

High academic standards Crescent Academy serves Canton's growing Muslim population

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by Carol Marshall

Staff writer

David Tauhidi has one eye on the calendar and one eye on the construction crew outside at the Crescent Academy International.

Tauhidi is the school director at the Muslim school located at Palmer and Lotz Roads in Canton. The school, built in 1991, is undergoing a major expansion and is scheduled to open this fall, but not before students start arriving for classes at the end of August.

"We've grown steadily over the years," Tauhidi said. "The school and the community organization (the Michigan Education Council, which owns the school property) have attracted Muslim families to the Canton area."

The 19,000-square-foot school now has 355 students in grades kindergarten through eighth. But after construction is complete, it will be 70,000 square feet, with enough room to accommodate as many as 600 students. The new \$7.3-million building will include a library, a dedicated science laboratory and a computer lab.

When the school first opened, its 130 students came from all over the Detroit area. But today, some 80 percent of its students are Canton residents, according to Tauhidi.

The growth at the school is not surprising to Tauhidi - it's the result of shifting demographics in southeast Michigan and even globally.

"Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, and the Muslim population is growing fast in America," he said.

And he said Muslim culture places a high premium on education.

"The Muslims who come here are a highly educated and moral people. They're doctors and engineers and professionals. That legacy of high academic and moral standards is ingrained in the culture," Tauhidi said.

Add to that the view held by many - not just the conservative religious population - that American mores have become too permissive to be good for children, so private religious schools have become increasingly popular throughout the country.

"What's happening in our culture is that people are not following the same morals as they used to. It seems like everywhere you look - on television, in magazines, on the

radio - people can do whatever they want, have sex whenever they want, get drugs whenever they want," Tauhidi said. "None of us wants our children to fall into those traps."

He did, however add that public schools are also trying to address the issue of moral malaise, and have added character education to the curriculum. But in religious schools, moral training is at the center of the educational process.

Until the new building is completed, students will fill the crowded classrooms of the old school, and the room outside Tauhidi's office door will remain packed with stacks of boxes of school supplies.

"We've been using eight portable classrooms for a couple of years now, and we'll continue to do that until the school is completed," Tauhidi said. "We're currently using every inch of space."

cmarshall@oe.homecomm.net - (734) 459-2700

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