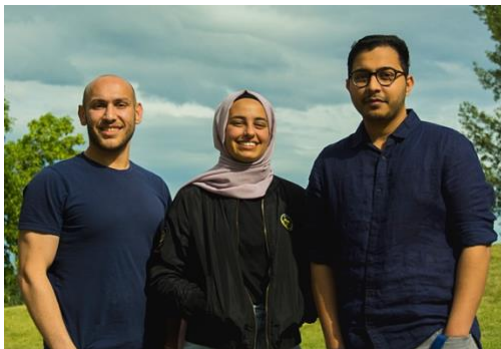




For immediate release — Thursday, July 19, 2018

## U of L students launch new business to help Syrian newcomer women integrate through employment

Three University of Lethbridge students have cooked up an idea that will bring Syrian culture to the broader Lethbridge community while helping newcomer women integrate — the newly formed catering business Jeeran55.



Ammar Shahid (BMgt '18), who's originally from Calgary, Deema Abu-Shaban, an education student who also works as an interpreter for Lethbridge Family Services-Immigrant Services, and Abdullah (Abed) Mouslli, who's originally from Syria and came to the U of L under the World University Service of Canada student refugee program, have joined forces to create a company that will provide employment opportunities for women.

“The idea came about after I had a discussion with Ammar about the difficulty newcomers face trying to integrate and become productive members of the community,” says Mouslli. “Because I also work as an Arabic interpreter at Lethbridge Family Services – Immigrant Services, I’m in touch with the Syrian community. I noticed that most men, after a year maximum, have jobs, mostly labour jobs. For women, it’s harder. Cultural and language barriers make it hard for them to find employment in town.”

Over the past few years, the Arab community in Lethbridge has grown considerably. In addition to the more than 55 Syrian families, people from Libya, Jordan and Palestine also make up the Arab community. Food often brings people together and the group determined that would be a good starting point.

“We noticed there isn’t any representation of the Arabic and Syrian culture here in town and there are no Arabic food restaurants,” says Mouslli. “Our idea was to connect skilled women home cooks with the larger Lethbridge community and help them to create more employment opportunities. The bigger goal is always to help them integrate, be productive and bring value to the larger Lethbridge community.”

They put their heads together and Jeeran55 was born. Jeeran is an Arabic word meaning neighbours and 55 refers to the 55 Syrian families that called Lethbridge home when they first devised their plan.

The plan for Jeeran55 is to operate as a catering business providing authentic Syrian dishes such as mandi (grilled chicken served on a bed of rice), tabbouleh (a salad made with bulgur), qatayef (a deep-fried dumpling) and hummus, of course, to groups of 15 or more.

The team conducted interviews and received positive feedback about their idea and potential cooks were eager to sign on. They analyzed the market and found possible kitchen locations. All they need now is funding to cover startup costs for items like equipment, kitchen rental, food safety training and insurance.

The team has launched a crowdfunding campaign through LaunchGood called [Jeeran55 Syrian Kitchen](#). The campaign has a goal of \$15,000 and goes until August 15. Several levels of contribution are available and each comes with a catering package, such as a dessert box, lunch, date night or family dinner, as a gift upon successful completion of the campaign.

“We are grateful for any support we receive,” says Mouslli. “Our main goal is to empower and provide employment opportunities for the newcomer women, with the bigger goal of helping them to integrate. As a newcomer, it’s hard to feel that you belong and, in my personal experience, employment really helped me integrate.”

This news release can be found online at [Jeeran55](#).

—30—

**Contact**

Caroline Zentner, public affairs advisor  
403-394-3975 or 403-795-5403 (cell)  
[caroline.zentner@uleth.ca](mailto:caroline.zentner@uleth.ca)

Abdullah Mouslli – [abdullah.mouslli@uleth.ca](mailto:abdullah.mouslli@uleth.ca)