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## **Lewiston's Somali surge**

Sunday, April 28, 2002

By KELLEY BOUCHARD, Portland Press Herald Writer

LEWISTON — It is a driving force for the nomadic herdsman who live on Somalia's vast, arid plains.

They move their livestock from one watering hole to the next, each a shrinking remnant of the gu, the monsoon season when most marriages and festivals take place.

For the rest of the year the herdsman look to the sky, hoping to see clouds ahead. They send out sahan, young scouts who search for lightning, a sure sign that a storm is brewing on the horizon.

"We always go where the rain is going to fall," said Omar Hamed, 48, one of the newest members of Maine's growing Somali community.

Right now, it's pouring in Lewiston.

Hamed — formerly a schoolbook translator in Somalia, now a welfare caseworker in Lewiston — is one of 800 to 1,000 Somalis who have moved to this once-bustling mill town in the last year. Another 1,000 are expected to come this summer, most of them from Atlanta. Victims of Somalia's lengthy civil war, they have chosen Maine for its low crime rate. They are bypassing Portland for Lewiston's cheaper, more plentiful housing.

As a result, this largely white, Franco-American city of 36,000 may be on the cusp of its greatest social and economic change since the area's textile mills and shoe factories started closing in the late 1950s. Some are prepared for Lewiston to take its place in an American landscape that grows more diverse with each passing decade. Others don't like it at all.

The city has responded to such a large and rapid influx of newcomers. Signs offering translator services are posted throughout City Hall. The city's Web site now has a Somali information page. Social workers help Somalis find apartments, navigate massive supermarkets and understand the school and health care systems. Employment counselors take extra time putting together resumes and explaining the nuances of job hunting. Teachers and volunteers give classes in everything from English to American culture.

Somalis are working hard to settle in, too. They have opened a storefront Islamic mosque, a nonprofit community center and a variety store on Lisbon Street, once the city's main shopping thoroughfare. Women wearing colorful head scarves called hijab are seen everywhere in a city dominated by the spires of six Roman Catholic churches. Last Wednesday, the Somali community hosted an evening of food and culture at the Franco-American Heritage Center. More than 300 people attended.

Still, city officials estimate that only about 40 of the 400 to 500 Somali adults living in Lewiston are working. The local labor market offers little for unskilled workers who don't speak English well or lack high school diplomas. At the same time, the annual welfare budget for this financially strapped city has doubled to \$200,000 because many Somalis are seeking rental and food assistance. Lewiston's Adult Learning Center, where half of the students are now Somali, is so packed that some classes are held in a stairwell. Lewiston has received \$200,000 in federal grant assistance already, for additional caseworkers and an adult education teacher, but city leaders plan to ask state and federal officials for more help.

The Somalis' arrival has strained Lewiston's limited resources and rattled city and school officials who are trying to hold down taxes. It has stirred reactions among longtime residents that range from genuine support to outright bigotry. One Lewiston man shares his disdain for newcomers with signs posted in front of his house. Another man, 33-year-old Samuel Gaiewski, has been charged with a hate crime for using a racial slur when he allegedly threatened to kill a Somali man during a parking confrontation last January.

"There is an undercurrent of resentment of people who are coming," said Mayor Laurier Raymond. "I don't think it's racial. I don't think it's religious. I think it's dollars and cents. I think the citizenry is genuinely concerned about the impact on their taxes. We probably should be flattered they've picked Lewiston. Unfortunately, many of them don't come with any money and they don't have jobs, and there is some resentment of that."

Leaders in the Somali community are aware of the growing concern. When the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram reported earlier this month that another 500 to 1,000 Somalis from Atlanta are expected to move to Lewiston this summer, one Somali leader went on Atlanta's Somali radio station and told them not to come. In response, Abdiiaziz Ali, the Somali case manager in Lewiston's general assistance office, made a follow-up announcement saying that Somalis are welcome in Lewiston, but that they should meter their arrival.

"The problem is, as I see it, if they come too fast," said Sue Charron, Lewiston's general assistance director. "In the past couple of months, people have been more

vocal about their concern. I think we need to simmer things down. We need to get the word out that we welcome you and we want you, but you can't come all at once."

Somalis started moving to Lewiston in February 2001, after they arrived in Portland and found that the only available housing was the city's family homeless shelter. Lewiston landlords started calling Portland officials to say they had plenty of apartments for rent.

In recent years, as Lewiston's population declined (4,000 people left in the last decade alone), rentals became increasingly available. Five years ago, before the city began tearing down substandard apartment buildings, the vacancy rate was as high as 20 percent. Now, by some estimates, the vacancy rate is closer to 7 percent. That's roomy compared to Portland's estimated 3 percent vacancy rate.

It's unclear how long Lewiston's vacancy rate will remain favorable. Many Somalis have found housing in Lewiston's downtown tenements. Others are renting through the Lewiston Housing Authority, where the waiting list for federally subsidized apartments has grown from 130 families last year to 230 families today. Somalis now occupy one-quarter of the 94 townhouse units in Hillview Apartments, one of the city's suburban housing projects.

"It has become the most popular destination (for Somali families)," said James Dowling, executive director of the housing authority.

The estimate that as many as 1,000 Somalis may move to Lewiston this summer comes from a variety of sources within the Somali community. While some Lewiston officials and even some Somalis dispute or downplay the anticipated number of summer arrivals, officials in Portland and Atlanta have learned to respect the accuracy of the Somali rumor mill. Barbara Cocchi, a regional director of World Relief Corp., one of five refugee resettlement agencies in Atlanta, said Somali elders have told her that more than 1,000 are planning to relocate to Lewiston soon after school ends in June.

"It's not about being alarmist," said Gerald Cayer, Portland's director of health and human services. "From my perspective, it means how do we help Lewiston work on the issues that will arise."

Lewiston officials have reason to be concerned. If another 1,000 Somalis move here this summer, in less than two years Lewiston will have a Somali population that rivals the estimated 2,200 Somalis who have settled in Portland (pop. 65,000) over the last 15 years. And Lewiston has little of the social service or employment infrastructure that Portland, as Maine's largest city, has developed over the years to

serve a diverse immigrant population. In comparison, there are 4,000 Somalis in greater Atlanta (pop. 3.4 million), and more than 50,000 in greater Minneapolis (pop. 2.8 million). A few Somali families have already moved to Auburn (pop. 23,000), Lewiston's sister city across the Androscoggin River.

Somalis say they are moving to Maine because they like its small-town feel, comparatively low crime rate and lack of racial conflict. Somalis have experienced tensions with established African-American populations in larger U.S. cities. They say Somali elders chose Maine after visiting several other states.

