

# Friends Schools Newsletter

Winter 2010



## A Tribute to Diana Abdel Nour: 35 Years of Exemplary Service at the Ramallah Friends Schools

By Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director

**M**s. Diana (as she is commonly referred to by all), started her career at the Friends School in 1975 after having completed her bachelor's degree from MC Master University, in Canada. After teaching one year at Birzeit University, her path led her to us. A young and enthusiastic teacher of Mathematics, she quickly delved into the lives of her students, making them and their education her priority. Her classroom, as I personally recall, was full of learning yet indeed a disciplined one. Despite our often uncontrolled rowdiness, Ms. Diana managed to calm us down. Her calmness somehow managed to rub off on us and with that came the ultimate respect for our teacher. This composure along with her value driven persona is what made her stand out among her colleagues as the leader the school Board of Trustees and Friends United Meeting aspired to recruit. After filling the role of acting principal of the Friends Girls School (FGS) for one year in 1993, she took on the position of principal and maintained it until her retirement this August 2010.



The Ramallah Friends Schools have always worked to provide a rich, innovative curriculum guided by the Quaker values of equality, tolerance and service. No one understood the importance of incorporating these values in education more than Ms. Diana. Our community owes much to her leadership. Together

with the Board of Trustees, Ms. Diana responded to the community demand for more classrooms by championing a school expansion initiative which added a third section in every class. She also worked for the smooth merging of the school with the Friends Boys School; transforming the FGS into a co-educational elementary school (kindergarten thru sixth grade). With all this she also adopted modern educational methodologies by implementing the contained classroom scheme for first thru third grade. The value of equality shined on our campus especially with Ms. Diana's insistence that her school was available for "all"; and by *all* she really meant *all*! She worked hard to ensure students with financial need are supported and often found creative ways to get them the support they required. Ms. Diana would not tolerate any students withdrawing for financial reasons. Furthermore, realizing that very limited educational opportunities are available for them, Ms. Diana was also a huge proponent of students with special needs. She worked with a very dedicated team to make the Friends School the first and only fully inclusive educational facility in Palestine.

### Highlights in this issue:

Lower School News in Brief By Frieda Khayat .....	2
Donations and Presents for the SOS Village Children By Duha Al-Masri .....	3
The Kaykab Garden — More than Just a Green Step By Summer Musallam Ayed ....	4
Launching the "Friends Sports Club" at the Upper School By Jeries Abu El-Etham .....	5
Upper School News in Brief By Mahmoud Amra .....	5
News Updates .....	6
Contribute to RFS .....	7
Donor Thanks .....	8

Editor: Jumana Thalji,  
RFS Director's Office

continued on page 2


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*continued from page 1*

No doubt competent school principals around the globe succeed in managing their schools through difficult times, but as we all know, “difficult times” are the most prevalent of times in Palestine, nearly becoming the norm. Impressive throughout Ms. Diana’s tenure, was her perseverance and wisdom as she led her students to safety and insured their mental well-being as the atrocities of the Israeli military occupation took hold of their daily lives. From long-term school closures, the first and second Intifadas (uprisings) against occupation, to air and land bombardment, to curfews — she has managed it all.

I could go on listing more of Ms. Diana’s contributions, but we all know they are way too many to recount. Listing the names of her over 3,000 students would be challenging; but in reality this is where Ms. Diana’s contribution ultimately lies. The track record of the Ramallah Friends Schools graduates is distinctly recognizable, not only because of their academic and career achievements, but for their commitment to the values they were taught to uphold since a very young age. So, our gratitude goes out to Ms. Diana for her contributions towards our value-led, tolerant and service-oriented community. Gratitude is also due to Ms. Diana’s dear husband George and her wonderful daughter Amal (our alumna) for supporting her work and for enduring the long hours she had to spend away from them.

Thank you Ms. Diana on behalf of your staff, students and school families and God bless you. We know you will continue to be with us as we carry on serving these delightful little souls.

For those interested in sending Ms. Diana a note of gratitude, you may do so using her e-mail address: [diana@palfriends.org](mailto:diana@palfriends.org), or the school mailing address available on our website. 

