

PLANTING HOPE

Garden honoring Lynch, Iraqi dedicated in Palestine

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PALESTINE — People stop by the Palestine Post Office to pick up mail, buy stamps and check up on the local news with postmaster D. Berylann Lewis. It's also where up to 1,000 pieces of mail have been arriving daily for Pfc. Jessica Lynch and her family.

In a small patch of earth just beyond the post office door, next to the sidewalk and the flagpole, people can now see a small reminder of Lynch and the Iraqi lawyer who helped U.S. rescuers find her after her capture in Iraq.

On Saturday, volunteers from Friends of Mohammed and the Islamic Association of West Virginia, along with local residents, put the finishing touches on a small garden to remember the efforts of the man, known only as Mohammed, who helped lead U.S. forces to Lynch's bedside in an Iraqi hospital.

The Friends of Mohammed is a group based in Malden that is trying to bring Mohammed to West Virginia.

Mohammad Jamal Daoudi, the spiritual leader of the Islamic Association of West Virginia, said the new garden would remind people of Mohammed's heroic actions long after the media blitz, books and television movies have come and gone.

"When they come to the post office to check their mail, they will keep that story in their lives," Daoudi said.

The story is one of hope, peace and understanding that everyone is human, regardless of their nationality, Daoudi said.

"The beauty of this garden will remind them of the beauty of his actions," he said.

A short dogwood tree, azaleas, phlox, iris and daylilies sat in fresh mulch as about 30 people milled about the post office on a cloudy spring day. The new flowers and plants sit in a freshly cleared area next to the post office's existing garden.

Lewis said she had been telling people about the dedication and picnic the past two days, and expected more people to stop by during the afternoon for a picnic with Middle Eastern food donated by the Sahara Restaurant in Charleston.

"This is a meeting place," Lewis said. "We try to tell people what's going on in the community."

Lynch turned 20 on Saturday, and birthday cake was on the menu for the picnic.

Lynch remains in Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., where she is recovering from the numerous injuries she sustained upon her capture by Iraqi forces.

Ibrahim Abdullah of Charleston said the Lynch rescue, and Mohammed's part in it, showed that people around the world don't have to be enemies — they can help one another no matter what their governments are doing.

During a silent dedication of the new garden, Daoudi said he would pray for Lynch, people like Mohammed in Iraq and that U.S. troops would be home soon, without having to hurt others or being hurt themselves.

"I'm going to pray for the whole world to learn from this inspirational incident."