Statistically, Maine ranks 46th on the FBI crime index, while Georgia ranks 13th. Maine also is the whitest state in the nation, with a minority population of 3 percent, according to the 2000 Census. In Lewiston, black, Asian, Hispanic and other minorities represent about 5 percent of the population, including a handful of French-speaking Togolese families who moved here in 2000.

"In Atlanta, we were concerned the whole day what we would find when we got home," said Mohammed Abdi, the Somali community/parent specialist in Lewiston schools. "Here, our children can go out in the afternoon and ride their bicycles and come home when the sun goes down, and we do not have to worry."

Most Somali refugees in the United States came from refugee camps in Kenya. Many Somalis in Portland were initially settled by Catholic Charities Maine, the state's primary, federally funded refugee resettlement agency. Many Somalis who are relocating to Lewiston from other states are no longer eligible for federal refugee assistance. As a result, those who cannot find work rely on city, state and federal welfare programs.

Since February 2001, a total of 210 Somali families (more than 600 individuals) have been served by Lewiston's general assistance office, Charron said. At this time, 200 Somali families (563 individuals) are receiving food and housing vouchers. Among them, 339 are children, 224 are adults.

The adults include 16 Somalis who are in the country illegally and have applied for asylum. While they wait for their cases to be decided, which could take more than a year, they are prohibited from working and ineligible for any public assistance other than the city's welfare program.

Charron said Somalis now make up 22 percent of the people getting welfare from the city, and she expects general assistance spending to continue to grow if the Somali population increases as predicted.

Another 48 Somali families in Lewiston are getting Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, said Pierrot Rugaba, the state's refugee coordinator. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is a federally funded program administered by the state that provides monthly stipends of about \$125 per family member.

Financial costs aside, various agencies in the city are stepping up efforts to coordinate services for the Somali community. City officials have been meeting with Somali leaders to get a better understanding of how many are coming and what services they will need. Police have held similar meetings to explain local laws and better understand Somali culture and family life.

One place Lewiston is benefiting financially from the infusion of newcomers is in its schools, where the city is spending an extra \$250,000 on staff and programs for Somali students.

Lewiston's student population had dropped from 5,196 in 1990 to 4,439 in 2000. With its lower property values and the addition of 205 Somali students during the last year, Lewiston's state education subsidy increased \$1.2 million this year to \$18.2 million. Portland, which lost some students and saw its property values skyrocket, lost \$1.8 million in state aid.

What worries Lewiston school officials is that federal grant funding has grown scarce for education programs like those that helped Portland establish a nationally recognized multicultural center in its schools. Still, Lewiston school officials say they are doing their best to welcome Somali students, with diversity training, civil rights teams and cultural heritage events.

"It's not something we planned for or encouraged," said Leon Levesque, Lewiston's school superintendent. "We're mandated and obligated by state and federal law to provide an education to all students in our community and that's what we're going to do."

If the Somali community continues to grow, Lewiston officials expect it to become more difficult to maintain services for all children. That time may arrive sooner than hoped. By some estimates, there are about 200 Somali children already living in Lewiston who are under school age but will soon be entering the system.

While Lewiston is attracting Somalis from various U.S. cities, most are coming from greater Atlanta, which lost 60,000 jobs after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Lewiston-Auburn hasn't fared much better.

Business leaders say good jobs are still available in the Twin Cities, but the manufacturing jobs that attracted thousands of French Canadians in the late 1800s and early 1900s are gone. Lewiston-Auburn saw its job market shrink 2.9 percent last year — the ninth largest percentage decline in the country among metropolitan areas, according to CBS Marketwatch. Lewiston-Auburn's unemployment rate is 4.5 percent, compared to 2.9 percent in Portland and 6.1 percent in the United States overall.

Rose Hodges, an employment and training specialist at Lewiston's Career Center, said the local job market is tight. A year ago she typically had two or three pages of job openings. Now she has only one page. And the available jobs usually require applicants who speak English and have a high school diploma or can pass a test that requires high school reading and math skills. While some Somalis are well educated and are attending the University of Southern Maine in Lewiston and Portland, others have no education at all. Some are willing to commute to find work, but that prospect is difficult if they don't own a car.

"We have jobs available, but they may not be suitable for some Somalis," Hodges said. "Some (Somalis) are very employable. Some of them are not. We are making every effort to find them employment. Those we have placed have had good results."

Several large employers in Lewiston-Auburn have hired Somalis, including Gates Formed-Fibre Products Inc., Bell Manufacturing Co., Tambrands Inc., St. Mary's Regional Medical Center and Central Maine Medical Center.

Charles Morrison, president of the Androscoggin County Chamber of Commerce, said results have been mixed. While some Somalis have worked elsewhere in the United States, those who are unfamiliar with the American workplace require extra training. Some Somalis have become model employees. Others have had a difficult time adjusting to new concepts such as showing up on time, calling in sick and giving two weeks notice before leaving a job. So far, the need to pray during the workday and the safety hazard of long clothing worn by most Somali women haven't become problems as they have in other cities.

"This is a long-term adjustment for everybody," Morrison said. "People who do good work and maintain the standards are going to keep their jobs and be promoted, no matter who they are."

Despite the lack of jobs in Lewiston, Somalis are coming because they want to find a safe place to live. Many endured years of violence and famine in their home country, which still has no functioning government.

"Safety comes first," said Abdiaziz Ali, 32, who is married and has five children. Ali left a high-tech manufacturing job in Atlanta that paid \$16 an hour to find work in Lewiston last spring. He was hired by the city four days after he arrived. He said those who are motivated to work will find jobs, even if they must first learn to read and write English.

Somalis deny they are coming because they have heard Maine's welfare system is easier, a perception state officials say is unfounded. Since 1994, the number of Maine families on welfare has dropped from 23,200 to 11,000 because of welfare reform, said Judy Williams, the state's director of family independence. Somalis say they want to work and are ashamed to be on welfare.

"Many people believe Somalis come to Lewiston for the welfare, but it's not true," said Mohamed Hassan, 34, one of two Somalis who work at Bell Manufacturing Co., a clothing label maker in Lewiston. "We come here because it is a good place and because the people who live here are very, very nice people."

Still, some Lewiston residents wonder why the city bends over backward to make Somalis feel welcome when their French, Irish, German or Italian ancestors were mistreated when they arrived more than a century ago.

James Teehan has posted two large signs in front of his Sylvan Avenue home that have drawn widespread notice. Orange letters neatly stenciled on plywood ask why the city helps Somalis when veterans and homeless people go without and American soldiers fight in the Middle East.

