



Tuscola Review

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Music Boosters

The Tuscola Music Boosters' annual concert, entitled Rock of Ages, will be held on Saturday, Feb. 26 at 7 p.m. "Rock of Ages" is sure to be a concert that will provide toe-tapping music memories of decades past.

As there are ever changing guidelines, for health reasons Tuscola Music Boosters has opted to not serve a dinner this year. Open seating in the balcony will be available the day of the event.

Reserved floor seating is due by Friday, Feb. 21 and can be dropped off or mailed to Tuscola High School at 500 S. Prairie, or East Prairie Middle School at 409 S. Prairie (See ad on page 10).

Spring musical

The TCHS Drama Club will present Descendants the Musical March 17, 18 and 19 at 7 p.m. and March 20 at 2 p.m. Tickets go on sale March 3.

Soccer registration

Spring Soccer registration is open till March 1. Kindergarten practices and games are at Ervin Park. Grades 1-12 travel within the local area. Contact tuscolasoccer@gmail.com or message Tuscola Soccer Club on their Facebook page.

Need swim coaches

The Tuscola Torpedoes Swim Team is looking for advance youth swimmers who would be interested in volunteering as assistant swim coaches, under the training and supervision of experienced swim coaches.

Interested volunteers can send inquires and questions to torpedoesheadcoach@gmail.com.

Library activities

StoryTime every Tuesday, 10 a.m. on Facebook

Feb. 23, Book Discussion-Fathers and Sons 6 p.m.

Every Saturday is Tech Drop-In from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Come get help with your devices.

Group seeks help for evacuees now living in Arcola, Atwood

Ilene Henderson of Decatur spent nearly two decades in the military and worked in counterintelligence in Afghanistan. She said she lived and worked alongside Afghan residents and relied on their support. She also developed relationships with many of them.

So, when the U.S. began withdrawing troops last summer, her phone started ringing. Some of her Afghan contacts were looking for help to escape the country and Taliban rule. Using the WhatsApp online tool, they were frantically looking for help.

She described one man who had borrowed an SUV from a friend and driven to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and hid out leaving his home and belongings behind. Some forces were caught off-guard, she said, because they thought they were being sent in as a defensive measure and soon found themselves in a forced surrender. Rather than turn over their weapons and ammunition, they destroyed them, which infuriated the Taliban.

The plight of many evacuees has been well documented. Henderson said the U.S. government is very good at infrastructure but lacks the resources for a major resettlement program. Much of the effort is contracted out to private companies, and they are focused on larger cities. In Illinois, there are resettlement contractors in Moline, Rockford and Chicago and a small office in Champaign, but they don't seem interested in reaching out to

smaller communities.

That gave rise to the Afghan Welcome Home Project, which her mother, Susan Montgomery, directs. Henderson is operations manager, and Inge Henderson is assistant director.

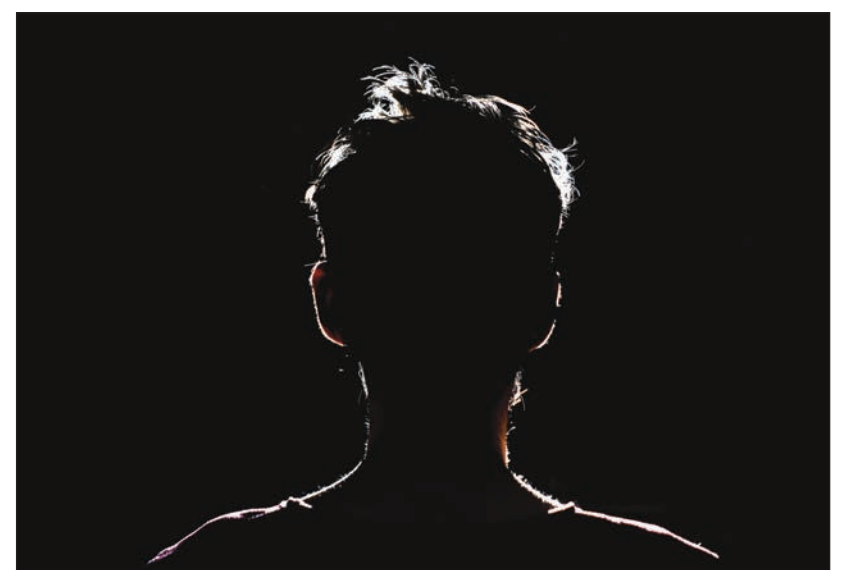
Ilene Henderson said they have no plans to become a resettlement agency but are working with agencies to relocate displaced Afghans to central Illinois. Six are now living in Arcola and five are in Atwood through the help of Welcome Home.

