

MOSAIC

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INTERFAITH MINISTRIES FOR GREATER HOUSTON

FALL 2021

IM
INTERFAITH
MINISTRIES
FOR GREATER HOUSTON

HOLIDAY CHEER FOR HOMEBOUND SENIORS



For too many homebound seniors, Thanksgiving and Christmas are not the joyous holiday we know it to be, but rather a time of loneliness and hunger. No senior should ever be hungry, but especially not during the holidays.



For over 25 years, volunteers have come together through Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston's Meals on Wheels program to ensure that homebound seniors in our community aren't hungry and lonely on Thanksgiving Day. In years past, each Thanksgiving approximately 2,000 community volunteers came together to bring a traditional Thanksgiving meal with all the trimmings to homebound seniors across the Greater Houston area. Two meals are given, so that if the senior does have a visitor that day, they can share a traditional meal with their guest.

This year again, unfortunately, due to COVID-19 and concern for our most vulnerable homebound senior clients, we were not able to host a large-scale volunteer event. Instead, deliveries of the Thanksgiving meal are made by our dedicated staff and drivers the week of Thanksgiving and in December, each senior will receive a holiday gift bag. You can support our efforts that are still greatly needed across our five-county service area, especially now, during the holiday season. Thanks to **Kroger**, for their generous Presenting Sponsorship of our Thanksgiving Project.



To participate in our holiday giving, please visit www.imgh.org and click on "Donate".



SAVE THE DATE FOR WAGS & WHISKERS!

We are returning to the Lone Star Flight Museum on **Saturday, February 26** for our annual Wags & Whiskers event benefiting Animeals! Our honoree is **Ann Kaesermann**, a long-time volunteer and supporter. Ann recently retired as VP and Controller at Hilcorp Energy Co. and serves on the board of Houston PetSet. Mark your calendars for this fun brunch that includes the ever-popular pet fashion show.

For more information, contact **Kyra Thomas** at kthomas@imgh.org or call **713.533.4925**.



Martin B. Cominsky

FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

On October 27, over 530 of IM’s closest friends gathered at the Hilton Americas- Houston in their masked and vaxxed best for a celebration that was a long time coming. We started to plan the **Tapestry Gala** honoring **Paula Sutton, Rev. Dr. Jim Bankston**, and **Sysco** two years ago. In the spring of 2020, just a few months from the planned event, it became clear that COVID-19 posed a serious threat, and we took the event virtual. One of the first virtual events in the pandemic era, our “Dine In with IM” event raised significant funds for our work. It was visually stunning and uplifting, yet even our best efforts in the virtual setting cannot equate with the joy of seeing a friend’s smiling face in person or giving them a hug. Thank you to **Shell** for being the presenting sponsor.

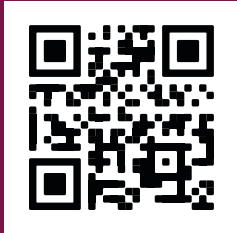
This fall’s Gala was the first in-person event IM has hosted since the start of the pandemic. And it was wonderful! The joy of coming together after months apart was palpable. I could feel the energy in the room as longtime friends greeted each other and strangers soon became friends.

“Coming together” is at the heart of IM’s work. We are a connector in so many ways- connecting the vulnerable with food and safety, connecting diverse communities in dialogue, and connecting volunteers with community needs.

As we enter the holiday season, hopefully a season in which families and friends can gather safely, “coming together” takes on even more meaning. A child’s smile, the wisdom from an elder, or catching up with old friends cannot be taken for granted after months of isolation. At this special time of year, I wish you the joy that only connection can bring.

Martin B. Cominsky
President & CEO

Watch the 2021
Tapestry Gala



TAPESTRY GALA RAISES OVER \$600,000



2021
Tapestry Gala

More than 530 community leaders and luminaries gathered in their masked and vaxxed best to celebrate the work of IM at our 2021 Tapestry Gala on the evening of Wednesday, October 27 at the Hilton Americas-Houston. The ballroom glittered in shades of royal blue and gold, with an abundance of white lilies and other blooms.

