

## Big plans for the Muslim community in Bells Corners

**JULIE FORTIER**  
NTW Staff

Anver Malam gets a smile on his face as we look over the plans for the new mosque and community centre up on the wall at the Jami Omar Mosque just across from D. Aubrey Moodie Intermediate School in Bells Corners.

He points out the 185 parking spots, the entrance on Richmond Road, the prayer room big enough for 750 people and where the gym will go. He points out the current building we are standing in will be kept as a living quarters for the Imam.

It has been years of meeting City requirements and fighting the Ontario Municipal Board against neighbours worried about traffic, now it is just a few million dollars away from being a reality.

"We met all the legal requirements. Whatever they laid in front of us, we met it," explained Malam, founding Ameer (or president) who has been at the mosque since it opened in Bells Corners in 1993. Previous to that, Jami Omar had operated out of rental facilities.

The City of Ottawa approved the plans for the expansion in mid-December.

Now the plans must be approved by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Malam hopes to break ground this spring.

His hopes are that the project will be completed in two years at a cost of \$5 million, all of it coming from the community.

Five million dollars might seem like a lot to ask from the community of mostly newcomers and young families, but Malam said that his worshippers are very generous people.

"When the earthquake hit Pakistan a few months ago, we received \$40,000 in donations from just the people here. Just like that, right away. But we never talk about stuff like that because we are typical Canadians. We don't like to show off that kind of thing. We just do it, we don't talk about it."

He said that he is looking for 2,500 families to pledge \$100 per month for two years to cover costs and hopefully have some relief from the City in permits and other costs as they

will be providing numerous services for the community.

They already have \$600,000 towards the project.

The Muslim community is growing by leaps and bounds in the Ottawa area. In the 1920s about twenty-five Muslims were living in Ottawa.

Today there are approximately 60,000 (about 10 per cent of all Muslims living in Canada) in the Ottawa area.

The dramatic increase in population in recent years is mostly from Somalian refugees fleeing civil war in their home country.

A conservative Statistics Canada estimate says that by 2017 the Muslim population in Ottawa is projected to stand at 7.9 per cent.

The problem with this influx is that there are very few places for Muslims to go to pray and socialize.

This proposed mosque and community centre would be the only one of its kind in Ottawa. Similar ones exist in Windsor and Toronto already.

*Mosque, see page 3*



MIKE CARROCCETTO PHOTO

### Guinness Half Pints

**Matthew Daly, 9, of the Nepean Raiders Minor Atom B team (Black) and his teammates shot 13,678 pucks into a net during a 24-hour shootout marathon at Puck Masters last weekend. The Hockey Day in Canada event was an attempt to get into the Guinness World Book of Records. See page 15 for story.**

# Mosque will build bridges within the community of Bells Corners

## Mosque, from one

“We are already lagging behind, especially when it comes to the youth. When these kids have no where to go they hang out at the malls and get into trouble. We want to have a place for them to play and then pray. We want to give them some positive role models and uplift them both physically

and spiritually,” Malam said.

That is why the facility will include a gym to play in, classrooms for Sunday school, a banquet hall for special events and weddings and a library as well as a prayer room.

Malam said that it is about building bridges with the rest of the community, not shutting them out. He

points to the relationship his Mosque has built with the Bells Corners United Church down the road.

The two often let parking spill over onto each other’s lots and while the original Jami Omar was being built, the church allowed worshippers to use their basement for daily prayers so they wouldn’t have to pray in the rain.

“I was honestly very touched that they let us pray in their basement. They have been very helpful to us,” he said.

Ellen Boynton, an administrator for the Bells Corners United Church was the one in the office when people from Jami Omar came by to get out of the rain.

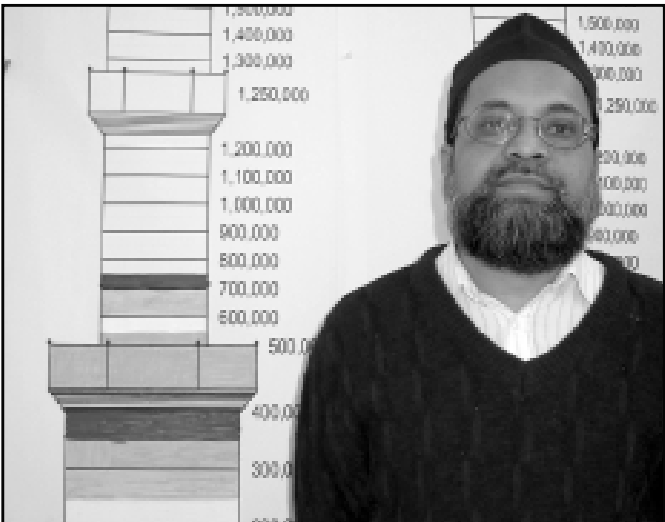
“I saw all their shoes and slippers by the door. It was an absolute pleasure to help them out.”

She said that although the plans for the facility look big and some neighbours might be worried about the size, it is obviously needed.