## Lower School News in Brief

*By Frieda Khayat, Lower School Acting Principal*

### Teachers’ Workshops

This school year started with different workshops for the teachers as part of their ongoing professional development. The workshops focused on topics such as classroom management skills and school values. In addition, consultant Laila Atshan conducted a long session on teamwork and transition.

### Activities

A “back to school celebration” took place on the afternoon of September 23. It included a puppet show focusing on the themes of cleanliness and healthy food. Three clowns entertained the children in addition to face painting. The children also spent a lot of time playing individual games that were supervised by volunteers from upper school students. It was a fun, entertaining activity that allowed the parents to socialize and the students to play.

### Staff and Students

The number of students enrolled at the school this year is 666. One hundred of them are new students. Three new English teachers and a librarian were recruited this year.

### Renovations

During the summer, a lot of renovation took place and new pieces of furniture were purchased. Teachers’ rooms were renovated and painted and a false ceiling with new lighting fixtures was installed. Additionally, new wooden lockers and shelves replaced the old ones. Also, 180 new desks and chairs were purchased for the fifth and sixth grades in addition to new cupboards. The science lab was equipped with new equipment. It is essential to mention that funds from the MSN program (Model School Network) designed by the AMIDEAST covered part of the cost and the school paid the rest.



*Lower school students enjoying the playground.*

# Donations and Presents for the SOS Village Children

By Duha Al-Masri, Head of Preschool

**T**here is nothing like starting our journey in life with giving: either emotional or material. Usually we start the school year with high doses of emotional giving for our new children and their parents as we witness their first experience with separation. The beginning of this year was additionally special. We started the school year with the fasting month of Ramadan where the spirit of giving touched everybody. As soon as we launched the campaign for helping around 135 children at the SOS village in providing them with the back to school necessities, the spirit of Ramadan brought out everyone's kindness and generosity. Parents and teachers donated money and presents in addition to some shopkeepers who made considerable discounts knowing that all this is for a good cause. Our entire school community was more than willing and happy to participate in this event and make it work. Further plans were arranged to keep this initiative going through mutual visits between our kindergarten and the SOS village and by making it a tradition to always start the school year in the same way. It keeps coming to my mind how the beginning of this year started and continues to bring out the best in all of us. 🌸



Kindergarten students give presents to an SOS village employee.



## Guests

Luba Suhweil, a Friends' graduate of 1955 and former lower school teacher, shared her wonderful experiences with our upper elementary students in the Monday morning chapel on September 20.

## Music

- Last year 270 students from grades 4-6 presented a performance for 15 minutes during our open day. They performed as one team, "Oriental Rhythms", by reading the notes through sight reading. This year we will teach third graders how to use and play a recorder after giving them Solfege lessons. The first performance will hopefully be at our Christmas party.
- Music appreciation and flute recorder playing will be taught as after school activities in coordination with and support from the Barenboim-Said Foundation for third and fourth graders.
- In coordination with A.M. Qattan Foundation, Pierre Dulaine, renowned ballroom dancer, gave three dancing sessions for our fifth graders; one session for each section. The students were introduced to ballroom dancing and were very excited about this new experience.



Lower school students have opportunities to enjoy reading in the library and creating original work in art class.

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## The Kaykab Garden — More than Just a Green Step

*By Summer Musallam Ayed, Kaykab Program Coordinator*

**E**mbraced within the arms of Ramallah and El-Bireh cities lies the green, peaceful and calm Kaykab Garden, an educational garden promoting environmental awareness that is overseen by Ramallah Friends Schools (RFS). The Kaykab Garden was named after a local endangered plant species and was established in 2001, by funding from Heinrich Boll institution and direct supervision from Birzeit University, to serve as a botanical garden with over 150 plant types identified and labeled.



*RFS students participated in activities such as face painting at the Kaykab Garden to support the initiative to cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.*

Over the past few years, several environmental activities were conducted at the garden to promote and disseminate environmental awareness, and these were in coordination with the Ministry of Education and Ramallah Municipality. The targeted groups for these environmental projects were not only students, but also local farmers and housewives trained in domestic farming. An organic garden was established; produce from the garden was marketed locally. The organic remains are recycled in composters to be used as organic fertilizer, fulfilling a role in self sustenance of the garden. Unfortunately some of these activities had to stop due to the lack of funding.

