

# Islamic Institute of Toronto inspires hundreds as they welcome back Hujjaj

*By Sr. Anela Jadunandan (Ontario Association of Islamic Schools)*



Performers from the Apex Shaolin Martial Arts

Old Man Winter didn't hold back hundreds of people from attending the annual Winter Gala Dinner held by the **Islamic Institute of Toronto** on Sunday, January 1, 2012. The occasion also welcomed back their Hujjaj from their pilgrimage to Mecca last October.

I was glad we bought our tickets early because this is usually a sold-out affair. Br. Fareed Amin, Deputy Minister of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, welcomed the mostly 'decked out' audience. His ease and great sense of humour at the microphone always put people in a great mood and Sunday evening was no exception.

The special Guest Speaker for the evening was **Muhammad Lila**, award winning Canadian journalist, reporter and anchor with the CBC, held our interest as he spoke about what is currently going on in the media and the Muslim world. He welcomed Sister Inas Qadri, who was at the dinner with her family. You might remember her name in the news recently for having her niqab rudely pulled off her face as she shopped in a west end Toronto mall with her young children. Sr. Inas did not take this assault sitting down (or, should I say, standing up). She used the full extent of the law to prosecute the woman who attacked her. I was hoping to meet Sister Qadri to congratulate her for the brave stance she took. My only hope is that Muslims will try to forgive her attacker and teach that woman about the beauty of Islam. Imagine what a great breaking story that would make!

Br. Lila also spoke about his experience in school when he was young and where his creativity and imagination were at times suffocated. He talked about his challenges when

growing up in a very controlled environment in school where everyone had to do as they were told – a type of 'one size fits all' methodology. He encouraged schools (and parents) to allow for greater creativity and imagination when educating their children. Today, he is quite accomplished and we heard Sunday, is moving up in the world professionally as we speak. I couldn't help but reflect that this type of stimulus might be just what our schools and especially our Islamic Schools might need.

Brother Mohamed (Farhad) Khadim, President of IIT, spoke about the impressive advances that IIT has made. These include Islamic schooling, Hajj resources, Scouting, and the White Ribbon Campaign spearheaded by Br. Muneeb Nasir (Violence against Domestic violence), Islamic bookstore and building improvements including a playground for the kids. We also learned that IIT has given internationally to humanitarian causes for Libya, Somalia and other places through Relief Groups such as Islamic Relief, HCI, IDRF and Children of Hope.

They have also provided much needed financial assistance locally through the Muslim Welfare Centre and directly to individuals and families who are in financial need. IIT also offers continuous educational, emotional and social support provided by their two scholars: Shaikh Ahmad Kutty and Shaikh Abdool Hamid, through family and youth counselling and answers to questions through **Askthescholar.com**. (By the way, this is an impressive website, that people should use regularly.)

I had made a promise to myself about limiting my donations to “bricks and mortar” institutions and giving instead to more social and humanitarian causes. However, when I see the wonderful work being done by IIT and its hard working people, and the fact that we are witnessing the results of this work, I had to make an exception.

The mouth watering dinner consisted of roast beef and chicken, catered by **Affy's Premium Grill** of Pickering, topped off with dessert of black forest cake, coffee and tea.

The real sensation of the evening was the entertainment portion. The performers from the **Apex Shaolin Martial Arts** and the Drumming opening act absolutely mesmerized the audience! Some of the performers looked like they were as young as 7. Watching the performers going through their routine reminded me of many years ago when I earned a black belt in Karate and how proud (and nerve racking) it was to perform in front of an audience and judges. Thankfully, those days are long gone.

Congratulations to IIT for setting the bar very high (again). May Allah bless this institution and make 2012 a very fulfilling and prosperous year.