“My goodness what an ambitious plan. I know that there are some people in the community who aren’t too happy about it, but they have to realize our world is getting smaller,” she said.

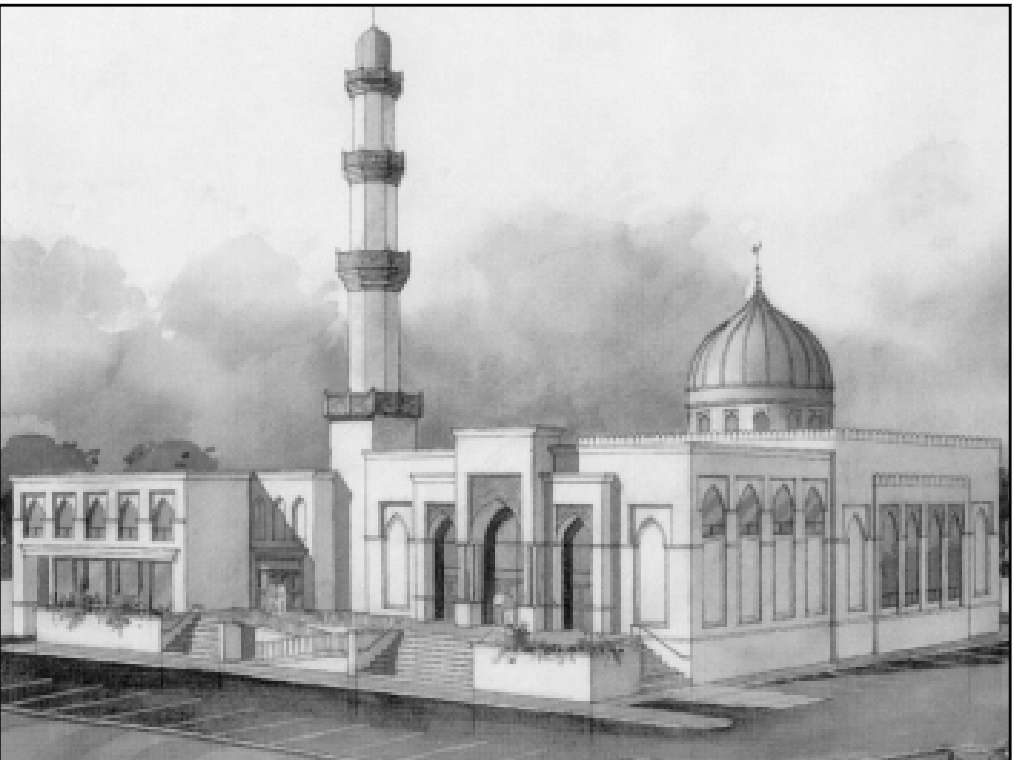
“Our gym is always in high demand and I know that they too are under a lot of pressure for use of their facility. This project will be very good for the area.”

“My message to all of those concerned about this is ‘you will be happy to have us as neighbours. You will not be disappointed,” Malam said.



JULIE FORTIER PHOTO

Malam stands in front of the tally of funds raised toward the construction of the new mosque.



A drawing of the proposed mosque as it was approved by the City.

**NEPEAN OPTOMETRIC CLINIC**

*Complete Eye Care*

- ✓ Eye Exams
- ✓ Eyeglasses
- ✓ Contact lenses
- ✓ Prescriptions filled
- ✓ Evening appointments
- ✓ New Patients welcome
- ✓ Free Parking

**Dr. Joyce Barbour**  
**Dr. Patrick D. G. Hamilton**  
**Dr. Denise E. Roy**

39 Robertson Road  
Bell Mews Plaza

**820-8272**

# EDITORIAL > COMMENT

## EDITORIAL

### *Winds of change*

Some Bells Corners residents have expressed concerns about plans for the Jami Omar Mosque to increase the tiny centre to a sprawling facility with room for 750 to pray and 185 to park their cars. It will occupy a portion of unused land between Richmond Road and Moodie Drive and the new entrance will face Seyton Drive.

The members of Jami Omar have drawn and re-drawn their plans until the City couldn't find anything else wrong with them. They accommodated traffic flow and actually exceed the number of parking spaces required by law.

So what's all the fuss about? Why did a small number of res-

idents feel the need to take their concerns all the way to the Ontario Municipal Board even after these provisions?

The bottom line is that the Ottawa Muslim community needs a centre like this, the numbers prove that. And so do the news headlines

As leader Anver Malam said, when these kids have no positive influences to feel a connection with, they can sometimes end up with very negative influences. Nepean residents don't have to look very far to see this happening.

Residents should be glad that they are going to be getting these neighbours. After all, they could have had a Wal-Mart or a Farmboy move into the area.



### *A sign of support*

**Ottawa West-Nepean MPP and Minister of Health Promotion Jim Watson (who is also Ontario's Sports and Recreation Minister) brought an Olympic flag to Agincourt Public School on Monday, January 9 to have grade 5 students sign their best wishes. The flag was also signed by the Cubs from St. Rita's school in Nepean and will be on display at the athlete's village in Torino, Italy for the entire games.**