

## **CAIR-National leadership-Banquet 2010**

On Saturday Oct 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010 The Council on American Islamic Relations held its 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Banquet and Leadership Conference designed to train members from the Muslim community on leadership skills and media and civic engagement techniques. Both programs were a tremendous success. Two hundred and eighty people participated in leadership workshops and 900 people attended the banquet in the evening.

The Leadership Training Conference received high marks from attendees who traveled from all over the US and Canada to participate. The “Becoming a Dynamic Public Speaker” session seemed to get the most praise, though all sessions were well attended and appreciated. Many young people traveled from out of town and some chapters sent delegations or teams representing their cities. CAIR-CT delegation was led by Dr. Jones (National Board Member), Sr. Matiniah (CAIR-CT Board member), Mongi Dhaouadi (Executive Director of CAIR-CT), and included 5 young Muslims representing different communities around the state (New Britain, Cheshire, New Haven, and New London.)

During lunch, CAIR Chapter Representatives led activists through a working lunch with a town hall format for a lively exchange of ideas and information. The most discussed topics were how CAIR can expand its work to other communities and how to combat Islamophobia. The discussions were very upbeat and the suggestions and comments were very constructive. The interactions continued throughout the day between CAIR reps and the attendees.

There was an atmosphere of high spirits in the packed banquet hall, and the speeches and presentations of awards were truly inspiring. The audience was addressed by the 9-11 First Responders that appeared in CAIR’s PSAs and Sharif El Gamal, developer of Park 51, passionately talked about the issues of the day. The CAIR New York team was honored with an award, as were local activists. Dr. Robert Pape’s ground breaking book “Cutting the Fuse” was distributed to guests who made contributions during the fundraising segments of the program.

There were so many highlights during the banquet:

- You could have heard a pin drop at the end of the evening when keynote speaker Tariq Ramadan shared his insights about how to define one's faith (ie; Islam) and defend ones rights.
- Comedian Mo Amer brought the house down with his jokes about everything from immigration woes to Egyptian soccer.
- The legendary Helen Thomas received achievement award to a standing ovation from the crowd.
- CAIR unveiled a new video highlighting its and the great work of many chapters during the year and across the country.

Unlike a typical fundraising dinner, where people start to leave the hall during fundraising or go home early, the banquet hall stayed crowded until the very end. At the conclusion of the banquet, large numbers of people stayed in the hall for an hour to continue conversations that were started earlier or start new ones, visit with the speakers and take pictures, or go to the book signing tables.

Congratulation to the National office for well organized and well run conference and Annual Banquet.



Anyssa Dhaouadi (CAIR-CT Youth) and Helen Thomas in the VIP meet and greet before the banquet.