"I was so irritated, I had to do something," said Teehan, a 33-year-old flooring contractor. "Why are we taking care of them before we take care of our own? . . . Immigration had its place at a certain time. That time has come and gone."

People with that mind-set only get so far with Phil Nadeau, Lewiston's assistant city manager and point man on the Somali issue. Nadeau is preparing a report on Lewiston's rapidly growing Somali population in an effort to win support from Gov. Angus King and Maine's congressional delegation for expanded job training, adult education and general assistance programs.

Nadeau acknowledges a certain amount of pride in the fact that his French Canadian forebears overcame great odds to make it in America. In Lewiston, some children were beaten for speaking French in school. Workers who couldn't speak English often got the lowest-paying jobs. But Nadeau rails against the idea that immigrants today should face the same trials. He notes that the social service programs available to Lewiston's Somalis are available to any American, no matter



where they live. And he sees obvious benefits from an infusion of culture and residents in a city that has been losing population for decades.

"God bless the tenacity of our grandparents and great-grandparents," Nadeau said. "But the fact remains that laws have been created because we've learned that putting up barriers isn't the best way to integrate newcomers into our community."

So far, that integration has gone pretty smoothly. Observers marvel at the way Lewiston has accepted the challenge of welcoming such a rapid infusion of newcomers. The next step, most agree, is getting them working.

"Right now, I don't see a problem," said Sgt. Michael McGonagle, spokesman for the Lewiston police. "But if the Somali community continues to grow and they don't find work, there may be conflicts within the Somali community and with the community at large."

Somalis who are already in Lewiston downplay the concern over those who are expected to follow. Eventually, they say, if housing in Lewiston-Auburn gets scarce and jobs remain hard to find, word will spread to the Somali community outside Maine.

"Down the road, the reality will set in and people will stop coming," Abdi said.

And they will look elsewhere for signs of rain.

## **A Thousand Miles**

Sunday, June 30, 2002

By KELLEY BOUCHARD, Portland Press Herald Writer

CLARKSTON, Ga. — The apartment is airless and dark, brightened only by the colorful hijab that covers Ayni Mohamed's head, and the burst of evening sunlight that fills the living room each time one of her children opens the front door and runs outside to play.

Mohamed stands at the edge of the room and gently sways. Her 10-month-old son, Joe, is asleep on her shoulder. Her visitors sit on low, foam sofas wrapped in tapestry, a style of furniture common to her native Somalia. She eyes the strangers warily. They come seeking answers.

Why do you want to move to Lewiston, Maine?

"I want to go to school and I want to work, but the lifestyle here is expensive and difficult," Mohamed, 36, said through an interpreter. "I heard housing is cheaper in Lewiston and people are getting help there, and people are getting an education there."

A single mother of three, Mohamed lost her job at an Avon cosmetics plant after the Sept. 11 attacks. She plans to leave Clarkston this summer and move to Lewiston, sight unseen. She worries about leaving Georgia's mild climate for Maine's sometimes frigid temperatures, but she has endured much greater hardships. She saw two brothers killed in the clan warfare that has divided her homeland for a decade. She spent six years in a refugee camp in Kenya before coming to Clarkston in 1998.

Mohamed is inspired to move to Lewiston by glowing reports from some of the estimated 1,000 Somalis who have moved to the once-bustling mill town since February 2001. They have opened an Islamic mosque and three community centers and are planning several businesses in a city of 36,000 that is largely white, Roman Catholic and Franco-American.

Lewiston's reputation as a Somali boom town has spread so fast that Somalis who have resettled elsewhere around the world have heard about it. News stories and online chat about Lewiston are posted on several Somali Web sites. Somalis waiting in refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia have heard about Lewiston from family and friends. "We are faster than the Internet," said Mohammed Maye, a Somali who is president of the African Community & Refugee Center in Clarkston.

Ayni Mohamed is one of 500 to 1,000 Somalis who are expected to relocate to Lewiston during the next six months. Some say fewer will move there because Somali elders have attempted to stop the flow, but others say any effort to control Somali migration is futile. Many will come from this fast-growing Atlanta suburb of 7,200 people, a former whistle-stop on the Georgia Central Railroad that is now home to immigrants from more than 50 countries, including Bosnia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Liberia, Russia and Vietnam. Somalis make up the largest group.

Locals call Clarkston "Ellis Island South," which it has become over the last two decades because several of Atlanta's refugee resettlement agencies are located in the area. Many of the middle-class whites who once lived here have moved away or died, and the newcomers have begun to purchase their homes. An indication of the community's changed demographics came last March, when Clarkston voters elected Abdul Akbar, an Egyptian-American born in New Jersey, as Georgia's first Muslim city councilor. Akbar won the at-large seat with 66 percent of the vote.

The trend of Somalis leaving Clarkston for Lewiston has piqued the curiosity and concern of federal, state and local officials in both states, who are dealing with the impact of this unusual secondary migration. Not since Hmong refugees from the mountains of Laos were resettled in Central Valley, Calif., and Eau Claire, Wis., in the late 1970s has a small city like Lewiston dealt with such a large, rapid and unexpected influx of newcomers as culturally dissimilar as Somalis. Federal refugee resettlement officials were in Clarkston in late May and in Lewiston earlier this month to find out why Somalis want to move, and to make a case for additional federal funding to help them wherever they decide to live.

Indeed, some Somalis are happy in Clarkston, where they make up more than half of the local population and where every shopping plaza boasts a few Somali businesses, including halal, or Muslim-blessed, meat shops and stores that sell the clothing, music, movies and other items Somalis seek.

Other Somalis say they don't feel welcomed by Clarkston's police force and shrinking white establishment. In particular, they complain that police badger them with costly tickets for traffic violations. Police officials say they simply expect all residents of Clarkston to follow the law, no matter where they're from.

Some Somalis see Lewiston as a place where they can establish a tightly knit community and more easily maintain their Muslim faith and Somali culture. They also hope to filter out what they see as negative aspects of American culture. Some Somali parents find it especially difficult to shield their children from the lure of hip-hop music, clothes and attitudes that are so popular among African-American youth. Clarkston's diversity — 80 percent of its population is nonwhite — makes

it more difficult to control these outside influences. Lewiston's relatively homogenous population — 5 percent of its residents are nonwhite — offers some measure of control.

Other Somalis say they are willing to leave Clarkston and move 1,000 miles north, as the crow flies, because they've heard Lewiston provides better access to social services, job training, housing and education. Somalis aren't the only ones who've heard this. Catholic Charities Maine, the state's primary refugee resettlement agency, has started receiving calls for information and assistance from other refugee groups in Atlanta, who say they've heard Maine resettlement workers are more accessible.