This year, however, the Kaykab Garden will still serve its primary mission, and will prosper and flourish even more. Owing to generous donations from the United Nations Development Program-Global Environmental Facility and the Dutch Mennonites, more facilities will be available at hand to expand the garden's potential. We are excited to get started with our projects in an attempt to elevate the status of the garden so it would become acknowledged as an icon for environmental education and a diverse resource center for the region.

One of our main objectives is to educate the community about the concept of renewable energy. For this purpose, we are working on installing solar panels in order to aid in lighting the garden at night with solar energy stored from daytime harvesting. In addition, we are currently working on introducing a wastewater treatment unit. This facility will allow for the reuse of gray wastewater (sewer water) in irrigation.

Moreover, we intend to establish a permanent environmental exhibition to educate visitors on several environmental issues, such as recycling, sustainable agriculture, pollution and water management. Part of our mission is to also launch environmental clubs at RFS. These would target primary and secondary school students as an expansion of an already existing model in kindergarten, where several environmental projects involving young children at Friends Girls School took place in coordination with Ramallah Municipality. These clubs will guarantee the implementation and sustainability of environmental awareness programs in future generations.

The current and future plans for the Kaykab Garden may seem strenuous and faced with many challenges, but the success of such a project is feasible with input from all members of society. It is more than just taking a green step forward in the Palestinian environment, it is about educating today and tomorrow's leaders and society about the need to respect, sustain and save Earth.





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# Launching the “Friends Sports Club” at the Upper School

By Jeries Abu El-Etham, Upper School Deputy Principal

**W**hat distinguishes the upper school in extracurricular activities is the availability of excellent facilities and playgrounds that qualify the school to provide various activities for all students who wish to participate.

At the beginning of this year, the work on the renovation of the tennis court was completed in accordance with specific criteria for the design and implementation to allow students to use the court for ground tennis training within the various sports programs. This is the only tennis court available on a school campus in the area. Added to that our artificial turf soccer field provides a sports environment not available in any other school that meets the needs of the students, teachers and sports coach. Also the internal and external basketball courts contribute mainly to the development of the athletic abilities of students and encourage them to join the activities. We hope to have these renovated soon.

By the beginning of this year, and out of the high concern of the school administration to activate our sports program in line with the school's mission of “developing the whole person”, the “Friends Sports Club” was formed. A committee of

teachers and administration was formed to oversee the planning and two teachers were assigned to supervise the work by identifying needs and providing trainers and tools to start sports activities. So far the program includes basketball, football (soccer), handball, tennis, table tennis and athletics. The program was launched at the beginning of October, with students engaging in sports from 3-5 p.m. every school day.

Our interest in developing the sports activities compliments our other activities such as Debkeh (Palestinian folklore dance) and drama clubs as there is a high demand in joining the Debkeh and the drama teams under the supervision of the best trainers.



Upper school students play tennis on the newly renovated court.

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## Upper School News in Brief

By Mahmoud Amra, Upper School Principal

The number of students at the Friends upper school this year (524) is the highest ever and many applicants could not enroll at the school because of the lack of vacancies. It is apparent that the demand at the school is increasing year after year, especially in grades 9-11. The main reasons for this increasing demand are: the Quaker values of the school, the long successful history, the IB Diploma program, the college counseling program which provides many opportunities for college admission and the emphasis on helping students in developing well-rounded personalities.

### Back to School Bonfire

In cooperation with the student council, the back to school bonfire took place on September 30. Hundreds of students participated in this activity, during which they played several games and were entertained with music and dancing. It was fun for students.

### Participating in MUN Conferences

The participation of upper school students in Model United Nations (MUN) conferences is growing year after year to become a tradition. This year, 12 students will participate in the MUN confer-

ence taking place in Amman, another six will go in January 2011 to Doha, Qatar, for another conference and six more students will participate in an MUN conference in Istanbul.

