



ROAD WARRIORS CELEBRATE

Longtime bus drivers
give speeches
at Gold Coast Transit's
40th anniversary party.
LOCAL, 1B

SIMI VALLEY/MOORPARK | THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2013

VENTURA COUNTY STAR

PENTAGON TO DISCUSS DROPPING SOME DANGER PAY: NATION, 7A

\$1.00

Pooling resources to help kids



Johanna Ricks plays in the pool with children Shayla (left) and Clara during Project Mañana's fundraiser at a private residence in Simi Valley.

Ventura surgery lawsuit settled

■ Trial was set for this week; terms secret

By Tom Kiskam
tkiskam@star.com
805-437-0255

A lawsuit has been settled involving a neurosurgeon who was sued by more than 20 former patients in separate cases covering his 17 months performing surgery in Ventura, according to court records.

Dr. Aria Omar Sabit was accused of telling Charles Shinn, of Ventura, that he needed a minimally invasive procedure and then performing a different, more involved procedure. The suit alleged the operation failed, causing Shinn to have a second surgery and leaving him disabled. Sabit denied the allegations.

Defendants in the original suit included Sabit; his former employer, Dr. Moustapha Abou-Samra;

See SUIT, 2B

A month to pray and fast

■ Observation of Ramadan



Brian Berman (center), of Project Mañana, said a \$30 donation at the fundraiser will yield 30 nutritious meals for children in need.

■ Simi event yields 1,646 meals for Dominican Republic's needy

By Robyn Plans
Special to The Star

At a recent event in Simi Valley for the nonprofit Project Mañana, enough supporters

attended to raise funds to provide 1,646 meals to needy children in the Dominican Republic, according to Brian Berman, organization founder and president.

Each \$30 donation at the fundraiser will yield 30 nutritious meals for children in the Dominican Republic, Berman said. In addition, two children became sponsored at the event, while guests were treated to a dinner, a cool-down in the pool and music by the JD Casey Band.

The nonprofit works in the Dominican Republic to better "the lives of impoverished children, their families and communities through nutrition, education, and guidance," according to its website.

People help the organization in several ways, including through

donations and child sponsorship. Sponsors help pay for a child's basic needs, including nutrition and education. Berman, of Simi Valley, first went to the Dominican Republic in 2007 on a short-term mission trip, which changed his

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LOCAL

RAMADAN from 1B

this holy period.

"Ramadan is the month of mercy and forgiveness. We are remembering the starving people — poor people who cannot afford to buy food," Ismail said. "Whatever a person is doing has great reward, even more than in a regular month."

He said the beginning

of the month emphasizes mercy, the middle of the month focuses on forgiveness and the end of month celebrates freedom.

"You are setting the person free from going to hellfire because of their sins because they did prayers or peace," Ismail said.

To help deal with the physical effects of the long fast, people need to prepare by drinking and eating enough to see them

through the day. The fast ends after sundown traditionally with the eating of dates.

"This is how the Prophet Muhammad would break fasting. This is the correct way. We don't shrink our stomachs and drink all of sudden after 14 or 15 hours," Ismail said. "The dates give you energy. It's a natural sugar from a blessed fruit. We also drink water. It's a very simple start of our sunset

prayer. After sunset, the prayer continues. The meal gives the stomach a chance to understand food will be coming."

Observing Ramadan is one of the five pillars of the Muslim faith, a religion that emphasizes peace and charity, Ismail said.

"Our religion is a religion of peace. It is not a religion of violence. Our religion never told us to attack people or to kill innocent people or do anything

PROJECT from 1B

life. He returned to California, gave up his corporate job and went back to the Dominican Republic to live. He met his wife, Nebraska, while he was there.

He returned to Simi Valley in 2009 and started Project Mañana. It became a nonprofit the following year. There are now 225 children in the program. They receive schooling, uniforms, backpacks, school supplies, nutritious meals and attendance at summer camps.

"We are so pleased with the turnout for our Summer Splash event. It's amazing to see how an afternoon gathering by the pool can provide so many meals to needy children in my country," said Nebraska Berman, executive director of Project Mañana.

Project Mañana has a full team of about 15 people in the Dominican Republic. Berman and his wife head the organization as volunteers and as a labor of love.

"This year, we started working with the prisons," he said. "We are the only organization with the green light to go into the prisons to rehabilitate their prisoners."

The group has 27 people from all over the United States convening in the Dominican Republic this summer to do "hands-on work," Berman said.

"They will be doing painting, construction, feeding children, story time, arts and crafts," he said. "What separates



Brian Berman, president and founder of Project Mañana, gives T-shirts to actor Taj Mowry and Josh Heller, both child sponsors, during the organization's Simi Valley fundraiser.

CARMEN SMYTH/
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Project Mañana from other organizations is we try to build real relationships. We want people to visit their sponsored child. We've had 40 percent of our child sponsors come to the Dominican to meet their kids. That's a magical moment."

Taj Mowry, who stars in ABC Family's "Baby Daddy," hopes he can meet his sponsored child one day soon.

Mowry, who grew up in Agoura Hills, met Berman when Berman was his Bible study leader. As soon as Berman mentioned the idea for Project Mañana, Mowry asked how he could get involved. Mowry became the organization's very sponsor.

"I purposely picked a child that was not smiling in the photo, so the next photo I got, he had the biggest smile on his face," Mowry said. "He was maybe 5 at the time. He sends me Christmas cards and drawings. It makes my day. I try to tweet about it as much as possible, too, so people will give even a dollar. That doesn't do much here, but it makes a difference there."

Event host Ed Lopez,

who also sponsors a child, opened his home to the fundraiser because he said, "I believe in what Brian is doing. It's for the kids."

Even the members of the JD Casey Band who played at the fundraiser were involved in the cause. Band leader Scott Jeffers designed the Project Mañana logo.

"Brian and I went to church together, and I went to the Dominican the first time with him," Jeffers said. "It's just grown out of that."

Project Mañana recently launched Project Pass It On.

"The idea is to pass on something and instead, send that money to sponsor or to feed a child. So instead of buying a \$5 coffee, for example, that \$5 purchases five meals in the Dominican Republic," Berman said. "It's \$1 for a nutritious meal of chicken, rice and beans. We have created a bridge for average normal people to do extraordinary things. That's what Project Mañana does."

On the Net:
<http://www.projectmanana.org>

SUIT from 1B

and Community Memorial Hospital, where the surgeries took place. Steven Glickman, Shinn's attorney, said Community Memorial settled first, followed by Sabit and then Abou-Samra.

The trial had been scheduled to start this week and would have been the first trial emanating from a slew of litigation involving Sabit's operations. Glickman declined to comment, saying all the settlements were covered by con-

TRANSIT from 1B

at its present Oxnard facility. In 2007, it was named Gold Coast Transit in part to distinguish it from a dozen other transit agencies in the nation named SCAT.

Today, Gold Coast is the county's largest public bus agency, with an annual budget of more than \$20 million, a fleet of 54 natural gas-fueled buses on 19 routes, and 165 employees. Ridership in fiscal year 2011-12 was 3.5 million, a 3.6 percent increase over the prior fiscal year. Gold Coast also provides paratransit service.

General Manager Steve Brown told an outdoors