Refugee resettlement workers in Clarkston are taking the criticism to heart. They say programs are available to address the needs of new immigrants, from English classes and child care to transportation and job training. They say they must find new ways to make these services more accessible in the Clarkston area.

Still, Barbara Cocchi, director of World Relief Corp., a refugee resettlement agency in nearby Stone Mountain, says it may be impossible to satisfy the nomadic spirit and the cultural demands of Somali refugees.

"This is not Utopia," Cocchi said, "and I think some Somalis are looking for Utopia." Local officials say Somalis have had difficulty resettling. This part of Georgia is known for its rust-colored dirt.

It spills over the edges of lawns that grow lush in the near-constant heat and humidity. It pushes up through cracks in the pavement that surrounds the several shopping plazas and 20 apartment complexes that are the substance of this square-mile town. The sprawling complexes with their mazelike roads have pleasant-sounding names like Kristopher Woods, Wyncrest and Olde Plantation. Some are well-kept, others are rundown.

Driving through several town house-style complexes on a steamy morning, Sgt. Alan White knows who lives where and what country they come from. As a beat officer and detective in the Clarkston Police Department, it has been his job to know for six years. He is familiar with Clarkston's immigrant community, in part because he is married to a Vietnamese woman he met when he was called to the scene of a car accident a few years ago.

White, who is 40, says most of Clarkston's apartment dwellers come from somewhere else. Bumper stickers back him up. There's a Bosnian coat of arms. Another coat of arms from Panama. Many cars have stickers that say "I love Allah" or support the local fund-raising effort to build a new mosque.

While the 2000 U.S. Census found Atlanta to be the second most-segregated city in the nation, after Chicago, some of Clarkston's apartment complexes are fairly integrated. White marvels that people who were enemies overseas can live next door to each other here in relative peace. Iranians and Iraqis. Somalis and Ethiopians. Indians and Pakistanis.

DeKalb County, where Clarkston is located, is Georgia's leader in refugee resettlement. More than 2,500 of the 4,100 refugees who came to Atlanta in 1999 were resettled in DeKalb County. Most of the estimated 4,000 Somali refugees who have been resettled in DeKalb County since 1992 live in Clarkston, Decatur and Stone Mountain. About 60 percent of Atlanta's Somalis live in Clarkston.

But there is disagreement on exactly how many people live in Clarkston. According to the 2000 census, Clarkston's population increased from 4,500 in 1980 to 7,200 today. And while Clarkston was mostly white in the 1970s, the census counted only 1,400 white residents in 2000. Local officials believe the actual population of Clarkston may be closer to 15,000 because census workers often miscalculate the number of people living in immigrant households.

"These are two- and three-bedroom apartments," White said, "and you can have 10 to 12 people living in each one."

White has heard that many of Clarkston's Somali residents are moving to Lewiston. His reaction is tinged with humor, Southern pride and disbelief. "I just cannot imagine moving that far north for nothing," he said. "I can't figure out what the attraction is."

Somalis are also moving to Portland, a city of 65,000, where later this year another 1,000 are expected to join the 2,200 Somalis already there. Larger Somali communities also have developed in recent years in Columbus, Ohio; Minneapolis; and St. Louis, Mo.

White isn't surprised that, of all the immigrant groups living in Clarkston, it is Somalis who say they are unhappy. He and other local officials say Somalis have been the most difficult group to resettle and help assimilate into the community. Most Somalis have refused help from Christian church groups. They often see themselves as distinct from the established African-American community, even though black churches are among the first to volunteer to help immigrants. Some Somalis also maintain clan affiliations that isolate them from other ethnic groups and can lead to confrontations between Somali elders. And a fair number of Somalis have had conflicts with local police, usually over things as minor as speeding tickets and stop-sign violations.

"They fuss that we don't give them breaks," White said. "They don't feel they should be held as accountable as everyone else."

White recalls the day he pulled over a Somali taxi driver for a traffic violation. As the man stopped by the roadside, he radioed other Somali taxi drivers to back him up. Soon, several other taxis were parked along the road. White says the driver argued that he had done nothing wrong. Other drivers joined in the argument or stood by glaring. White eventually issued the ticket and moved on, but he never forgot what he saw as the Somalis' efforts to intimidate him.

"Somalis are difficult for people to get along with," he said. Mohammed Maye explains aspects of cultural behavior Mohammed Maye sees White's confrontation with the taxi drivers in a different light.

Maye, who recently opened a satellite office of the African Community & Refugee Center in Lewiston, says Somalis are often on the defensive with police because they don't expect to be treated fairly. Police are often corrupt in their homeland. And Somalis are used to speaking up for themselves, something Maye says still isn't expected from blacks who live in the South.

"Some Somalis may not have enough English and they have a network of people to help them," said Maye, 40, who came to Clarkston in 1996. "If someone gets pulled over or taken to jail, the community will respond very quickly so the person doesn't get taken advantage of."

Maye says Somalis will argue over a traffic ticket because fighting it in court often means missing work and losing a day's pay — something few immigrants can afford.

Maye understands that others may be intimidated or confused by Somalis' group ties and conflicts. He admits that many Somalis older than age 30 cling to their culture's clan organization. But he says many younger Somalis are leaving tribal ties behind and adopting an individualistic approach more common in the United States.

Maye and Clarkston officials say immigrants have made no substantiated charges of harassment or brutality against the city's police officers. Even so, some effort is being made to increase understanding between the two groups. The nonprofit Bridging the Gap Project has held community orientation sessions for various ethnic groups on topics such as child abuse, traffic laws, domestic violence, gun laws and gang activity. It recently set up a 24-hour, statewide interpreter and translator service for public safety agencies. And it is developing a public safety

orientation center in Clarkston where refugees can get information about various state, local and federal laws and police officers can get diversity training.

Still, as much as longtime Americans must respect the cultural differences of new arrivals, immigrants must understand how their cultural behavior and habits appear to Americans, said Gail Hoffman, director of the Bridging the Gap Project.

"Many refugees are coming from cultures that are collectivistic in nature, where the needs of the group outweigh the needs of the individual," Hoffman said. "They believe in arranged marriages, sharing the wealth, family networks and protecting their own. Sometimes that even means covering up a crime. They must understand how threatening that can be." Clarkston mayor says communication is key. Some longtime Clarkston residents have been overwhelmed by the changes brought by such a large and varied influx of newcomers. Others appreciate the growing diversity and the texture it brings to the community, but they regret the population growth and the gradual loss of Clarkston's small-town lifestyle.

