

# NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO WELCOME THE FRIENDSHIP CARAVAN; *Citizens Invited To Join Historic Town Hall Meeting and Attend Cultural Programs Celebrating Arab and American Friendship***

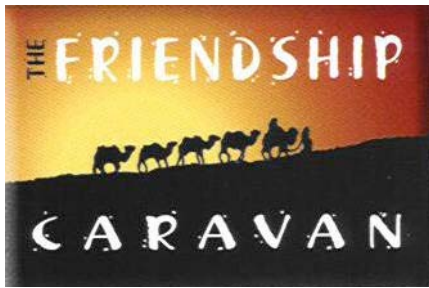
GAITHERSBURG, MD (October 8) – The Friendship Caravan, in partnership with a broad coalition of municipal officials and community groups, is launching a grass-roots celebration of American and Arab friendship in several cities and towns in Maryland, including Gaithersburg, Montgomery Village, Potomac, and Chevy Chase, from October 21- 25.

In first post-war program of its kind, the Friendship Caravan will organize educational and cultural programs involving Americans of all faiths and visitors from Bahrain and other nations of the Middle East and North Africa. Programs will include an historic town hall meeting with Arab Ambassadors, a walk for friendship, cultural exhibits from the Arab world and concerts featuring renowned Arab musical artists.

“The Friendship Caravan is founded on the principle that by bringing together people of diverse cultures through education, dialogue and cultural exchange, we can eliminate stereotypes and foster friendship and understanding. Gaithersburg is a *Character Counts! City*,” said Gaithersburg Mayor Sidney Katz, who is hosting events in Gaithersburg.

“Fresh approaches are necessary to generate an appreciation for the fundamental goodness of people and the common humanity shared among people of diverse cultures,” said Michael Kirtley, President, the Friendship Caravan. “By bringing Americans together with Arabs from around the world, we will demonstrate to a worldwide audience that Americans are, indeed, a warm, hospitable people who can open their hearts and build bridges of friendship with foreigners,” he added.

The Montgomery County events are being organized with support from the Rotary Clubs of Montgomery Village, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Gaithersburg and Potomac; the YMCA (Montgomery Village), Montgomery College (Germantown), the City of Gaithersburg, Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khlaifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the embassies of the Republic of Egypt, the Republic of the Sudan, and several other nations of the Middle East and North Africa.



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## Join the Walk for Friendship

On Thursday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> at 8:45 am, Montgomery County citizens and their families can join the **Walk For Friendship**, a Caravan beginning at City Hall, 31 South Summit Ave. Gaithersburg Mayor Sidney Katz will host international guests and dignitaries from the Arab world, community leaders, families and school children. Camels and Arabian horses will accompany the Caravan on Summit Ave. At 9:15 am, students and teachers will welcome the Caravan to Gaithersburg Elementary School, 35 North Summit Ave.

## Attend a Town Hall Meeting – Meet the Arab Ambassadors

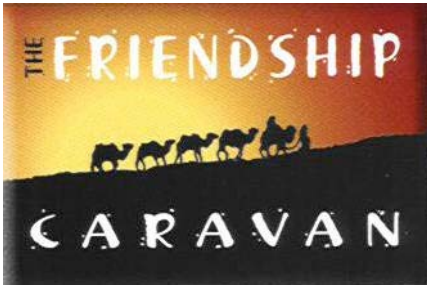
On Thursday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30 pm in Globe Hall, Montgomery College (Germantown) will host **A Town Hall Meeting – Meet the Arab Ambassadors**. Students, teachers and members of the public will greet the Chairman of the Arab League and Arab Ambassadors from the Middle East and North Africa and discuss issues of importance to our respective communities. For free admission tickets and Friendship Caravan information call 301-519-2922.

## Visit the Friendship Tent at the YMCA – Arab Cultural Exhibits and Musical Performances

A Friendship Tent will showcase traditional and contemporary Arab music and art with an exhibition of the work of Saudi, Bahraini and Egyptian artists and craftsmen. Evening concerts will feature jam sessions bringing together American and Arab musicians, and performances by renowned Arab musicians from the Middle East and North Africa. The Friendship Tent at the YMCA Wellness Center, Montgomery Village Shopping Center, will be open daily from October 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, from 4pm to 9pm.

Educational highlights of the Friendship Caravan will include a two-hour international video teleconference on friendship involving Gaithersburg High School and students from the Bahrain School in Manama, Bahrain. And on Friday, October 24<sup>th</sup> at 10am, teachers, students, and family members at the Oneness-Family School, 6701 Wisconsin Ave., Chevy Chase, will welcome the Friendship Caravan for a celebration of United Nations Day.

Following the Montgomery County events, the Friendship Caravan will embark on an historic, cross-America journey starting in late Spring 2004. Advancing slowly from West to East across America with cultural exhibits, camels and Arabian horses, a group of international Caravaneers will bring the message of inter-cultural harmony to hundreds of cities and towns across the Heartland, beginning in San Francisco and ending one year later in Washington D.C.



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The Friendship Caravan is pleased to acknowledge and thank the following supporting organizations and individuals: Hon. Mayor Sidney Katz, City of Gaithersburg, HH Crown Prince Sheikh Salman Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, The Gazette, Holiday Inn (Gaithersburg), the Rotary Clubs of Montgomery Village, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Gaithersburg and Potomac, YMCA Montgomery Village, Gaithersburg Elementary School, Gaithersburg High School, Montgomery College, Oneness-Family School, YBA Kanoo, Batelco, and the Bahrain School.

The Friendship Caravan, Inc. was founded in 2001 by Michael Kirtley, a writer-photographer who has spent years living in the Middle East and Africa, working for such magazines as *National Geographic*, *Life*, and *Geo*. The organization is based in New Haven, CT, with an office in Gaithersburg, MD.

For more information visit: [www.friendshipcaravan.org](http://www.friendshipcaravan.org) or call 301-519-2922.

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## ABOUT THE FRIENDSHIP CARAVAN

The Friendship Caravan, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit American organization dedicated to promoting multi-cultural understanding and mutual respect through educational programs, discussions and cultural events.

The Friendship is focused, in particular, on the commonalities between Americans and people of the Arab world. Through activities taking place in communities in Maryland and, later, across the nation, the Friendship Caravan will encourage citizens to explore the cultures and belief systems within the greater American experience and seek to apply lessons learned to improving communication and understanding among Americans and Arabs.

The Friendship Caravan's programs are non-political. The program will expand in successive years towards an ongoing effort to building global, inter-cultural bridges among diverse populations.