exact, so that it’s never been changed from the original one. Usually the people to do this were women because their hands were smaller, they were able to write better, and also because it was something they could do from the home. This was their occupation, and that tradition was passed on through generations.

Traditional calligraphy is produced with a reed pen the calligrapher herself carves to the preferred size, and a homemade ink of soot and other ingredients. Part art and part science, there is a prescribed way of measuring the widths of the letters, which must always remain constant. Reem has seen 113 different styles of calligraphy, though only six are considered standard. Her own choice of style depends on the words she is writing and the mood she wants to convey. *Kufic* style is linear in style and easy to read. *Thuluth* style is more fluid and organic in shape, “*like waves.*” *Dervish* style, created by the whirling dancers of the Sufi sect, has a modern look. She has not chosen a favorite style, finding that “*each style evokes different feelings in different people.*”

Calligraphers in the Arab world usually learn their trade by apprenticing to a master artist. There are so few

calligraphers working in the United States that Hussein has not had this opportunity and is mostly self-taught. However, Reem’s father did teach her the basic rules that he had learned as a child in Egypt, like letter positions. Calligraphy should ideally be written “*in one fluid motion, like a breath.*” This “*sense of fluidity*” ensures that the eye is not distracted by any irregularities.

While it is important to uphold such rules, Reem also feels that calligraphers must continue to innovate within these strictures in order to keep the tradition alive. She began by using the traditional pen and ink and continues to practice her skills this way, carving

her pens from bamboo, but her finished products are now usually in watercolor. Hussein chose this unusual medium for its subtle colors which can produce an “*antique*” look and are more “*calming.*” Some Muslims feel mosques should not display any art, since it can distract worshippers. But watercolors have helped Reem to avoid this problem:

“I believe in decorating our mosques or any place of worship with calligraphy. It’s God’s words and this is a place we go to worship. I encourage it as long as it’s not going to be a distraction

for people - by using more subtle colors, things that are soft on the eye, that are pleasing, that aren’t going to take away from the actual worshipping. It’s also something that’s going to be a reminder if they’re able to look at it and read it and recognize its beauty, the beauty of the words.”

Although she insists she has many years of work ahead of her before she can truly be called a calligrapher, Reem’s art seems to have struck a chord among American Muslims – it has been selling briskly at events like Manhattan’s annual Muslim Day Parade and at Muslim conventions and fundraisers. Her dedication to upholding faith through art may help revitalize a centuries-old tradition. She also hopes her work will inspire both Muslims and non-Muslims to learn more about Islam and become more tolerant: “*I would like for the American public to see what kind of influences and contributions Muslims have made in the past and can make in the future, and I’d like to be a part of that.*” ■



Alhamdulillah (“Thank God”), calligraphy in Kufic style by Reem Hussein.

EVENTS OF INTEREST

PLEASE NOTE: If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we'll put it in our "Events of Interest" column. The deadline is the 1st of October, January and April.

- April 11** Imagine NY workshop on the future of the World Trade Center. Freeport Memorial Library, Merrick Road & Ocean Avenue, Freeport, NY. 7:30pm. For more information call Long Island Traditions at (516) 767-8803.
- April 16** Oscar Brand & Jon Pickow concert at Nassau Community College Folk Festival. Student Center. Free admission. 8pm.
- April 16** Rahel Musleah's "Eshet Hayyil: Jewish India Through Women's Lives." Community Synagogue, 150 Middle Neck Rd., Port Washington, NY, 6:45 pm. Call (516) 883-3144 for more information.
- April 20** Latino fiesta at Unitarian Church of Freeport. Features performance and dance party with Luis Cordero y Los Amigos del Amargue. Food and refreshments. \$20/person or \$35/couple. Sponsored by Long Island Traditions. Call (516) 767-8803 for more information and reservations.
- May 9** Rahel Musleah's "Jewish Calcutta Through Music and Memory." South Shore JCC, 12:30 pm. Call (516) 623-0696 for more information.
- May 18th** The Mulvihill-Lynch School of Irish Dancing is having their annual FEIS (dance competition) at Smithtown Middle School in St. James. Doors open at 9am. Admission is \$8.00 per person. Dancers from all over the country will be there competing in various dance competitions. Call 631-738-1242 or e-mail: MLSFeisinfo@aol.com
- May 25** Dance performance and music featuring Theo Torres and his Technocumbias ensemble. Hungarian Liberty Hall, 2784 Ocean Ave, Ronkonkoma (Exit 59 south on Long Island Expressway.) 8 pm. to 2 am. Tickets: Men \$15, Ladies \$10, couples \$20. Call 631-434-9862 for more information. (Other dances scheduled for June 22, July 13 and Aug.31.)

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