While Clarkston has developed into a multiracial community in recent years, the history of its race relations is fairly distinct. Located 12 miles northeast of downtown Atlanta, Clarkston was founded as a residential subdivision in 1882 by a railroad executive, William W. Clark. Clarkston is part of a land tract that was ceded to the United States by the Creek Indians in 1821. Parcels of land were then doled out by lottery to white settlers, 202 acres at a time. The "fortunate drawers" paid \$19 for each claim. Widows and children of fallen soldiers got the land free of charge. DeKalb County archives include a list of these recipients, as well as lists of local Confederate soldiers who fought in the Civil War and freed slaves who were living in the area prior to the war.

When DeKalb County was forced to integrate in the mid-1960s, many whites sent their children to private schools, according to county historian Walter McCurdy. Today whites are a minority in DeKalb County, representing about 35 percent of the population, compared to 86 percent in 1970. Various racial and ethnic groups work and attend school together, but generally live in segregated neighborhoods and attend segregated churches by choice. Cultural and economic divisions persist as well.

Clarkston is still more of a town than a city. Its municipal center lies along a short stretch of Church Street, running parallel to the railroad tracks that bisect Clarkston. It consists of Clarkston City Hall, Clarkston Methodist Church, the defunct Clarkston Women's Club, now rented out for special occasions, and Clarkston Baptist Church, which now shares its space with several ethnic Christian denominations from around the world. The railroad station is long gone. Locals say the train stops in Clarkston now only when there's an accident.

The mayor of Clarkston is Lee Swaney, a 62-year-old retired heating and ventilation contractor. Sitting in his office at City Hall, he initially dodges questions about Clarkston's growing immigrant population. Then he opens up.

"Communication is one of the biggest hurdles," Swaney said, speaking of immigrants in general. "We try to convince them that we're here to help them, but some remain distrustful and fearful of city officials."

Another problem Clarkston faces is the cost of providing public services — especially law enforcement — for a culturally diverse community. "It really puts a strain on everything," Swaney said. "The resettlement agencies get them here and then we're left with the aftermath. I think the agencies do as good a job as they can with the money they have, but most of the refugees are on their own and they don't know what to do."

Charles Nelson, Clarkston's police chief, has a more direct assessment. He bristles at the expectation that he should provide diversity training for his police officers without getting financial help from the federal agencies that bring refugees to Clarkston. Nelson also resents being asked to learn about the cultural difference of each ethnic group when some immigrants seem to disregard the need to learn about American culture and laws. He says many refugees fail to get car insurance, maintain active driver's licenses and follow the traffic laws. The expectation that he should cut them some slack angers him.

"If I go to Portland, Maine, I'm going to do what the Portlandese do," said Nelson, 61. "So if they come here from another country, I'm going to expect them to follow our laws. I tell them, 'We'll learn about your culture, but you learn about our culture, too.'" Crime, costs, schools: How Maine, Georgia compare Many Somalis have learned about American culture, and some don't like everything they see. That's why Mohammed Maye has sent his wife and four youngest children, ages 8 to 14, to live in Yemen, a small, Middle Eastern country where they attend the best Islamic schools, are immersed in Islamic culture and live among the privileged class for just \$500 a month. Maye says he loves the freedom, humanity and opportunity of American democracy, but he wants to give his children an Islamic foundation that will help them avoid the less attractive aspects of American culture — premarital sex, drug use, drinking, divorce and a lack of regard for family ties — when they return to the United States in a few years.

While few Somalis in Clarkston can afford to send their families abroad, some can afford to move someplace they perceive is better. It reflects a national trend of refugees and other immigrants to leave congested metropolitan areas and seek



quieter, safer, less expensive cities and towns in places like Maine. Maye says the schools and the lifestyle in Georgia pale in comparison to Maine.

In fact, Maine schools score above the national average on national math and science assessment tests, while Georgia schools score below average. Maine's graduation rate is 94.5 percent — the highest in the country — while Georgia's graduation rate is 83.5 percent — below the national average and among the bottom 10 states in the nation. The Georgia Public Policy Foundation rated Clarkston High School at 258 out of the 323 public high schools in Georgia, and some Somalis take that rating very seriously.

Looking at lifestyle indicators, Georgia was ranked 36th in the nation last year by the United Health Foundation, which assesses each state based on violent crime, graduation rates, unemployment, heart disease, cancer cases, infectious disease, mortality rates, motor vehicle deaths, prenatal care and health insurance coverage. Maine was ranked the eighth healthiest state in the nation. Maine also ranks 46th on the FBI crime index, while Georgia has the 13th highest crime rate in the nation.

Some lifestyle factors are similar. Atlanta's unemployment rate was 4.4 percent in April, compared to 4.1 percent in Lewiston-Auburn. The apartment vacancy rates in both cities are about 5 percent; Lewiston's rate has dropped since so many Somalis moved there. But Clarkston's available apartments are generally smaller and more expensive. Somali families are often large and require at least three bedrooms, which can cost more than \$1,000 a month in Clarkston, compared to \$600 a month in Lewiston.

Some social services are more readily available in Maine, where cities and towns offer public assistance along with state and federal agencies. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, which provides about \$125 per month per family member, is available for five years in Maine, but for only four years in Georgia. And Maine provides medical care for children of needy families, while Georgia does not.

Many of the Somalis moving to Lewiston are single mothers with children. Some officials wonder if some Somalis are moving to Maine so they can collect another year of family assistance. Other officials worry that some Somali men are sending their wives and children to Maine to collect welfare, claiming they are separated or divorced, while their husbands continue to live and work in Clarkston. The concern is great enough that Ronald Munia, a program specialist with the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, recently warned Somalis when he was a guest on a Clarkston radio show that welfare fraud is a crime that could cause them to be deported from the country.

During a visit to Lewiston last month, Munia saw no evidence that Somalis are moving there to access welfare illegally, but he says it is an issue that will be monitored. Many Somalis who are moving to Lewiston will need English classes and employment training before they can get jobs and become self-sufficient. Munia says he is confident that will happen.

"Refugees are just trying to put their lives back together," Munia said, "and our job is to get them there." For one, Clarkston's home; another 'likes the snow' It is Friday afternoon during the weekly Congress of Prayer at the Clarkston mosque. It is one of more than a dozen in greater Atlanta. About 100 men and boys kneel on prayer rugs spread on the lawn outside the men's mosque, and 200 more are inside the white clapboard house set far back from North Indian Creek Drive. Somalis pray next to Afghans, Pakistanis, Bosnians and other Muslims. About 100 women and girls pray in the brick ranch-style house next door. The local Muslim community plans to build a traditional mosque on the site. They've already collected \$200,000 in donations for the project's first phase, which will cost about \$3 million.