This year’s event honored three long-time Interfaith Ministries supporters: Tapestry Award honoree **Paula S. Sutton**, Spirit of Respect honoree **Rev. Dr. Jim Bankston**, and Corporate Champion honoree **Sysco**. The event was chaired by **Philamena** and **Arthur Baird, Dr. Kathy Flanagan, Dr.**

Sushma and **Devinder Mahajan**, and **Anuradha** and **Dr. Kohur Subramanian**. The presenting sponsor was **Shell**. **Frank Billingsley** served as emcee and a musical tribute to Frank Sinatra was provided by the Richard Brown Orchestra, with a special performance of “The Prayer” by local tenors Kenneth Gayle, Michael Gott and Wayne Ashley.



Lead sponsors included: Brigitte and Bashar Kalai, Susan and Dan Boggio, Barbara Mackey and Jim Ferrendelli M.D., Karyn and Charles Crisp, EOG Resources, CenterPoint Energy, Susanne and Randall Evans, Patti and Richard Everett, Frost Bank, Karen and Jay Harberg, H-E-B, Dr. Sippi and Ajay Khurana, the Marek Family, Dr. Marilyn Stovall, Nihala and Shaukat Zakaria, Duane Failing and Fran Zandstra, and TRIO Community Meals.



REFUGEE SERVICES

AS AN INTERPRETER FOR THE U.S. MILITARY, HE SAVED AMERICAN LIVES

On any given day, Refugee Services Program Manager Ahmed Mushref is hard at work in IM's Midtown headquarters. He considers himself a Texan now, but embarked on a very long journey to get to the Lone Star State years ago.

Ahmed grew up in Iraq and, as a young man, he became an interpreter for the U.S. Army. This post almost cost him his life. Ahmed becomes emotional as he recounts a memory that is seared into his mind:

“One night, I was traveling with two dozen American soldiers when we came across an Iraqi military base. I tried to notify the Iraqis of our presence, but as we approached, I heard dogs barking and soldiers loading their guns. I realized in horror that my message hadn't been communicated – the Iraqis thought they were under attack. As my own team began loading their own weapons, I knew I had seconds to react.

Without thinking, I ran out from cover. “Stop!” I yelled in Arabic. “I’m an interpreter! This is a U.S. military unit!” Then I asked my team to hold their fire. “Please,” I pleaded, “give the Iraqis a chance.” Flood lights blinded me and my heart thumped as I approached the men. Once I could talk to my fellow countrymen face to face, they stood down and we continued our mission.

I still cringe to think of the lives we almost lost that night – including my own.”

After the U.S. left Iraq, Ahmed's family and he faced significant danger. Their house was attacked by a grenade while they were in hiding, and two months before they left the country, Ahmed's uncle was assassinated. The family thought he was a firefighter with no connections to the U.S. military, but later discovered he worked in intelligence. Soon after they fled, ISIS invaded their region.

Ahmed and his family arrived in Houston in 2010 and almost as soon as he received my work permit, this hardworking man became a dishwasher at Salata. When a position opened at IM, he jumped at the opportunity to give

back by becoming a case manager. In 2014, his wife and he also started their own interpretation business. Their company provides translation services in ten different languages and employs three people. The Mushref daughters attend a Houston public school.

“Back in Iraq, owning a car, let alone a house, felt like an impossible dream. Today we own a home and two cars. But it's all part of the American refugee experience,” Ahmed shares gratefully. His case is not unusual. Refugees are more likely to start a business than U.S. born citizens or other immigrants, and nearly 60 percent of are homeowners, according to *New American Economy*. They become well established over time, earning a relatively high median income.

Today, Ahmed and his family are safe in Houston, where he works to resettle refugees from around the globe. Most recently, he has been helping the Afghans who fled their country after it fell to the Taliban. Many were translators for the U.S. military who averted disasters like the one that nearly befell Ahmed's unit. They not only risked their lives but helped save thousands of American lives as well. That is why our community has responded so generously as we welcome these Afghan allies. In only a few weeks, IM raised over \$1 million to help Afghan refugees. Many of these donations came from people who had never given to Refugee Services before.

Ahmed is modest about his work with U.S. troops in his homeland.

“After that near deadly mission in Iraq, an American officer wrote me a letter, thanking me for the role I played in bringing two dozen American soldiers home safely. I wouldn't hesitate to do it again.”



Ahmed Mushref

1,000 NEIGHBORS AND A NEW COLLABORATION



Atiqullah, a member of Afghan Special Forces, along with his wife and children, now live in Houston after being resettled by IM

As U.S. troops withdrew from Afghanistan, desperate Afghans – many of whom had been working with our military – fled the country in fear for their lives. Very quickly, our Refugee Services program had to prepare to welcome these families. They started to arrive in September and we expect to resettle up to 1,000 Afghan refugees through the spring.

