

CITY OF JERSEY CITY

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Jersey City to Raise the Moroccan Flag In Celebration of the Growing Moroccan Culture in the City

JERSEY CITY – Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy, members of the Municipal Council, and the Department of Health and Human Services/Division of Cultural Affairs will raise the flag of Morocco at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, March 26, 2010, City Hall, 280 Grove Street.

The Mayor will raise the **Moroccan flag** in honor of the community's contributions to the City and raise awareness about the Moroccan culture. Many of the quarter-million people who reside in Jersey City are of Arab descent, including a community of Moroccan-born citizens.

“Jersey City celebrates the growing diversity of our great city by continuing to recognize the contributions of those who live here,” said **Mayor Healy**. “In promoting the intellectual, cultural, political and economic well being of the Moroccan community, we can all take great pride in our city's progress and commend them for the value in which they share.”

As part of the celebration, a new organization will be introduced, **Young Morocco**, spearheaded by soccer Coach Alex Lalaoui and his wife Melinda Vickerman-Lalaoui. The organization was created to celebrate, support and enlighten Moroccan families living in the United States. **Young Morocco** is a destination where the achievements of our children can be recognized and a trusted resource for answers when a member of our community is in need. A positive place where fresh, new ideas are exchanged, inspiring stories are shared, and proactive solutions are offered to the unique challenges that some may face.

Young Morocco is another means for Moroccans to connect with others and carry on their culture and their tradition for future generations by preserving Moroccan culture, language and rituals. Both Mr. and Mrs. Lalaoui believe that **Young Morocco** will help celebrate everything that is great about the country we love; the cuisine, music, artistry, religion, culture, traditions and more.

“We come from a country rich in ideas and know-how,” said **Mr. and Mrs. Lalaoui**. “We made it to America because we're smart and not afraid to work hard. Let's take the best of what we learned from Morocco and combine it with our experiences and education from America and create something great for our children, and their children to come. No excuses. No egos. Just positive plans and real results that you'll be proud to read about in the coming months.”

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Mayor Healy will also recognize two Jersey City students of Moroccan heritage, **Mohamed Shaban** of Frank Conwell MS #4, grade 8, and **Yasmine Raouf** of Primary Prep, grade 6, for their outstanding academic achievements.

This event has been coordinated in part by nationally licensed soccer coach **Alex Lalaoui** of the **Soccer Learning Center** who has worked tirelessly on charitable initiatives that support the community, particularly in areas of health and recreation. **Alex Lalaoui** also assisted the mission of Jack Burns, whose son is in an Army Unit in Iraq, in collecting close to 300 soccer balls for needy children living near his son's unit. Lalaoui rallied his players, their families, community agencies and sports teams like the New Jersey Ironmen to assist the cause.

Guests will enjoy delicious Moroccan tea compliments of the Marrakesh Restaurant in Parsippany while listening to traditional songs and music. This event is free and open to the public.

For further information regarding the Flag Raising, please contact the Division of Cultural Affairs at 201-547-6921.

All media inquiries should be directed to Jennifer Morrill, Press Secretary to Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy at 201-547-4836 or 201-376-0699.///

YOUNG MOROCCO

Meet Alex Lalaoui & Melinda Vickerman-Lalaoui

ALEX LALAOU

Born in Maarif, in Casablanca, Morocco, Abdelali "Alex" Lalaoui is better known as "Coach Alex" to his students at The Soccer Learning Center, the largest, private indoor soccer academy in Hudson County, New Jersey.

Alex possesses several high-level coaching credentials on a state and national level, including the United States Soccer Federation's B license. Alex will be a USSF A license candidate in the summer of 2010.

He currently instructs more than 200 youth students and over 100 adult students at the academy he started with his wife, Melinda, eight years ago. He has established an adult soccer league, an adult soccer skill-building boot camp, a special competitive group comprised of law enforcement officers and first responders who play for charitable causes, and has managed the Royal Air Maroc Atlas Cup Soccer Tournament for the past three years. Alex is an active community member and has organized charitable initiatives that have raised tens of thousands of dollars for several worthwhile causes over the years. In 2009 alone, he raised \$25,000 for area families in need.

The Mayor of Jersey City, Jerramiah Healy, recognized Alex in 2009 at a special ceremony and awarded him an Official Proclamation, highlighting his outstanding contributions to the city.

Alex is the father of two, Reyhan, age 9, and Moulay Sharif, age 4. He began Young Morocco in 2010 with the hope that all Moroccan-American children and their families will continue to support their heritage and great culture.

MELINDA VICKERMAN-LALAOU

New York native Melinda Vickerman-Lalaoui has a professional background that includes almost two decades as an award-winning marketing professional, with the last ten years spent as a freelance copywriter. She has worked as a senior level writer for top corporations including AT&T, American Express, MasterCard, Visa, Columbia House Records, and The Vitamin Shoppe. She is a past contributing editor for business-to business publications such as *Customer Service Now* and has ghost written for noted physicians and even famous Hollywood starlets.

With a keen interest in health and medicine, Melinda has contributed to efforts to help educate the public about nutrition, weight management, holistic healing, cancer, epilepsy, and patient advocacy. Melinda also has experience in producing high-end development and marketing materials for clients like The Jacob Burns Film Center in Westchester and St. Luke's Hospital in New York.

With families in mind, Melinda, a mother of two young children, currently authors a parenting column, *The Jersey Mom*, for *The Jersey Journal*, a New Jersey daily newspaper. She also partners with her husband of eleven years, Alex Lalaoui, in running the day-to-day operations of The Soccer Learning Center, the largest private indoor soccer academy in Hudson County, New Jersey.

Melinda made her first trip to Morocco shortly after meeting Alex in 1997 and has enthusiastically returned to the country several times since.

Through her work with Young Morocco, Melinda hopes to be able to organize high impact projects that will serve to help needy women and children in underserved areas of Morocco.