The men hear the prayer leader's song over a loudspeaker. They bend to the ground and the hum of their response fills the sweltering air. Cars and minivans of last-minute arrivals fly down the dirt driveway, sending a cloud of dust over the faithful, as they try to find parking spaces among the cars strewn across the front and back yards. A police officer blows his whistle when one tries to park in the driveway. The praying ends. The believers spill out of the mosque, jump in their cars and join an aggressive bumper-to-bumper campaign back to their daily lives.

For Mukhtar Mohamed, daily life consists of fashioning traditional Somali clothing for men and women, and Western-style suits for men. Now 23, the experienced tailor learned his trade while living in a refugee camp for nine years. He opened his international tailor shop in Clarkston last June, a year after he arrived in America. He worked at a manufacturing plant until he saved enough money to open his own business. He lives with his mother, two brothers and their families in nearby Decatur and hopes to bring his wife and child to the United States soon.

Fabrics of every hue hang from dowels along the walls of his shop, one of several small commercial spaces he has built inside a larger store in a shopping plaza. Mohamed rents the spaces to other Somali businessmen, including an Italian shoe importer and a fragrance boutique. The idea is to share the cost so that each business has a better chance to succeed. So far so good. Mohamed has no intention of leaving Georgia for the time being.

"I am working for myself and it is good," Mohamed said, wire-rimmed glasses sitting low on his nose. "I have a lot of customers. For now, I don't want to move."

At Medina, a Somali restaurant in Decatur, several Somalis gather to chat with Mohamed Diriye. He moved to Lewiston last September and is back in town to visit family members. Diriye, 52, is one of the Somalis who is spreading the word about how good life is in Lewiston. He talks excitedly with his friends, motioning with his left hand. Its thumb is missing. His body is marked by the scars of five bullets he received before fleeing Somalia, where he was a police officer and a farmer, to Kenya in 1990.

"Because of my tribe," Diriye explained. "They left me to die." His voice trails off and he looks away.

Diriye came to San Diego in 1995 and moved to Clarkston in 1996. He worked in a factory for several years, until open-heart surgery left him disabled. He says he moved to Lewiston for health reasons, and because he no longer liked living in Clarkston. Now he studies computer science at Central Maine Technical College in Auburn, Lewiston's sister city.

Although refugee resettlement workers expect that some of the Somalis who have moved to Lewiston will eventually move on to another city, Diriye says he has found his home. He doesn't even mind the winter weather.

"I like the snow," Diriye said. "Lewiston is my last stop."

## **Mayor Raymond's letter to the Somali community 10/01/02**

Reprinted from Portland Press Herald

For some number of months, I have observed the continued movement of a substantial number of Somalis into the downtown area of our community. I have applauded the efforts of our city staff in making available the existing services and the local citizenry for accepting and dealing with the influx.

I assumed that it would become obvious to the new arrivals the effect the large numbers of new residents has had upon the existing staff and city finances and that this would bring about a voluntary reduction of the number of new arrivals - it being evident that the burden has been, for the most part, cheerfully accepted, and every effort has been made to accommodate it.

Our Department of Human Services has recently reported that the number of Somali families arriving into the city during the month of September is below the approximate monthly average that we have seen over the last year or so. It may be premature to assume that this may serve as a signal for future relocation activity, but the decline is welcome relief given increasing demands on city and school services.

I feel that recent relocation activity over the summer has necessitated that I communicate directly with the Somali elders and leaders regarding our newest residents. If recent declining arrival numbers are the result of your outreach efforts to discourage relocation into the city, I applaud those efforts. If they are the product of other unrelated random events, I would ask that the Somali leadership make every effort to communicate my concerns on city and school service impacts with other friends and extended family who are considering a move to this community.

To date, we have found the funds to accommodate the situation. A continued increased demand will tax the city's finances.

This large number of new arrivals cannot continue without negative results for all. The Somali community must exercise some discipline and reduce the stress on our limited finances and our generosity.

I am well aware of the legal right of a U.S. resident to move anywhere he/she pleases, but it is time for the Somali community to exercise this discipline in view of the effort that has been made on its behalf.

We will continue to accommodate the present residents as best as we can, but we need self-discipline and cooperation from everyone.

Only with your help will we be successful in the future - please pass the word: We have been overwhelmed and have responded valiantly. Now we need breathing room. Our city is maxed-out financially, physically and emotionally.

I look forward to your cooperation.

Laurier T. Raymond Jr.  
Mayor, City of Lewiston

**Text of letter from Somali elders 10/06/02**

Reprinted from Portland Press Herald

October 6, 2002.

Mr. Laurie Raymond  
Mayor, City of Lewiston

Re: Your letter dated October 1, 2002.  
Somalis in Lewiston.

This letter is in response to your above referenced letter in regard to the move of Somali refugees/immigrants to the city of Lewiston. First of all, with due respect, we would like to indicate that your letter is not only untimely but is also inflammatory and disturbing, to say the least. Your letter is untimely because it is written and released at a time when the movement of Somalis to Lewiston has naturally dropped and as per records no Somali moved to Lewiston since the end of August 2002. The letter is also inflammatory and disturbing as we are dismayed to see such a letter from an elected official and leader who is supposed to show good leadership, co-existence and harmony among the residents of this humble city.

We react to your letter in mixed feelings ranging from dismay, astonishment and anger. This is because of the fact that you have never given us a chance to meet with you and discuss our future plans with you during your term in office. Your predecessor Mayor Kalleigh Tara perfectly understood us and was working with us as new additions to a city where she was the mayor. We also had and were given opportunities to meet with and discuss our future with elected and non-elected local and state officials. Most recently, such meeting included those we had with Governor Angus King on September 17 and with the gubernatorial candidate, Congressman John Baldacci on September 27th, among others.

During all such meetings, the officials indicated their satisfaction with our coming to live here in the state, they say, is sparsely populated and need to attract more residents as both manpower and future electorates. Those officials, after listening to us, applauded our efforts to try and "Fit in" as much as we can. While we have had contacts with other leaders as stated above, you have never given us a chance to meet and explain ourselves to you. The first contact, which you ever had with us, is through your recent letter, which prompted this response; something which we never thought, would happen and feel unwarranted at this time.

