

Summarizing the 54th Annual AFRP Convention in Orlando, FL By Joy Batteh-Freiha

The 54th Annual AFRP Convention hosted by the Ramallah-American Club of Jacksonville in Orlando, Florida, was a break-out convention that included many positive changes.

The most noticeable may have been the introduction by the Federation two years ago, to shorten our annual event from the typical 4 days to 3 days, effective with the 2012 convention to be hosted by the Jacksonville community.

Charged with this change, members of the Ramallah-American Club of Jacksonville ran full speed ahead, taking careful consideration of every detail so that our Ramallah family would enjoy the most spectacular 3-day event ever!



At the helm, was **Johnny Musa Bateh** as **convention chairman**, and other volunteers came forward without hesitation. Committees were formed, destination hotels were researched, events were planned, and sponsors were rallying their support. Truly, this would be the convention of many firsts, a convention like no other.

Location, location, location – once again, our convention committees chose magical **Orlando, Florida**, as the site for our annual reunion. The resort hotels – the **Orlando Bonnet Creek Hilton** and the **Waldorf Astoria Orlando**, were connected by a convention center and provided amenities such as the lazy river pool, a golf course, a world class spa and salon, balcony views, and close proximity to Disney Theme Parks.



Exhibitors at our ***Souk*** or marketplace offered Palestinian goods, clothing, jewelry, paintings, books, CDs, and more. The **Bank of Palestine** – one of our title sponsors, generously offered t-shirts, cups, and the well-known olive oil soap to those who stopped by their booth.

The annual **Federation Business Meetings** were held each morning of the convention and proved to be as rousing and exciting as in years past. It was voted and approved that the **2014 AFRP Convention** be held in our beloved ancestral homeland of **Ramallah!**

‘Lest not to forget the reason for the season – of conventions that is, the youth of our Ramallah families participated in the **Test Your Memory** event. This hands-on icebreaker brought **young adults 18 and older** together for a **mini-speed dating roundup**. A version for the youth of our communities was held in a room nearby. Both events would have made any Ramallah matchmaker smile – ***Inshallah!***



We also had the pleasure of featuring **Aaron Kader**, a well known comedian on **Friday**. In addition, on **Friday** evening we showcased entertainment that rocked the house!



The award-winning **KTG Musical Entertainment**, a **seven member full band and singers** played and sang tunes that delighted every age group.

If you awoke early enough Saturday morning, you may have run into groups of determined youths on a mission searching for items during the first annual – and way cool, **Ramallah Scavenger Hunt!** Items such as a photo of an astronaut, a wedding cake, sun hat, and even a candy bar, were planted around the hotels waiting to be discovered by scouring **Ramallah youths**. Prizes were awarded to the groups with the most found items.



We also featured **Jennifer Jajah** who brought her **One Woman Show – Growing Up Palestinian**.

To see if you were spotted and caught the eye of our official convention **photographer Cynthia Sullivan** of **Unobstructed Photography**, check out her website and photos taken during the convention including those taken during Saturday evening after the Banquet.
http://www.unobstructedstudios.com/clients/20120707_afrp/index.html.



Speaking of banquets, the **highlight of our convention finale** was when youth from our Jacksonville Ramallah community made their debut marching into the banquet hall as the first-ever, organized **Palestinian Kashaaf group** outside of Ramallah. There were **beating drums**, a **bagpipe**, and even **posters** of past **Kashaaf members**. Tears of pride were streaming down the eyes of parents, men, and women as our youth performed their rendition of the annual *Sabt il Nour* tradition.



Other members of our youth sang the **U.S. National Anthem**, while Middle Eastern singer **Wassim Kattan** – our Saturday evening singer, sang the **Palestinian National Anthem**.

Our two speakers did not disappoint! We were humbled and honored to have **American Ambassador to Qatar Susan Ziadeh**, daughter of our own **Professor Farhat Yacoub Ziadeh**, who was recognized by our Federation during the Grand Banquet for his service to our collective Ramallah community here and abroad, speak about our Palestinian heritage, assimilation, and our experiences in Diaspora.

We were equally honored to have **Ambassador Maen Areikat, Chief Representative of the PLO Mission to the U.S.** The Honorable Areikat inspired us to become active within our communities and to savor the privilege and importance of voting for leadership in our country.



Following the Grand Banquet, the convention resorts offered to light up the night sky with an awesome display of fireworks, before **Wassim Kattan** and his band took the stage and entertained convention attendees with old and new favorites. If you weren't on the dance floor doing the **Dabke** (traditional circle dance) or solo dancing with your cousins, **Yah Abe-A-Shoom** (shame on you)! The music and beat was enough to get your **Tata** going!

While these were just a few **highlights of the 2012 AFRP Convention**, we know there were many more. After nearly two years of planning, members of the Ramallah-American Club of Jacksonville, thank you for participating in **our signature event**. It was our pleasure to welcome you and your family from every part of the U.S. and Ramallah to Florida. We hope you made memories that will forever be embedded in your minds.

We are unique. We are one family. We are Ramallah!

Until we see each other again . . . Salmoo (say hello to everyone back home!)