In response to this critical and unexpected need, we launched the 1,000 *Neighbors* campaign to raise much-needed funds for the significant costs of serving these newcomers. In only six weeks, we raised approximately \$1 million for the cause! “It was amazing to see the generosity of Houstonians from every walk of life, every political

background, every religion embrace these families,” remarked Ali Al Sudani, IM’s Chief Programs Officer. We are especially grateful to lead donors **The Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Foundation** and **The Frees Charitable Fund**.

IM is not the only local agency that is working with Afghan refugees. Our partners in this effort are **Catholic Charities, the YMCA, and The Alliance**. Martin Cominsky, our President and CEO, was approached by Houston Endowment to facilitate a collaboration among all four agencies that they and other funders could cumulatively fund. **Houston Endowment** and **The Kinder Foundation** made two, equal lead gifts of \$1.5 million each. Since the inception of what is called the **Houston Afghan Resettlement Fund**, over \$4 million has been donated to the combined efforts of our city’s resettlement agencies.

We are proud to carry on our work of “welcoming the stranger” in this critical time.



ISLAMIC RELIEF USA STEPS UP TO FEED FAMILIES

Thanks to a grant from **Islamic Relief USA**, newly arrived Afghan refugees will receive grocery gift cards to help them stock their pantries. These families arrive with nothing and quickly have to become self-sufficient in a new city. The gift cards ensure they will have access to nutritious food. IM volunteers even help the families shop the first time, as they learn to navigate Houston and American grocery stores.



IM VOLUNTEERS GIFT CARS TO AFGHAN REFUGEE FAMILIES

In early September, IM hosted an event on the **Brigitte & Bashar Kalai Plaza of Respect** for Super Volunteer, **Tehmina Masud**, and her friends – **Shehed Khudairi, Ustazah Farhat Ahmed Shamsi, Tara Turk-Zafran and Dr. Sherif Zaafran, and Sima Ladjevardian** – who raised community donations to purchase cars for six newly arriving Afghan refugee families. The cars were presented to each family after brief remarks were given by Tehmina and friends. All funds were raised by Tehmina, and no IM funds were used to purchase the cars.

During Tehmina’s comments she stressed the importance of how one person can start a movement to help others and how much the movement can spread. Major donors offered their remarks about the strong community support to help Afghans resettle in Houston, a welcoming and diverse city, where people can rebuild their lives.

FUNDING OUR MISSION



Rochelle and Alan Jacobson

PHILANTHROPY IS IN THE FAMILY

Rochelle Jacobson, formerly an owner of steel pipe businesses, and her husband, family psychotherapist Alan Jacobson, are now enjoying retirement and paying it forward. Though the couple loves to travel, their hearts are in Houston where they support a number of worthy causes. Rochelle serves on IM's Advisory Board, in addition to other volunteer commitments.

Long-time friends of Interfaith Ministries' President and CEO Martin B. Cominsky, the Jacobsons followed his path from the Anti-Defamation League to IM with great interest. They had supported

IM's Meals on Wheels program before Martin's tenure and, under his leadership, became even more committed to helping seniors in need through **The Rochelle, Alan, Julie and Scott Jacobson Family Fund**. "Our high respect for Martin's capabilities turned us more toward Interfaith Ministries," Rochelle explained.

Not only are the Jacobsons loyal supporters of Meals on Wheels, but they have also taken an interest in other IM programs including Animeals and Refugee Services. The influx of Afghan refugees this fall caused them to pivot their giving this year to food for the newly arrived families. Rochelle explains their motivation: "Compassion for others who are less fortunate than us. And fulfilling the needs of individuals who can't do so themselves."

In addition to IM, this generous couple supports a number of other causes in Houston – ranging from food insecurity to healthcare, women's issues, nature and more. Their goal is to "address human suffering by helping with basic needs and to improve the lives of others." Rochelle elaborates, "We also focus on the environment and nature, civil rights and equal justice for all." The couple puts their time, talent and treasure where their interests lie and, in so doing, make our community a better place.

It can be difficult for the philanthropically minded to choose which charities to support. There are many worthy causes in Houston. Rochelle and Alan take an analytical approach, ensuring that their donations are used wisely and well. As Rochelle explains: "One needs to evaluate the potential of goal achievement through their donor dollars. Evaluation of the quality of the organization through nonprofit rating agencies so one can be assured of the nonprofit being a good shepherd of the donation and allocating the money properly is paramount."