For your information therefore, our coming to Lewiston and living here have revitalized this city in certain ways. Our presence has turned Lewiston into a multi-ethnic, multi-racial city, which has embraced diversity and change. A city of

thirty-six thousand people, in the middle of the "whitest" state in the country has suddenly become an international city. Lewiston's name appeared in papers and news clips around the country. We portrayed the facts about this place and its humble people who we consider, by and large, as generous Americans who understand our plight and are ready to help in our initial days of settling down. Our presence here have also attracted hundreds of thousands of dollars in state and federal funds to boost existing social services for all residents of Lewiston. This particular point was not stated in your letter.

Apartment units located in the Lewiston downtown area which were abandoned many years ago, were suddenly refurbished and made livable as the arrival of Somalis generated funds and put money in the pockets of landlords. This also raised the market value of real estate. Somalis were hired to work in businesses and plants making them to be able to contribute to the local economy as taxpayers. Back in April 2002, there were 249 able-bodied Somali men and women who could work, Forty people worked at the time. Today out of the 416 able bodied men and women 215 persons are currently employed. This is over 50% of adults who could work. Also, there are three Somali businesses in Lewiston which opened in less than a year.

While we thank the city of Lewiston, and the general public for their understanding and accepting us in their midst, we would nevertheless like to bring to your attention and to the attention of others in your line of thinking, that we are citizens and/or legal residents of this country. Although we originally hail from the Eastern African state of Somalia, we renounced our Somali citizenship and taken U.S. citizenship. Over 80% of our children are Americans by birth. Therefore, we believe we have every right to live anywhere in this country. So do other Somalis or any other legal residents who choose to come and live in Lewiston or in Alaska for that matter.

In view of the above, and with due respect we consider your letter Mr. Mayor, as the writing of ill-informed leader who is bent towards bigotry. Therefore, by a copy of this letter we ask both the state government and law enforcement to guarantee our safety here. If any harm inform of an attack happens to any Somali-American man, woman or child in the wake of your letter, we hold you squarely responsible for any such acts. We think your letter is an attempt to agitate and incite the local people and a license to violence against our people physically, verbally and emotionally.

Hope this is clear and let God show all of us what is right.

Sincerely,  
Elders of the Somali Community.

## **TWO WORLDS COLLIDE IN LEWISTON**

KELLEY BOUCHARD, GREGORY D. KESICH and JOSIE HUANG

Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram January 12, 2003

Thousands of voices supporting diversity drowned out the small contingent of racists who came here Saturday to protest Maine's growing Somali population.

Shouting down intolerance and singing songs of solidarity, more than 4,500 people converged at the Bates College Merrill Gymnasium for the pro-diversity Many & One rally, organized to counter a neo-Nazi meeting held at the same time on the outskirts of the city.

In striking contrast, 32 supporters of the racist World Church of the Creator listened to a few mostly anti-Semitic lectures in a city-owned building just off Exit 13 on the Maine Turnpike. Jon Fox, head of the Illinois chapter of the group, spoke in place of the group's leader, Matthew Hale, who was arrested last week on charges of soliciting the murder of a federal judge. Hale planned to give a speech titled "The Invasion of Maine by Somalis and How We Can End It."

Despite temperatures in the low 20s, 450 anti-racism protesters and racist sympathizers gathered outside the racist meeting. The dull roar of shouting seeped through the walls of the meeting hall.

About 230 state, local and federal police controlled crowds at both events, which resulted in only one arrest. Metal detectors and bomb-sniffing dogs were used at both sites. Streets were blocked and parking was prohibited in many areas. Picket signs, cameras, water bottles, gym bags and any items that could be used as weapons were banned.

The pro-diversity rally triumphed in volume, attendance and number of speakers. More than 20 people took to the podium at the 2 1/2-hour event, which had an overflow crowd. Maine's most prominent civil rights leaders and top politicians were there, including the congressional delegation and newly inaugurated Gov. John Baldacci.

"We come together as one in Maine when it comes to neighborliness, when it comes to tolerance, when it comes to respect for one another," Baldacci said. "This is not a haven for any hate group."

Thousands of people wore "Where's the mayor?" stickers, calling attention to the absence of Mayor Laurier Raymond, who is vacationing in Florida.



Hale set his sights on the whitest state in the nation in November, after Raymond asked Somalis to stop moving to this mostly Franco-American, Roman Catholic city of 36,000. Raymond said the city was "maxed-out financially, physically and emotionally."

More than 1,100 Somalis have moved to Lewiston from other U.S. cities since February 2001. They were attracted by cheaper housing, lower crime and more accessible public services. They are Muslims who escaped clan warfare that has devastated their East African country.

At the pro-diversity rally, one of the nation's most prominent Somali leaders, Omar Jamal, head of the Somali Justice Advocacy Center in Minneapolis, noted the absence of the mayor and members of the city council. He also called for Raymond's resignation, which the Lewiston chapter of the Somali justice group repeated at a news conference after the rally.

"The mayor is in Florida playing golf today and his city is on fire," Jamal said. "I challenge you to do the right thing."

Jamal pointed out that most Somali residents were also missing from the rally.

"We have handfuls of immigrants who are very fearful," he said. "Nobody is supposed to be fearful here."

The rally was organized by a coalition of 200 community leaders to oppose hatred and support the safety of all Lewiston residents.

"We've all come together to say whether you're gay or straight or whether you have this ability or disability, either you're this color, or that color or this religion or that, we say this will be our community," said Mark Schlotterbeck, leader of the Many & One Coalition. The group organized the rally and quarter-mile procession to the Lewiston Memorial Armory that immediately followed.

Former Lewiston Mayor John Jenkins, the state's first African-American mayor and state senator, was master of ceremonies.

"This is a defining moment in history," said Jenkins, as people clapped and pumped their fists in the air.

Six children of different faiths quietly offered prayers, accompanied by a flutist from the Micmac tribe. Speaker after speaker stressed the importance of accepting people of all backgrounds.

"We will strive to ensure that all citizens regardless of race and ethnicity are guaranteed their God-given right," said Winston McGill, president of the Portland chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Some speakers said that while white supremacists from out of town were a threat, Maine people also had to make sure to stamp out hate. The Rev. Bill Gordon, an openly gay pastor of Northern Lights Metropolitan Community Church in Vassalboro, got a standing ovation saying how discrimination of all kinds must stop.

"Discrimination and hatred are not something that has been imported from outside of this city and state and brought to us," Gordon said.

State Attorney General G. Steven Rowe targeted his criticism directly at the white supremacists.

"I have a message for these hate-mongers," he said. "You are wasting your time here."

