



CHELSEA DISTRICT LIBRARY
BEST SMALL LIBRARY IN AMERICA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Karen Persello, Head of Youth and Teen Services

PHONE: 734-475-8732, Ext 212

E-MAIL: kpersello@chelseadistrictlibrary.org

February 3, 2017 | Chelsea, MI

Chelsea District Library Exhibit Showcases Immigrants' Stories

The Chelsea District Library is exploring the stories of immigrants and refugees this winter through *What We Carried: Fragments from the Cradle of Civilization*, a photographic exhibit from the Arab American National Museum (AANM) in Dearborn, Michigan. The exhibit is currently available in the library lobby now through February 24.

Photographer Jim Lommasson captured dozens of images from Syrian and Iraqi refugees for this exhibit. The photographs depict objects that individuals or families brought with them to remind them of the homes they left behind, such as a child's toy, photograph, or heirloom dish. Each photo is accompanied by a caption so that visitors can learn the story behind the objects. Immigrants and refugees from across the country, including Dearborn, Michigan, are represented.

More than 4 million Iraqis have been displaced from their homes since 2003. Many traveled to Syria, seeking stability and refuge, only to find themselves again in war-torn and dangerous living situations. About 140,000 refugees have since immigrated to the United States. Few are able to bring more than a memento or two from home.

"The exhibit gives us all the opportunity to imagine what object we might have kept in a similar situation," explained Karen Persello, Head of Youth and Teen Services. "Nearly all of our ancestors came from someplace else, and we all have a story."

The library has received overwhelmingly positive responses from patrons regarding the exhibit. Some of the comment cards included remarks such as, "I loved it. I learned a bit about this culture. It creates a connection between me and these brave people," and "It's amazing and so timely! And so touching my heart," and "Emotional and thought-provoking. Thank you for bringing it here," and "Sad, but so important for all to know and hopefully accept refugees into our community!"

Chelsea area families are also invited to participate in a community display called "What Did They Bring?" Like the Iraqi and Syrian immigrants, many local families have a treasured memento from "the old country" with a story attached to it. An actual item or a photograph of

the item are welcome for our display, which already includes a zither from Germany and a noodle maker from Hungary, along with naturalization and traveling documents from Turkey and Serbia. These are on display in the library, and community members are welcome to submit their objects to Karen Persello at kpersello@chelseadistrictlibrary.org.

A panel presentation on “Immigrants, Refugees, and the Arab American Experience” will be held on Sunday, February 19, from 2:00-3:30 p.m. at the library in conjunction with the exhibit. Representatives from the AANM and the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services will address immigration and refugee issues in Michigan.

“We’re hoping that this panel will provide some background information on immigration and refugees, including who’s coming to our region, and why,” said Persello. The presentation will be held in the McKune Room and is a drop-in program with no need to register.

The *What We Carried: Fragments from the Cradle of Civilization* traveling exhibition is a collaboration between photographer Jim Lommasson and the AANM. The exhibition is funded by The Oregon Regional Arts Council, the Oregon Arts Commission, Ruth Ann Brown, and the AANM.

####

About Us: Chelsea District Library is nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide equal access to quality resources that serve the lifelong cultural, educational and informational needs and interests of all people. The Library currently serves 14,000 residents in the Chelsea district – City of Chelsea plus Dexter, Lima, Lyndon and Sylvan townships and more than 20,000 individuals visit the Library each month. For more information visit chelseadistrictlibrary.org.

##