IM is proud to have a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator and a Platinum rating from Guide Star. We also meet all of the Better Business Bureau's Standards for Charitable Accountability.

The Jacobsons have passed on their philanthropic nature to their two grown children and two grandchildren, who also reside in Houston. This generous couple, who have been married for nearly 47 years, are a shining example of thoughtful and impactful charitable giving.

YOUR GIVING HAS A GREATER IMPACT IN 2021

As you plan your year-end giving for 2021, you may want to consider making a gift of appreciated stocks, bonds, or mutual fund shares instead of cash. Why? Because you may receive greater tax benefits when you donate appreciated securities.

This is also the last year that the CARES Act affords special, higher tax deductibility for charitable donations. Did you know that, this year, you can deduct up to 100% of your adjusted gross income (formerly 60%) in contributions? Even if you do not itemize, the CARES Act allows you to deduct cash contributions of up to \$300 as an individual or up to \$600 as a married couple filing jointly. This is an additional, "above the line" deduction.

Please take a moment to consider your tax-saving, mission-accomplishing, year-end gift.

For more info, contact **Maria Magee** at **713-533-4924** or **mmagee@imgh.org**.

THANK YOU TO OUR LEAD DONORS!

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MEALS ON WHEELS & ANIMEALS

A NEW BEST FRIEND



Meals on Wheels senior Gloria Tyler recently enrolled in the program in October 2021. She is kind, compassionate, funny, and still enjoys life despite her circumstances. She was mentioning to her IM Case Manager that she felt she could really benefit from having a small dog to keep her company. She often feels isolated and lonely at home. The Case Manager quickly reached out to our Animeals team to see if they had any connections to organizations that might be able to help Gloria adopt a dog. Our friends at the **Houston Humane Society** were willing to help, and thanks to that great relationship, Gloria and her new furry companion, a 5-year-old Yorkie/ Shih Tzu mix named Ace, were united on November 14. The Houston Humane Society generously waived the adoption fees, made sure that Ace was heartworm- negative and had treatment for an eye issue, and even delivered Ace directly to Gloria. It has been wonderful to see Gloria and Ace become best friends! The Animeals program helps seniors like Gloria keep their beloved animal companions and saves animals like Ace from an uncertain fate.



HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY, NOVELLA!



Interfaith Ministries' Meals on Wheels recently celebrated a milestone birthday with our client, Novella, who is a mother, grandmother and great grandmother! Novella has been a Meals on Wheels client since 2019. She still enjoys good health and she likes all types of cake, but she is not a big fan of chocolate cake.

Birthday greeters included the Interfaith Ministries staff who provided a birthday cake and friendly visit to commemorate this very special lady on her very special day!

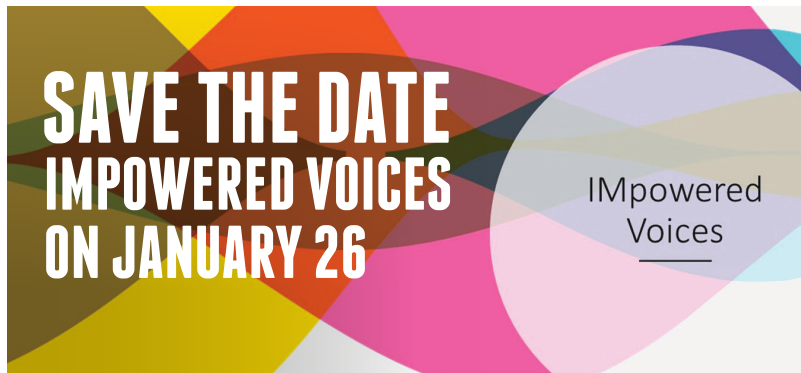
GENEROUS GIFT WILL IMPROVE MEALS ON WHEELS WAREHOUSE

Thanks to a capital gift from **The William Stamps Farish Fund**, we will be able to make improvements to the Meals on Wheels loading area. This is a small space between our W.T. and Louise J. Moran building, which houses Meals on Wheels operations, and a newly acquired adjacent building that is under renovation. The work will allow our delivery trucks easier access and protection from the weather.



