

## **From Peoria to Lebanon: Unprecedented Partnership Stages Unique Arts Benefit for Beirut Medical Centers**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

PEORIA, Ill. – "From Peoria to Lebanon," a unique multitiered benefit and an unprecedented partnership between organizations in Peoria, Ill., New York City and Beirut, deploys the healing power of the arts to provide much needed medical relief through the Lebanese American University Medical Centers for those affected in the continuing aftermath of the Beirut port explosion.

The benefit, which begins Oct. 25, features an exhibition of works by leading contemporary Lebanese artists Nov. 30 through Jan. 9 at the Peoria Riverfront Museum, a concert by renowned pianist Antoine "Tony" Karam, MD, Dec. 19 at the Scottish Rite Theatre and an online auction of the exhibited works and others, all donated to the benefit by the artists themselves.

A special reception for the artists takes place Dec. 18. Among those attending are featured emerging artist Wissam Melhem, painter Zeina Nader Selwan whose work appears on the benefit promotional material and photographer Fadia Ahmad whose acclaimed documentary film "Beirut: The Aftermath" will be screened at the museum's Giant Screen Theater this fall.

The Peoria Riverfront Museum and Scottish Rite Theatre spearheaded the project with Dr. Karam and the Lebanese community in Beirut, Honorary Chair Michele Couri, MD, and the Lebanese community in Peoria, with the support of the Itoo (Aytou) Society, and the Lebanese American University New York City which will receive and direct the funds to its Beirut campus and medical centers.

"On August 4, 2020, the entire world witnessed the devastating explosion in the port of Beirut that caused unfathomable loss of life, permanent injuries and widespread homelessness. Hospitals were damaged and overwhelmed. Those that managed to stay open continue to suffer from shortages and backlog more than a year later," said Dr. Karam. "This unprecedented collaboration seeks to raise relief funds for LAU Medical Centers and the Gilbert and Rose-Marie Chagoury School of Medicine by providing vital medical supplies and medical intervention for those in dire need who cannot afford care."

"It is an esteemed honor to be a part of 'From Peoria to Lebanon,' a medical relief effort that harnesses the healing power of the arts to make a difference in the lives of the people of Lebanon who are in most need of humanitarian help," said Dr. Couri. "This December, the Peoria Riverfront Museum in partnership with the Scottish Rite Theatre will make history by pairing the musical genius of Dr. Tony Karam with an exquisite art exhibition by the leading contemporary artists of Lebanon with one goal in mind – to offer help, hope and a future for those who, in the aftermath of the devastating Beirut Port explosion and a total economic collapse of Lebanon's currency, cannot afford even the basics of medical care."

"On behalf of the Lebanese community in Central Illinois, I ask for support and prayers as we show Lebanon and the entire world what can be achieved when love for humanity, translated through the arts, heals those most vulnerable," Couri said.

"The Itoo Society is excited and humbled to support the 'From Peoria To Lebanon' fundraising initiative to improve access to healthcare in Lebanon, as we seek to honor and preserve our Central Illinois Lebanese heritage through shared fellowship and charitable activities," said Lenny Unes, president.

For more information about the “From Peoria to Lebanon” benefit, including the art exhibition, concert, auction, benefit sponsorships and donations, visit [RiverfrontMuseum.org](http://RiverfrontMuseum.org) or contact Honorary Chair Dr. Michele Couri, email: [drmichelecouri@gmail.com](mailto:drmichelecouri@gmail.com).

#### **Lebanese American University Medical Centers**

The Lebanese American University is a not-for-profit, private American university established in 1924 in Lebanon. It hosts a community of over 8,000 students and over 1,200 faculty and staff members on two campuses and two major teaching hospitals in Lebanon, as well as an academic center in New York City. LAU offers 58 graduate and postgraduate degree programs across seven schools. It operates under a charter from the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York, and is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education. LAU strives to deliver high-quality liberal arts education to the broadest possible spectrum of Lebanese society and the MENA region, and, in so doing, to be an agent in making our world fair, equal and free.

LAU Medical Center–Rizk Hospital is a 120-bed medical campus located in the heart of Beirut. It is the university’s main clinical teaching and research facility. Since its acquisition in 2009 it has been transformed into a comprehensive university hospital containing several centers of excellence. Despite suffering extensive damages upon the Beirut Port explosion in August 2020, LAUMC-RH mobilized all its resources to attend to victims on that tragic night and thereafter.

LAU Medical Center–Saint John’s Hospital is a state-of-the-art 85-bed facility located in the city of Jounieh. It is gradually opening up a wide range of medical services as of 2021, offering a premium patient experience and an exceptional setting for the training of future healthcare professionals.

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#### **Itoou (Aytou) Society**

The Itoou Society is a 501(C) (3) charitable organization founded in 1914, with the initial intent to bring aid to Lebanese immigrants. Over the decades, the Itoou Society has broadened its scope of giving to include the entire Central Illinois community. The Itoou Society continues to support various charitable organizations such as Saint Jude Midwest Affiliate, the American Red Cross, and the Heart of Illinois Down Syndrome Association. The Itoou Society also honors our country’s veterans in various activities throughout the year.

#### **Scottish Rite Theatre**

A majestic historical masterpiece, preserved and restored as Central Illinois’ premier venue for theater, music, dance, film and the most cherished of celebrations, the Scottish Rite Theatre is a Central Illinois landmark constructed in 1925. Complete with flying buttresses, stunning stained glass windows, custom wood craftsmanship (of the kind that is all too rare today), terrazzo flooring, a massive pipe organ that is original to the building, a working theater with majestic acoustics, and green gargoyles peering out over the Illinois River valley, this landmark is deservedly on the National Register of Historic Places. The building has more than 10,000 square feet of useable space, theater seating for 900, a full basement kitchen and banquet facility, and parking for more than 130 vehicles. It rests at the corner of Spalding and Perry, at the foot of Peoria’s OSF HealthCare St. Francis Medical Center and a growing medical district. Visit [ScottishRitePeoria.com](http://ScottishRitePeoria.com).

#### **Peoria Riverfront Museum**

The only multidisciplinary museum of its kind in the nation, the Peoria Riverfront Museum uses art, science, history and achievement to inspire confidence, lifelong learning and talent. Since opening in 2012, the privately funded museum has provided more than one million experiences through major exhibitions, a permanent collection, interactive galleries, a dome planetarium, giant screen theater and educational programming including curricula-related student visits. The AAM-accredited, Smithsonian-affiliated private nonprofit museum is supported by more than 4,000 members and donors, and is housed in a county-owned LEED Gold-certified building on a campus overlooking the Illinois River. Visit [RiverfrontMuseum.org](http://RiverfrontMuseum.org).

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