

# OPINION

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## Islamic Academy of Prelate welcomes community like family

On September 4, the residents of Prelate, Leader and other areas surrounding the Great Sandhills were invited to participate in the dedication ceremony and Grand Opening of the Islamic Academy of Saskatchewan, led by Academy President Mohammed Tayyab and attended by other Islamic families and dignitaries from across Canada who travelled great distances to take part in the birth of a new era for Saskatchewan.

Sharing in the celebrations at the facility that is nestled on the north end of the Village of Prelate on 10 beautifully treed acres, were the Ursuline Sisters of Prelate, who built the original convent and St. Angela's Academy in 1919 and served the region through outreach and an all-girls Catholic boarding school for almost 92 years.

Many former students and area residents made a special effort to participate in the spiritual and academic transition of this highly regarded and historic community institu-

tion, demonstrating academic excellence within the Islamic tradition.

"Originally I'm from Pakistan. First, when I migrate from Pakistan to Fiji in 1986, at that time also I discussed with my community members in Fiji Island, and I said this is my dream: that I build some kind of school, because I like education and this is very hard to build a school because we don't have so many Muslim scholars, because I was the second Muslim scholar in Fiji Island in 1986. But I said don't worry. Just you start it and the Lord will help you.

"We started. Within a few weeks, we build not a huge school like this," he said, gesturing to the walls of the Academy, "but approximately 70 or 80 students. First we enroll in this school, and just the grace of Almighty Allah, this school is still running, and more than 100 students are boarding there."

Tayyab's next journey brought him to British Columbia.

"In 1989 I migrate from Fiji Island to Canada and I spent around 22 years in



The Prayer Hall of the Islamic Academy of Saskatchewan, formerly St. Angela's Academy of Prelate, welcomed a capacity crowd to the facility's Grand Opening celebrations on Sept. 4, attended by families from across western Canada and many former students in addition to local residents.

purpose, but I'm very happy and I'm hundred per cent sure all the Sisters they are very happy we are using this facility for the same purpose again."

Tayyab welcomes any family who has boys to consider an academic education at the Academy.

"Last time when we were talking with the Minister of Education and Sister Rosetta was here also, at that time I said because this is a religious school plus academic also, if our neighbours they have any boys, because this is a only

the world, and it starts right here, and with our own families, our own communities, and so on."

Following the ceremony, visitors were asked to stay for lunch and many accepted the offer to gather downstairs and sit at the tables of their new family, the men in one dining area and the women and children in another at the opposite end of the hall, sampling figs, flatbread, curried rice and lamb, chicken, yogurt and fruit punch, while sharing animated conversation.

Entire families had trav-



tion. Visitors were encouraged to explore the academy at their leisure, and many of the Ursulines accompanied those who were new to the facility, explaining the uses they once had for each of the rooms. Additions over the years have included a spacious gymnasium and portable dormitories all connected to the main structure.

When everyone finally gathered upstairs in the beautiful prayer hall that inspires reverence with its white walls, vaulted ceiling and tall windows open to the afternoon's brilliant sunlight, the excitement and curiosity of the capacity crowd were palpable.

"Welcome to the Islamic Academy of Saskatchewan," began Mohammed Tayyab, and the hall that overflowed with people resounded with applause.

The transition from Catholic girls to Muslim boys at the Academy will require adjustments and adaptations from all members of the community, but residents of Prelate are very hopeful that the village will benefit from having the facility continue as an educational academy for Muslim boys from Grades 4 to 12.

Tayyab described the circuitous journey that led him from Pakistan many years ago to Prelate this spring to facilitate aca-

demies in 25 years in British Columbia. In 1996, the same, I called my friend to see if we can start the same school in British Columbia, but very hard to find a place they have the zoning for like a boarding school [where] you can keep boys inside the building and at the same time teach them both Islamic and academic educations.

"Finally in 1998 we find one place in Hope, BC. The place named Hope, and the same time we have lots of hope from this place also."

Tayyab then founded the Islamic Academy of British Columbia, and was overjoyed to see many students graduating with high honours over the next 13 years. However, when he tried to expand the Academy beyond its 40-student capacity, he discovered that zoning and municipal laws would not allow it.

"And finally we find in, I think March 2011, this beautiful facility and we are talking to Sister Rosetta several times, and I come two, three times and I saw the place and finally we reach a deal.

"And I'm very happy because this place used to the same purpose for education, and because some reason they sold this one, it would be shameful for all the communities if we used this beautiful facility for some other purpose like warehouse or some other

boys school, if they want to come and join the academic program with us, our door is open for all community, all nations and all the religions."

Sister Anne Lewans and Sister Rosetta Riedinger were asked to speak on behalf of the Ursulines who played such a leading role in the community for several generations.

"There are lots of things I would like to say," began Sister Anne, "but I will be brief and just welcome you all to 'our' house. We are very happy indeed that the Islamic Academy of Saskatchewan will also be an educational institution and we are very grateful that someone has come to use the facility in a very good way."

Sister Rosetta added, "I think that the work that we, the Sisters, the Ursulines, began in 1919 will continue. It might be a little different in the sense that it was all girls and all the girls running down the hall," she gestured with her left hand, "and now it will be all the boys running down the hall," she gestured with her right hand, "but the purpose is the same: to bring our people closer to God.

"You call him Allah, we call him God, but He is the same being and I think the purpose is to make humankind a better place so that there can be peace and brotherhood throughout

ened from BC, Alberta and Manitoba with their sons to bring them to their new academy and meet the people in the community that will be their home for the next several years.

All the mothers, Muslims from every culture, some in traditional dress and others wearing jeans, a T-shirt and simple headscarf, were delighted with the facilities and in awe of the great prairie skies, admitting that so much space was spiritually uplifting and yet humbling.



Mohammed Tayyab, President of the Islamic Academy of Saskatchewan, warmly welcomed guests attending the Grand Opening Sept. 4 before relating a brief history of his life-long dream to facilitate academic excellence in the traditions of Islam for Muslim boys.

The Islamic Academy of Saskatchewan hopes to play a key role in giving their young men a strong academic background and an equally strong sense of social and community responsibility, emphasizing self-refinement and high morals, so they can become productive members of society.

## Prepping for a parade



Doc's Town volunteer Beryl Robinson describes the parade route to the children who decorated their bikes and scooters for the Harvest Festival at Kinetic Park on Saturday.