WE ARE GROWING! IM's two construction projects are in progress with estimated completion in March 2022. Our new building in Midtown will expand our capacity in Meals on Wheels and volunteerism, while our new building in La Marque will allow us to grow to meet the needs of Galveston County. Special thanks to our architect, **PBK**, and its President **Dan Boggio**, for donating services to the projects!

INTERFAITH RELATIONS & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



Join us for a virtual conversation on **January 26, 2022** from **12 noon to 1:30 p.m.** with three empowering women about race, identity and culture, health care inequities, and the beauty of “welcoming the stranger.” Sponsored by IMpower, IM’s women’s initiative, “**IMpowered Voices: Everyday Women, Real Stories & Real Solutions**” will feature **Dr. Ann Barnes**, Chief Health Officer for Harris Health System, **Jaundrea Clay**, editor of the Houston Chronicle’s *HouWeAre* newsletter, and **Farrah Moussallati Sibai**, president and co-founder of Afia, a Mediterranean food company. Sponsorships and tickets are available. All proceeds support the critical work of IM.

Email **Jodi Bernstein** at jbernstein@imgh.org.



DIALOGUE WORKSHOPS WITH BRAVER ANGELS

As part of The Dialogue Project, Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships co-hosted The Dialogue Workshops in fall 2021. To help faith communities and their leaders navigate these trying times, Interfaith Ministries partnered with the national, non-partisan organization **Braver Angels**. These programs provided skills for engagement in our polarized world, including “Depolarizing Within” held on September 23, and “Families and Politics” held on November 9.



VITAL CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR COMMUNITY FALL SERIES

The Dialogue Project: Vital Conversations with Our Community started its fall 2021 series with “Welcoming the Stranger”, a timely virtual Conversation on October 7 with staff from IM and faith leaders from the Houston community to learn more about the importance of welcoming refugees into our community. Thank you to **CITGO Petroleum Corporation** for supporting this ongoing series.



Join us for a Vital Conversation on December 7 from Noon to 1pm as we discuss, **A Season to Care: Mental Health and the Holidays**.

Email Gevetta Phillips at gphillips@imgh.org for more information.

VOLUNTEER HOUSTON COORDINATED CITYWIDE VOLUNTEER SERVICE ON 9/11



TOMORROW TOGETHER

On the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, as a way to pay tribute to and remember the victims, people across the United States put aside their differences and worked together to help others in need through volunteer service. On 9/11, volunteers, families, neighbors and coworkers chose volunteer opportunities posted by local nonprofits that could be done remotely, virtually and in-person.

“This has become an annual ritual, a fitting and appropriate gift to the many who lost their lives and the countless others who were injured and the first responders who came to the aid of those in need,” explained Brooke Parkinson, director of Volunteer

Houston, a program of Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston.

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has made volunteering more challenging, though nonprofits need help more than ever. As a result, 9/11 Day was a nationwide day of volunteering. The goal of the project was to inspire one million good deeds done at home, in support of local causes, many of which relate to COVID-19 relief. This nationwide effort was led by **Points of Light**, **World Central Kitchen**, and the **Corporation for National and Community Service**. As the local Points of Light affiliate in Greater Houston, Volunteer Houston led the effort in our city.

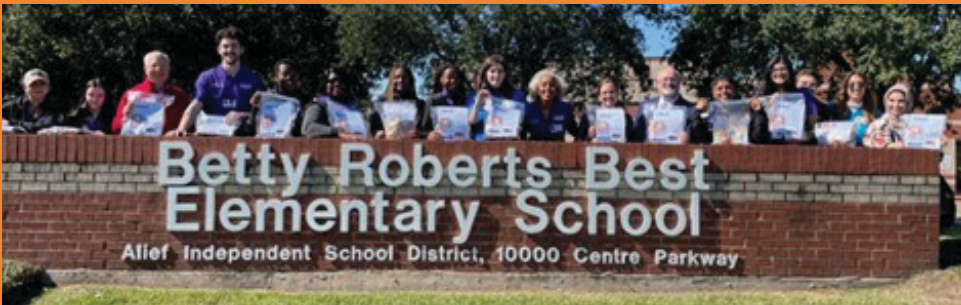
COMPANIES GIVE BACK



Osaka Gas USA and **Sabine Oil & Gas** participated in two service projects as part of their corporate charter to increase employee engagement through volunteerism. Employees assembled and donated 200 backpacks filled with school supplies to **Ronald McDonald House Charities of Greater Houston Galveston**, assembled and donated 1,200 personal hygiene kits to **The Beacon** as well as volunteered in-person. **Sabine Oil & Gas** had in-person volunteer activities that included prepping and serving lunch, working in the laundry room and assisting staff with client intake.



