

Local News

AWARENESS / BRINGING THE WORLD HOME

Event puts focus on refugees' lives

8,000 in Rochester have fled their homeland

By **Laura Horihan**
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About 80 Rochester residents enjoyed the morning sun as they walked around Silver Lake on Saturday as part of the Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association's first annual Walk Around the World event to commemorate World Refugee Day.

IMAA program manager Courtney Lawson helped organize the walk, meant to raise awareness about the 8,000 refugees in Rochester and to

raise money to help them integrate into the community.

Ponlœu Chim of Rochester, originally from Cambodia, helped set up prior to the walk.

"It's very important for the community to know that refugees come here and contribute to society," Chim said.

She came to the U.S. 18 years ago and has worked as a social worker for IMAA for the past 12 years.

"So many have come here



Chim



Osman

and worked so hard to get into school," Chim said. "Many give all of their heart and energy to the community."

Seeing the array of walkers meant a lot to Ahmed Osman of Rochester, who came to the U.S. as a refugee from Somalia 24 years ago.

"The walk is a true statement of our mission at IMAA, but it also gives the local community a chance to interact and learn more about what these refugees have experienced," Osman said.

Osman helps recruit and train refugees for jobs in the health industry and helps new arrivals find jobs.

Walkers were separated into groups, and each group was paired with a refugee.

Walkers were invited to learn about the different cultures, but the event also focused on why refugees are here and what their experiences — both good and bad — have been since arriving in the states.

Osman said Rochester has welcomed refugees, but he'd like there to be a stronger connection.

"We already have that in schools and work places, why not communitywide?" Osman



Scott Jacobson, sjacobson@postbulletin.com

Participants in the Walk Around the World event Saturday at Silver Lake Park raise awareness about the refugees who live in Rochester.

said. "One day we can be one community. That's what we're aiming for."

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