### Student Exchange Program

The school was once again proud to announce scholarship exchange program opportunities in partnership with Westtown School, Sidwell Friends School, George School and Penn Charter School. These four Quaker schools have generously offered to accept one student each and to provide scholarships for them to spend the academic year 2010-11 there. All four students have safely arrived in the U.S. and have already started school.

### Student Council

One of the highlights of every school year is the election of a new Student Council president. The process itself is of great value. Two students are this year nominated: Sama Salem and Fares Saadeh. They were both given the opportunity to speak to the student body about their goals and vision. All students had the chance to vote.

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## News Updates



Ms. Diana (center) is honored by RFS Board of Trustees. Samer Shehadeh, RFS Board of Trustees Clerk (left) and Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director (right).



Back to school bonfire for upper school



RFS participants at MUN Conference in Cairo

The Board of Trustees honored **Ms. Diana Abdel Nour** for her 35 years of service at a reception on 7 October 2010. Lower school staff, PTA members and principals of other schools joined the Board of Trustees in a very touching gathering. We were happy to see Diana's husband, George, join us for the evening. Frieda Khayat (class of 1983), lower school deputy principal, was appointed as lower school acting principal for one year until the Board reactivates the recruitment process in the winter.

**Eight new teachers** joined the RFS faculty this year. Three of them are learning support teachers for the Special Needs Program. To date, around 54 students receive direct services from a team of seven staff at both schools. Many other students benefit from some form of intervention from this team. Our school is the only school offering a fully inclusive educational program in Palestine. Two of the new teachers are Quakers: Ian Rhodewalt from Pennsylvania who is serving as our college counselor and teaching the World Religion class (developed by Max Carter) and Deena Zaru, a Palestinian Quaker and member of the Ramallah Monthly Meeting who recently graduated from Guilford College. Deena is teaching English at the lower school.

The School was approved for another **USAID/ASHA grant** totaling \$500,000 which will be used to upgrade sports facilities, create additional residential space, student drop-off/pickup area and purchase new computers and desks, among many other provisions. We are grateful to the ASHA program for its continued support.

The new **Kindergarten Building** at the lower campus has finally received some funding from the German organization KfW (a government-owned development bank) through UNDP (United Nations Development Program) as well as several other individual donors. This donation came after over one year of halting the construction due to the unavailability of funding. The balance to complete the building including the new assembly hall remains high (over \$300,000) and needs to be secured quickly to avoid further interruption. Construction will resume in December 2010 to hopefully have the kindergarten open its doors to new students in September 2011. Funds for furniture are also being sought; thanks for spreading the word!

Support for our **student financial aid fund** remains a priority. This year, we have committed support to 197 students – constituting 17 percent of our student body. We need to raise \$218,849 by the end of August 2011 to enable us to honor our commitments to students without increasing school deficits. We thank all supporters for their continued support that makes a huge difference in our students' lives and encourage our supporters to encourage their friends and meetings to provide similar support. Sponsoring one student fully is a \$2,000 annual commitment and of course any contribution will help our efforts.

School director, **Joyce Ajlouny**, will be traveling to New England states for a two-week tour starting the last week of October. Thanks to New England Yearly Meeting for organizing an amazing program of visits that we hope will help raise awareness about the important role FUM is playing in the school. Joyce hopes to secure new pledges of support from New England by reigniting old friendships and starting new ones. After all, Eli and Sybil Jones who established the first classrooms for girls in Ramallah in 1869 came from Maine.



## Participate in the future of the Friends Schools, with your tax- deductible gifts!



☐ Yes, I would like to contribute to the Ramallah Friends Schools:

☐ Scholarships and Child sponsorship\*

☐ General Award (any amount) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ ESJ Award (min. \$2,000) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Preferences (age, gender, other): \_\_\_\_\_

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**U.S. \$ Gifts:** Tax-deductible gifts should be made payable to the Ramallah Friends Schools and sent to: **Global Ministries, Friends United Meeting, 101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, IN 47374-1926.**

**Sterling (£) Gifts:** should be made payable to the Quaker International Educational Trust (QulET), noting "for Ramallah" on the back and saying if Gift Aid may be claimed, and sent to: QulET, Yew Tree House, Church Street, Bloxham, Banbury, OX15 4ET or Brian Morphy at QulET, Tel: 01295 720019; e-mail: [brianmorphy@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianmorphy@tiscali.co.uk).

