



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Mozart Comes to Muthanna with PRT Help-

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Muthanna Province, Iraq - The families of Muthanna are mostly underprivileged, subsistence farmers who were long neglected during the years of Saddam's regime. On the United Nations's Deprivation Index, Muthanna ranks last among all Iraqi provinces -- eighteenth out of eighteen. Unemployment hovers around 60% of the population.

But even kids growing up under these austere conditions dream of becoming soccer stars. And a group of musicians from the San Francisco Bay Area is helping them get a little closer to their dreams.



Concert organizer and head of non-profit Artch, Inc. Jinye Wang with some of her student musicians.

A U.S. State Department Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) recently launched an initiative to create a youth soccer league in the province. The project will fund the construction or rehabilitation of 13 soccer fields across this vast area -- the second largest province by territory in the country.

Diplomats from the U.S. Embassy are working with representatives from the Iraqi Ministry of Youth and Supports to create a "home team" for each new field and a schedule for a series of matches leading to the grand prize: a newly-minted Muthanna Cup.

In order to get the project underway, the State Department placed an appeal on the U.S. Embassy Baghdad web site for donations from American communities to provide soccer equipment and apparel to transform groups of barefooted schoolchildren in the province into proper soccer teams.

One of the first organizations to respond to this request is Artch, Inc. - a small northern California-based non-profit organization that promotes the scholarship and performance of classical music.

On May 25th it will hold a benefit concert to raise funds for the purchase of soccer paraphernalia to benefit the new Muthanna league. Concert organizer and professional piano instructor Jinye Wang is proud of her students for jumping at the opportunity to help kids they have never met halfway around the world.

"When I asked my students if they might be interested in helping poor kids in Iraq start a new soccer league, they jumped at the opportunity. These young musicians have raised funds for New York rescue dogs involved in September 11th operations, Hurricane Katrina victims, and local environmental conservation efforts, Wang said.

"Now they're helping Iraqi school kids whom they may never even have the chance to meet. I hope their example sends as powerful message as their boxes of new uniforms."

U.S. Embassy staff are delighted with the support and are exploring ways to watch the performances live in southern Iraq via a digital video conference uplink with Baghdad.

In the desire to build human capacity in Iraq – a chief aim of the 29 PRTs that operate in of Iraq’s provinces – these student musicians from California have made an important contribution and a significant impact on the diplomats serving in Iraq.

Foreign Service Officer Paul O’Friel, team leader of the Muthanna PRT, believes that “the young musicians from California must feel a real sense of camaraderie with these local kids in Iraq and their mutual desires to follow their dreams.” He is delighted to see the outpouring of support from his country in improving the lives of local Iraqis.

The benefit concert will take place at the Santa Clara University Recital Hall on May 25, 2008 at 7:30pm.