

LOCAL ISLAMIC LEADER BACKS EFFORT

Group working to bring Mohammed to West Virginia

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The leader of the Islamic Center of West Virginia says he supports efforts to invite Mohammed, the Iraqi man who helped rescue Pfc. Jessica Lynch, to West Virginia.

"We would like to host him here and take care of him and pay him back what he deserves," said Mohammed Jamal Daoudi, the imam of the Islamic Center, the mosque in South Charleston.

Daoudi met Wednesday with the "Friends of Mohammed," area residents who want to bring the 32-year-old Iraqi lawyer to the state.

The man known as "Mohammed" went to Saddam Hospital in Nasiriyah to visit his wife, and while there spotted Lynch, the Wirt County native who was captured when her supply unit was attacked.

Mohammed said he saw a black-clad Fedayeen commander slap the 19-year-old American. He resolved to find help and walked six miles through a war zone known to American military troops.

Mohammed returned to the hospital twice, sketched maps and told the Marines that 41 Fedayeen guarded Lynch. On April 2, a team of special forces carried out the rescue. Mohammed, his wife and 6-year-old daughter were relocated to a refugee camp in Umm Qasr.

Daoudi said the event was a blessing. He said the example that Mohammed provided helped ease cultural tensions.

"We were very excited," Daoudi said. "After all the news of destruction and bombing and civilian casualties, to have a window of life.

"After 9/11, there were lots of stereotypes, especially for people named Mohammed. It's the will of God to have this guy help Jessica get out of the hospital. He looked at her as a person of need rather than as the enemy."

Mohammed's full name still hasn't been revealed, and there is still danger in the region where he is living. So those trying to invite him to West Virginia still aren't certain how it might work.

Daoudi said it will be easier to extend an invitation when events become calmer.

"With any further information, we can build our effort," Daoudi said.

The "Friends of Mohammed" group is based in Malden. The meeting occurred at the Good Living assisted living center there.

The group says about a hundred people have signed an invitation so far.

The group is trying to work with the office of Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., to issue the invitation.

"We're very excited to reach out to your community and make a statement about the beautiful work this man has done," Karen Glazier, one of the owners of the assisted living center, said to Daoudi.