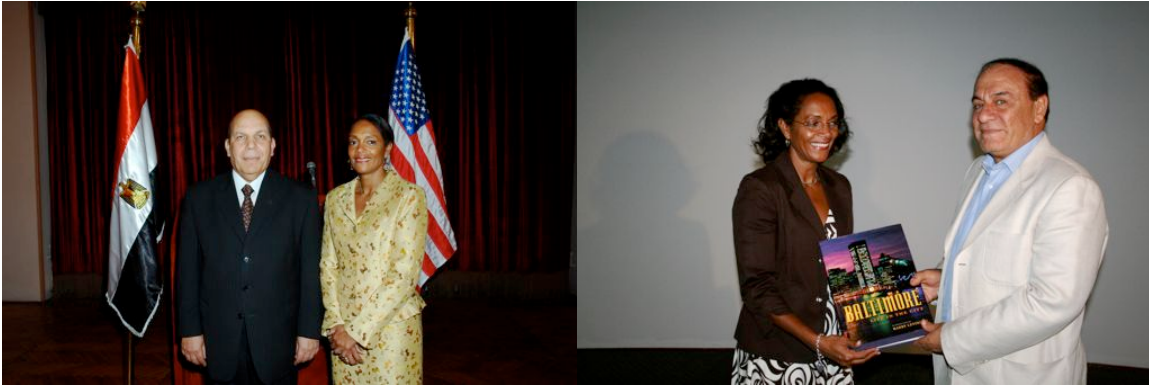


2008 Baltimore Annual Trip to Egypt

By Shelly Lieberman

The annual trip to Egypt sponsored by the Baltimore/Alexandria/Luxor Sister City Committee (BLASCC) was truly a multifaceted venture. The trip provided the BLASCC to opportunity to combine a health mission, a cultural mission, and a historical first mayoral visit and accommodate a large group of distinguished travelers as well.



Mayor Sheila Dixon & Alexandria Governor Adel Labib

Mayor Sheila Dixon & Luxor Governor Samir Farag

The BLASCC members who joined the trip focused their attention on two important health missions in Egypt. The Mayor of Baltimore accompanied by distinguished members of her staff attended meetings at the Alexandria Faculty of Medicine, the Mubarak Women's Center, the Luxor International Hospital and the Johns Hopkins affiliated Center for Communication Studies. Additionally the Mayor attended meetings with USAID, the Ministry of Health and the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt.

BLASCC members also visited two run-down neighborhoods, Abis-1 & Khorshid, near Alexandria with the intent of providing assistance to both communities for rebuilding. BLASCC members will be working with the American Center in Alexandria, the Takamol Integrated Reproductive Health Services Project, the Governor of Alexandria, and the USAID to establish health and social services clinics immediately. Future initiatives to be addressed are support for public education, providing employment opportunities, and economic development. BLASCC members also met with representatives of Habitat for Humanity to obtain their sponsorship for these two neighborhoods.

The cultural mission centered on the world famous Library in Alexandria. The staff of the Library graciously put together a four-hour cultural program for the group that included a tour of the Library, a wonderful lunch, and a number of interesting presentations. Special presentations were made by two Egyptian Ambassadors that the group found to be fascinating. The topics discussed focused on peace in the Middle East and Egypt's relationship with Israel. The Mayor of Baltimore also made a presentation that touched on Baltimore's current efforts to become a cleaner and greener city. The high point of the Mayor's presentation was the generous donation of books to the Library on behalf of the tour group.



Abdelwahab Elabd, Ambassador Islambouly & Mayor Dixon

The Baltimore Tour Group with the book donation

While there, members of the BLASCC had the opportunity to launch the Egyptian Corner website that acts a portal for accurate information regarding political, economic, cultural, educational, and social life in Egypt. The BLASCC also had the pleasure of announcing the commencement of the Baltimore Friends of the Suzanne Mubarak Library of Luxor established for mutual cooperation and exchange of resources.



Baltimore group, Mayor Dixon & Governor Farag

Mayor Dixon & Governor Farag at Women's Center of Luxor

at the Suzanne Mubarak Library of Luxor

The trip marked two important milestones for the BLASCC. This trip comprised the largest contingent of travelers of any previous Egypt trips sponsored by the BLASCC. Several of which were first time visitors to Egypt. One of the most noteworthy travelers was the Mayor of Baltimore. This trip marked the first mayoral visit to Egypt in 25 years. The Mayor was able to see first hand the diversity of the cultural and diplomatic programs that the BLASCC supports in Egypt. Upon reflection, the Mayor and her delegation stated that the trip was a tremendous experience, and are looking forward to supporting the many wonderful partnerships for years to come.



The Baltimore tour group at Giza Pyramids

All travelers on this trip marveled at the beauty and splendor of Egypt. Several comments the BLASCC received about the trip include:

- The people of Egypt were wonderful
- The tours were awesome
- Our guides were very knowledgeable and informative
- The trip was filled with information, memorable sights and activities
- An incredible bargain for all we did
- It was fun to travel with such an interesting and diverse group of people

Our group of travelers has such a good time that at their request, the BLASCC has scheduled a reunion event at the Walters Art Museum. The event will include an Egyptian buffet, music and dancing, and Egyptian magic.