Through charitable giving at **UPS** and the power of UPSers’ volunteerism globally, Volunteer Houston, designed several projects to align with UPS’s passion to create better places to live, work and play for this generation and the next. UPSers create a better world through action to create resilient, just, and safe communities and these multiple projects addressed social justice and inequality. UPS’s Red River Team assembled hundreds of hygiene kits, literacy kits, books and post high school resource kits that were donated to **St. John’s Bread of Life**, **KIPP Connect Primary School**, **Etoile Academy**, **Raise Up Families** and **Higher Up Texas**. In addition, local UPSers’ participated in a virtual reading activity with **Boys and Girls Club Greater Houston**.



SERVE HOUSTON CAPSTONE

The Serve Houston Ambassadors held their capstone project distribution event at Best Elementary, on Friday, Nov. 5. The capstone project focused on combatting the community issue of food insecurity. Serve Houston Ambassadors distributed 265 Best Kids Wellness packs to 2nd and 3rd grade students at Best Elementary in the Alief area of Houston. The packets contained a variety of information guides on how to grow their own herbs

and veggies; several healthy food items; activity sheets and games on the benefits of healthy eating habits; mindfulness cards; yoga dice; and an interactive recipe booklet with links to a fun video created by the ambassadors.

Serve Houston extends a special thank you to Best Elementary students, parents and staff!



PRESIDENTS' LUNCHEON AT INTERFAITH MINISTRIES

On Sept. 20 Martin Cominsky hosted a Presidents' Luncheon at Interfaith Ministries to bring three great University leaders - Dr. Lesia Crumpton-Young (Texas Southern University), Dr. Ruth Simmons (Prairie View A&M University) and Dr. Loren Blanchard (University of Houston-Downtown) - together for dialogue and collaboration with undergraduate and graduate students in the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship Program and Interfaith Ministries' Serve Houston Ambassadors. The University presidents were able to meet some of the student participants from each of their campuses.



From left Veronica Hernandez, Serve Houston Ambassador; Martin B. Cominsky, President and CEO, IM; Dr. Loren Blanchard (UH-Downtown); Dr. Lesia Crumpton-Young (TSU); Dr. Helen Valier, UH Honors College Medicine and Society Program; Marvin Smith, Scout Executive, Sam Houston Area Council Boy Scouts of America; Ali Al Sudani, Chief Programs Officer, IM; Sydney Medina, Serve Houston Ambassador

SERVE HOUSTON – GRADUATION ON NOV. 19

Serve Houston Ambassadors continue to help our community's most vulnerable people through their service projects with Volunteer Houston, Meals on Wheels, Refugee Services, and Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships. The Volunteer Houston team encouraged nonprofits and community volunteers to participate in a day of coordinated volunteer efforts to honor the memories of the lives lost on 9/11. The Meals on Wheels team created a Pet-Vet Tracker and plotted Animeals routes, and set up Alexa devices as part of a study to document the increased independence the devices can add to the lives of our seniors. The Refugee Services team created videos in English and Spanish about our various refugee medical and cash assistance programs and helped educate refugee youth about

internet and security, and health tips. The Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships team is helping to expand our outreach in the faith communities. The Serve Houston Ambassadors graduated from the program on Nov. 19 after completing their capstone service project with Best Elementary School in Aldine ISD. City Council Member Abbie Kamin was the graduation keynote speaker and offered the ambassadors insights and best practices as they move forward in their service and professional careers. The graduation took place at the Hilton Americas-Houston.



IM

FALL 2021 MOSAIC

**INTERFAITH
MINISTRIES**
FOR GREATER HOUSTON

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Martin B. Cominsky
President & CEO
Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston



United Way of Greater Houston

HOUSTON
ENDOWMENT



This program is supported by a grant from the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance. The Fund for Veterans' Assistance provides grants to organizations serving veterans and their families. For more information, visit TVC.Texas.gov.

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LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY

Interfaith Ministries could not carry out its work without community support! We are grateful to all our donors for their generosity.

Become an Impact Society member:

www.imgh.org/donate/impact/

To find out how you can include Interfaith Ministries in your estate plans, contact Jerry Haus at jhaus@imgh.org or 713-533-4965.

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