

Graduates from Syria and Saudi Arabia Inspire Moroccan Weavers

Ain Leuh, Morocco: In a unusual and inspiring example of inter-Arab collaboration, two students at Georgetown University - one from Syria and the other from Saudi Arabia - are helping women weavers in the Atlas Mountains to strengthen their business and open up new markets.



Khadija shows off the cooperative's newly purchased basting machine

[Benan Grams](#) and [Mohammed Alshubrumi](#) are volunteering as Peace Fellows at the Ain Leuh cooperative - a group of 17 skilled weavers whose tapestries and carpets draw on ancient Berber culture. This summer, The Advocacy Project (AP) has [deployed 12 Fellows](#) from seven universities to work in seven countries.

The two Arabic-speaking Fellows in Morocco have already won friends and made their mark. Working with money raised by Mohammed in Saudi Arabia and by students at Pyle Middle School in Washington, they have installed a new sewing machine, purchased dyeing pots, and put up new signs along the road to attract visitors. The two Fellows have even [confronted Moroccan tour guides](#) who bring tourists to Ain Leuh and sell cooperative products for exorbitantly high prices without the weavers knowing.

As Benan explained [on her blog](#), these initiatives will all improve the efficiency of the cooperative and increase profits. The sewing machine will enable the weavers to finish small items like purses and scarves, instead of outsourcing to workers in other villages. Benan writes: "Now our ladies can baste their own products. No more waiting, no more dependence on others, no more devaluation of very valuable products!"



The Girl Up chapter at Pyle Middle School put on a bake sale to raise funds for the Ain Leuh cooperative

The dyeing pots will ensure that the larger carpets absorb the rich dyes in an even manner, while the new signs will spread the word about Ain Leuh's textiles in the region. Mohammed and Benan are also updating an online catalog that lists the cooperative's products and artists.



Benan, from Syria, helped the cooperative run a booth at Ain Leuh's annual Cherry Festival

Benan has special praise for the energetic students at Pyle who worked under the auspices of Girl Up and raised \$400 for the sewing machine at a bake sale: "When I told the weavers about the source of money not only were they touched but were also very impressed by the determination and great organization of our little friends." Two years ago, Anna McGuire, one of the Pyle students, raised \$600 to buy sewing machines for women in the Congo.

The Ain Leuh cooperative is a relatively new AP partner, and last year's Peace Fellow, [Laura McAdams](#), focused on telling the story. She profiled the weavers, made videos, offered IT training, and helped the weavers produce panels for a [spectacular quilt](#) which is currently on display at Kean University. The panels carry ancient Berber motifs, predating the arrival of the Arabs to Morocco.

This year's team - Mohammed and Benan - are the first Saudi and Syrian volunteers to sign up for AP's fellowship program since it started in 2003. The novelty of a Saudi Arabian man working in a Moroccan women's cooperative is also not lost on Mohammed, and [his blogs](#) about women in the Arab world have attracted several comments.



Mohammed (right) has worked hard to raise money for the cooperative

With their short-term goals almost achieved, the two Fellows will now focus on the long-term challenge of finding new markets for the cooperative. The weavers would also like to refurbish two floors in their workshop, which are currently unusable during the winter. This would cost around \$5,000, and AP has posted a special page for donations. Please give generously!

- [Watch the Videos](#)
- [View the Amizigh Quilt](#)
- [Read Benan's Blogs](#)
- [Read Mohammed's Blogs.](#)