All six of the Arcola Afghans live in one house on Washington Street. Likewise, the Atwood five occupy one house. They will be working at MasterBrand in Arthur. Henderson said MasterBrand is trying to hire an interpreter for the men's training period.

Because of decades of unrest in Afghanistan, some of the men were not able to attend school regularly and have trouble reading and writing their own language. Most of them are married with children, but they had to leave their families behind and it will be at least five years before they can be reunited, she said, due to the red tape of immigration in both Afghanistan and the U.S. They need passports in order to relocate here, but the passport offices are controlled by the Taliban, she said.

Welcome Home has been working to provide resources for these

See EVACUEES on page 6



FOR THEIR OWN safety and the safety of their families still in Afghanistan, the evacuees asked that their images and real names not be published. Photos: Adobe stock images.

Leaving their families behind, soldiers start new lives in U.S.

The six men living together in the 400 block of West Washington Street in Arcola give no hint of their former lives or their families' predicament. On a Sunday evening visit, they were in good spirits and gracious, offering their guest an assortment of pistachio nuts, candy bars, cookies and hot tea served in a decorative, gold-trimmed Christmas cup.

Shoes are left lined up in the foyer as they lounge in flip flops, shorts and T-shirts. One is wearing a Punisher shirt with its distinctive skull emblem. One sports a full,

dark beard; another a thin mustache and bashful grin. Aside from speaking a fast-paced Pashto, one of the two most common Afghan languages, they could pass as American in this great melting pot of a country.

But just months ago, they were soldiers battling the Taliban alongside U.S. troops in Afghanistan. They were Afghan special forces, high-valued targets for the government that now controls the country. With help from the Afghan

See SOLDIERS on page 6

Dangerous situation worsening in Afghanistan

Zahid, the interpreter in Afghanistan, said the situation in his country is bleak. News is censored, so he fears that the world does not know the true story. The Taliban cannot be trusted to tell the truth, he said.

Life is particularly difficult for women, he said. The women there are not allowed to work or shop by themselves. Shops have been instructed to not sell products useful to women. Women cannot go out without wearing a burqa or without an escort. They cannot participate in any gatherings. Music has also been banned.

Radio stations are not allowed to broadcast music, and no music can be playing in the background of ads or announcements. The news cannot be read by women.

The salaries of university lecturers have been cut in half, and teachers' salaries have been capped. Doctors in public hospitals have not been paid in 7 months, he said. They do not have the equipment and medicines they need. There are private hospitals, but the "price touches the sky."

The situation is worsening, he said. The Taliban has been searching houses to find and eliminate those

who do not support the current government or who helped the U.S.

Most of the people who worked for him pre-Taliban rule are women, he said, and they have gone into hiding. "I'm not worried about myself. The only thing I'm worried about are the women who worked for me for 15-16 years. They are in danger. 'I'd be happy as hell if they are evacuated before me.'"

He said the Taliban are looking for Akarm's family. "I got a call from his cousin. They are in danger." He said there is no effort by the U.S.

government to intervene. "We need some way of solving this problem." He suggested that legislation is needed to make exceptions to current U.S. policy.

"We don't have peace of mind," Akarm said. "We think every day about our families and kids."

Henderson said there have been 75,000 evacuees processed out of Afghanistan and 30,000 to 50,000 are still in processing centers. There are still U.S. citizens and green card holders still in Afghanistan, she said. There are up to 50,000 people who still need to be evacuated, she said.