The rally also included a reading of a letter from legendary boxer Muhammad Ali, who fought one of his early fights in Lewiston in 1965.

"Somali immigrants, like any Americans, have the unalienable right to live anywhere in the United States that they choose," Ali wrote. "Moreover, they have the responsibility to raise their children in cities and villages that are clean and safe."

Donna Rowe, a child-care worker from Auburn, said she was pleasantly surprised by the turnout for the rally.

"I thought people were more apathetic," said Rowe, 49, who came with her 14-year-old daughter and husband Tom, who performed at the rally. "It says that people care more about their neighbors than you'd think."

Robert Rovener, a 41-year-old physician from Cumberland, came with his wife and their two pre-school age sons.

"We thought it would be good for our children to be exposed to this and to see what's it like for people to support human rights and equality," he said.

After the rally, thousands of participants marched a couple blocks from the auditorium to the Lewiston Armory. Spilling into the road, the group sang songs

and signed the petitions calling for Raymond's resignation before the bitter cold caused the crowd to disperse.

Several miles away, in a city-owned building next to the Maine Army National Guard Armory, the neo-Nazi meeting at the center of the day's events was small and strangely subdued. Twenty-seven men and five women sat in metal folding chairs, listening attentively to three speakers lecture on the white race, which the speakers claimed is under attack.

About 20 of the spectators came with Jon Fox, delivered by Lewiston police in two vans that picked up the group members at Maine Turnpike Exit 12 in Auburn. The rest were supporters or observers who came on their own. A handful said they were from Maine, with the bulk of the group coming from other New England states.

Police set up 50 folding chairs, tied together in groups of five, so they could not be used as weapons. They also taped heavy cardboard over all of the room's windows, to protect the people inside from broken glass in case objects were thrown at the windows. The meeting went on uninterrupted, as protesters shouted outside.

Several speakers commented on the absence of Lewiston's mayor. "I'd like to thank Mayor Larry Raymond," said Rob Freeman, of Old Lyme, Conn. "I know he says he has two black grandchildren and says that he's not a racist, but that's fine. What he did challenged these people, and I hope he enjoys Florida."

The speakers criticized African immigrants, who they say receive unfair benefits from the government.

"These people are the enemy - make no mistake," said David Stearns of Portland, who is the church's Maine contact. "If they get a chance they will probably slit your throat. . . . These people are not bringing anything good into our community."

While the influx of Somali immigrants sparked the racist group's interests in Maine, the speakers said little about them Saturday. Far more time was spent discussing an international Jewish committee, which the speakers blamed for the rise of Christianity, all wars including World War I and World War II, and the birth of the Soviet Union.

Stearns also blamed Jews for tensions over Somali immigration.

"Bringing in the Somali immigrants was a Jewish plan of divide and conquer," he said. "That's why we are in here and there are demonstrators out there."

Fox said the World Church of the Creator is not based on hatred. "I don't teach my children to hate someone else because of their color, but to love themselves and their race," Fox said.

Fox outlined the tenets of his church, which he said is not based on worship of a deity. It is organized among four principals, which he said were "sound mind, sound body, sound society and sound environment."

The church encourages its members to live in small, single-race communities, and farm their own food. Fox said members are discouraged from abusing drugs, and even avoiding the use of prescription drugs, which he said "are handed out by Jewish doctors."

The racist meeting ended squarely at 3 p.m., when police interrupted Fox's speech and asked him to wind it up. Then the participants who came with Fox were spirited out of the room to a waiting van and were taken back to their cars without the counter-demonstrators' knowledge. Those who came to the meeting on their own waited inside the hall until the demonstration outside dispersed.

No direct effort was made to sign up members, but Stearns said the group now has a foothold in Maine.

"There is no stopping us, so don't bother trying," he said. "Do not get into my face and talk to me about diversity . . . we are not violent people until you get into our face."

Supporters, protesters and curious bystanders started gathering outside the racist meeting shortly after 10 a.m. By noon there were about 40 people, corralled behind concrete barriers along Goddard Road. Robert Hoyt, 30, of Portland, was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct when he tried to block a racist supporter from attending the meeting.

Shortly after 1 p.m., as the meeting inside got under way, the crowd outside swelled to about 450 when a parade of anti-racism protesters marched down Goddard Road. Many carried signs and shouted "Death to Nazis." Some wore black hoods or scarves over their faces. Some banged on 5-gallon buckets as make-shift drums. A few took turns leading the crowd in shouting slogans over a portable loudspeaker.

"Hey, Nazis, you can't hide! We charge you with genocide!"

The protesters represented several groups, including the NorthEastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists and the Progressive Labor Party. Most came from outside Maine. Some suggested that the pro-diversity rally was tainted because officials such as Attorney General G. Steven Rowe participated.

"We will not allow the fascist movement to grow in the U.S.," shouted Cathy Wells of Boston, a member of the Progressive Labor Party, over the loudspeaker.

Anti-racism protesters circled the speakers and repeated their chants. Police in riot gear stood in a solemn line along the armory building and across Goddard Road. Firefighters positioned themselves on a ladder truck, ready to turn a water hose on the crowd if a riot broke out.

It never did. Beneath the constant chanting and occasional shouts, heated but controlled conversations occurred spontaneously between people who sympathized with the World Church of the Creator and those who opposed the group.

Vanessa Williams, 25, of Lewiston told a handful of protesters that she and her friends have had several confrontations with Somalis. She said she's worried about Lewiston's future and the favoritism she feels Somalis are receiving as newcomers to Lewiston.

"Do you really want to dedicate your life to hate?" Vanessa Torres, 21, of Portland, asked Williams.

Williams defended her position and questioned the intentions of the anti-racism protesters. "It's OK to say death to certain people, but if we have a problem with the Somalis moving here, we're at fault," Williams said. "I thought these (anti-racism) people were here against hate, but that's all they're about."

Marc Cyr, 44, of Auburn observed from the sidelines, arms folded. When one protester confronted him about his views, Cyr said his main concern with Somalis coming to Lewiston was the financial impact to the community. Many Somalis have received various kinds of public assistance since arriving in Lewiston.

"When my grandparents came here, they worked. They didn't ask for handouts," Cyr said of his French-Canadian ancestors. The anti-racist protester, who declined to give his name, disputed Cyr's claim that Somalis came to Lewiston to take advantage of the welfare system.

Police informed the protesters when the racist meeting ended and asked them to disburse. Some protesters demanded proof that the neo-Nazis were gone. One man

went with police to check the meeting room. He returned and verified that only a few reporters and photographers remained.

As the crowd walked away, a few were still banging on their buckets.