

Welcoming Week kicks off with a (soccer) ball in Detroit

September 17, 2015

By Ali Harb



DETROIT — To celebrate National Welcoming Week, which celebrates diversity and immigrants' contributions, The Arab American News fielded a futsal (mini-soccer) team that lost 7-2 in its opening match at Detroit's second Welcoming Games.

But the loss did not affect the fun. The universal spirit of soccer manifested itself at Clark Park on Sunday in the diversity of the teams that participated in the tournament. Teenage and middle-aged players, girls and boys, pros and newbies and people of different ethnic backgrounds interacted on and off the field.

Detroit showed one of its many welcoming aspects during the games.

Who won the tournament? Google It. Don't actually look it up on Google. The team's name is "Google It."

Raquel Garcia Andersen, director of partnerships and community outreach at Global Detroit, which organized the event, said the event was successful and achieved its goal

of creating an enjoyable setting where Michiganians could interact.

More than 130 people attended the tournament throughout the day, according to Andersen. Last year, 70 showed up at the event. Global Detroit wants to capitalize on that growth and make the friendly championship even more popular next year.

Andersen said Global Detroit, a community nonprofit, aims to help immigrants integrate in society and assists new Detroiters with civic engagement, municipal issues, language access and makes them aware of economic and social opportunities.

"Everybody had a really great time," Andersen said. Despite the 7-2 loss, The Arab American News can second that statement.

Andersen said sports create a "ripe environment" for breaking down the barriers between people.

She said people are reluctant to start a conversation in formal settings. "But physical activity take you out of your comfort zone. Everybody becomes chatty and starts laughing when you are doing something less serious."

She said futsal is a unique combination of something outdoor, fun and friendly.

Andersen added that the tournament had an "international flare."

"There is never a shortage of events like that in Detroit," Andersen said. "We want to add to it. We are not the only ones who see the potential of fun events in the city."

Michigan observed Welcoming week with a series of events, including a naturalization oath ceremony organized by OneMacomb.

Gov. Snyder proclaimed September 12-20 as Michigan's Welcoming Week.

"Michigan is a state with a rich heritage of immigrants and their families contributing to make our state special," Snyder said. "It's important for us to continue working to welcome people who come to our state, leveraging their full potential."