FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Assyrian American National Federal names Zeena Yonkers, P.h.D Woman of The Year

Zeena Yonkers, born Zeena Tawfik, was a child when her journey around the Middle-East began with her benevolent parents, between Iraq, where she was born, Lebanon and Kuwait, before making the United States her home.

Her unique story of activism began rather early in life, when she sought to reform social injustices to bring balance to communities. A clever onset that has led to an awakening of an enriched life of education and experience, combined with empathy and grace.

Zeena earned her undergraduate degree at the University of Connecticut with a major in Psychology and a minor in Anthropology. Her graduate work was completed at the joint UCLA/ Loyola Marymount program, majoring in Clinical Psychology. But somehow, her career in the Assyrian community has always been in the making all the while she was pursuing her education. As a teen, she started a youth group at her local church, and later set-up a refugee support group to facilitate cross-culture transition.

Within the walls of the Assyrian American National Federation (“A.A.N.F.”), a non-profit humanitarian organization that was originally started in 1933 to respond to the casualties of what became known as the Simmel Massacre, where “an estimated 3,000 Assyrians were massacred,” Zeena’s finger prints are everywhere.

For ten consecutive years, Zeena was the Director of the Youth Initiative Program, where she co-founded the Youth Camp Lamassu, and currently serves on the National Committee of the Youth Excellence Contest. She has also served as the Eastern Regional Director, assisted the president, chaired last year’s convention, and now Zeena holds the second highest executive office seat, the Executive Vice President.
Among her noteworthy professional accomplishments are the publication of thirty-some articles, papers, and poster presentations in various medical journals in the American Psychological Association and Neuropsychiatric Association. Some of Dr. Yonkers’ publications and presentations include “Momentary Pain and Coping in Temporomandibular Disorder Pain,” “Youth and Spirituality,” “The Relation of Criminal Justice and Minority Status to Adolescent Reporting of Substance Use,” “A Comparison of Problem Gambling and Non-Problem Gambling, Youth Seeking Treatment for Marijuana Abuse,” and “Clock Drawing in Schizophrenia. A Qualitative Analysis.”

Currently, she is a researcher and teaches graduate courses in the field of Behavioral Science at the University of Connecticut Health Center. She is also co-authoring two manuals “Prevalence of Depression During Pregnancy and The Postpartum,” and “The Effects of Lithium on Cognition in Bipolar Disorder,” currently in press.

She appreciates her ancestor’s journey to the new world while admiring their dedication to protecting one another and preserving their culture and history. Her grandfather, Zackaria BetBabaZaya, migrated with his family as a small child from Northern Iraq to the Republic of Georgia and forced back out of there to Northern Iraq where he was a decorated Assyrian Levy and protected his people. Her grandmother Maria Issa Petrous was born into a religious family from the line of Mar Yousip. Her healing abilities handed down to her enabled her to take in people with ailments and cure them. Her grandparent’s combination of soldier and healer and parent’s generosity and love is imprinted in her.

Together with husband Dr. Paul C. Yonkers, Zeena is also busy raising two sons, Josef Antonious and Tomas Constantine where they have made Farmington, Connecticut their home.

This year at the 76th Annual Assyrian American National Convention in Chicago, Dr. Yonkers was honored with one of the most prestigious awards in the Assyrian community ~ “Assyrian Woman of The Year.”

The Assyrian Medical Society shares in congratulating Dr. Zeena Yonkers, also the Director of the Assyrian Medical Society in the East Coast, for her accomplishments.

Dr. Zeena Yonkers has set a marker in the history of Assyrian feminism, an inspiration to her peers, a celebrated doctor, and a gifted mother ~ congratulations!

~ Helen Talia, MBA, CPA
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