\*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2010–2011 range from U.S. \$2,000 to \$2,700.

For further information and inquiries, feel free to contact our office at [development@palfriends.org](mailto:development@palfriends.org) or Tel: +972-2-295-2286, [www.palfriends.org](http://www.palfriends.org).

### It's finally here! Support RFS through Online Giving!

Through an initiative aimed at saving money and resources, we have begun to shift much of our correspondence online. Donations can now be made with the click of a mouse on our new, **completely secure** online donation page (designed and supported by eCommerce, a U.S.-based company). Donations made through this secure site are U.S. tax-deductible; please visit our web page for other donation methods. As always, we will never share your information with a third party. Visit [www.palfriends.org](http://www.palfriends.org) and click "Donate" for more information.



*Friends Schools  
Class of 2010*

Our 78 graduates — **Class of 2010** — are missed. They've had a very successful year with excellent college matriculation results. Their IB scores were equally impressive. With one at Guilford College, one at Harvard, two at Yale, two at the University of Virginia, one at Cornell, one at Tufts ... the impressive list continues. Around 33 percent of our graduates stayed home and are attending local universities; over 35 percent ended up in North American colleges; and around 25 percent are attending universities in the Arab world. The remaining are attending colleges somewhere around our globe.



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c/o Friends United Meeting  
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## Donor Thanks

Friends Schools, Ramallah/Al-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General  
April 1, 2010–October 1, 2010

We would like to thank the following people and their meetings for their recent donations to Ramallah Friends Schools.

Alnahhas, Yazan  
Amesbury Monthly Meeting  
Anderson, James & Janet Leslie  
Angell, Stephen & Sandra  
Azar, Deeb & Kay  
Barbour, Hugh & Sirkka  
Belmont, Peter  
Bethesda Friends Meeting  
Bewley, Eleanor  
Bismarck Friends Meeting  
Bostian, Ray & Martha  
Brush, Miriam  
Cambridge Friends Meeting  
Canadian Yearly Meeting  
Chakoian, Dave & Lynn  
Chamberlin, John & Shannon  
Church Of The Savior United  
Church Of Christ  
Comer, Mary Lee  
Consolidated Contractors  
(CCC)  
Covington, Miriam  
Cross Monthly Meeting  
of Friends  
Diehl, Barbara

Dodd-Collins, Ann  
Dover Friends  
Durland, Bill & Genie  
Earlham College  
Easton Friends Meeting  
Edinger, Fred & Nancy  
Evanston Friends Meeting  
Fancy Gap Friends  
Fayetteville Friends Meeting  
First Presbyterian Church  
Friends Memorial Church  
Gardescu, Paul & Betty  
Garner, Sallyann  
Gowin, Robert & Laura Cisar  
Grass Valley Friends Meeting  
Hanover Friends Meeting  
Hawkins, Bruce & Ruth  
Healey, ML  
Hutton, Gail Clifford  
Indiana Yearly Meeting  
Iowa Yearly Meeting Missions  
Irish Quaker Faith in Action  
Johnson, Timothy & Ann  
Khalaf, Tareq  
Kishek, Rami

Lansdowne Monthly Meeting  
Little Rock Meeting  
Live Oak Friends Meeting  
Marin Friends Meeting  
Marshburn, Ted & Mary  
Millville Monthly Meeting  
Mito Monthly Meeting  
Monadnock Quaker Meeting  
Morningside Monthly Meeting  
Neff, Sam & Ruth  
New England Yearly Meeting  
Newtown Monthly Meeting  
of Friends  
Newtown Presbyterian Church  
Obadiah Brown Fund  
Oread Friends Meeting  
Oxford Friends Meeting  
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Poston, Chip  
Praetorius, Robert  
Quäker-Hilfe Germany  
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Rodley, J Houge E.  
SA'D, Jamal A.

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Tooker, Charles & Anna Lisa  
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Valley Friends Meeting  
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In honor of Ibrahim Resek  
by Jennifer Ho