

## **Incredible teamwork helps thousands of Dearborn residents in escaping war-torn Lebanon**

**DEARBORN**, Mich. – An incredible display of teamwork – involving local, state and national officials, local and international assistance agencies, and the U.S. military – has helped thousands of current and former Dearborn residents to escape war-torn Lebanon since fighting began there on July 12.

Dearborn Mayor Michael A. Guido praised the efforts of the many groups and individuals involved, including the key role played by his own citizen liaison, Joe Beydoun, himself a native of Lebanon.

“These past weeks have seen many of our citizens, whether past or present, suddenly thrust into harm’s way,” said Mayor Guido. “Through cooperation, hard work and a commitment to helping people in their time of greatest need, they are now out of the war zone and back here safe in Dearborn. It makes me very proud and grateful.”

When the conflict broke out on July 12, it was estimated that about 25,000 U.S. citizens were in Lebanon. Of that number, an estimated 8,000 were residents of Dearborn.

Officials at the U.S. embassy in Lebanon and at the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C., organized plans to help U.S. citizens leave the country. Mayor Guido and Beydoun quickly made contact with them, and over the past few weeks have helped directly facilitate the departure of about 4,000 current or former Dearborn residents.

The City of Dearborn also worked with the staff of Dearborn Heights Mayor Daniel Paletko to help residents of Dearborn Heights that needed help to get out of Lebanon, and assisted residents of other area communities as well.

“We invited people in here in Dearborn to let us know about loved ones who were in Lebanon, and were unable to get out on their own,” Beydoun explained. “We got many calls as well from our citizens who were actually *in* Lebanon, too. We were able to pass their names and other key information to the right people at the State Department and other agencies. This helped get them into the system, and get them scheduled for departures as soon as possible.”

Beydoun praised Mayor Guido for giving his strong support to the work, adding that “the Mayor’s many contacts in Washington made all the difference in getting this job done. Through him, we were able to get a direct link to the right decision makers, and work with them to get our people home.”

He also commended the efforts of the State Department and other agencies involved, saying that “the work to bring our people home was extremely well organized and well done.”

Citizens who were helped in leaving Lebanon were taken from Beirut to Cyprus via ship, and from Cyprus to the United States. Beydoun maintained contact with officials who dealt with the people who arrived at receiving centers in Baltimore, Philadelphia and New Jersey.

Additionally, some of those who left Lebanon were former Dearborn residents who had returned to their native country in the past, intending to stay, but lost everything when the war began and now have chosen to return to U.S.

Beydoun and the Mayor worked with those who do not have family or friends in the city now, gaining the assistance of Governor Jennifer Granholm's office, the Michigan Department of Human Services, ACCESS and the Arab American Chaldean Council (AACC) to meet emergency food and shelter needs.

Now those individuals and families are being helped in their efforts to find permanent housing.

In response to all of this, Mayor Guido and Beydoun have received letters and emails of thanks from many who received help.

"We were treated with every professional courtesy and respect and everyone made us feel we're very important and the only thing that mattered at the time was our safety and our safe return back home," wrote Dearborn resident Michael A. Makki.

Makki praised the work of Mayor Guido and his staff, U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Jeffrey D. Feltman and his staff, and the U.S. Marines who escorted his family on the ship ride to Cyprus.

"The Marines took excellent care of us and they were so courteous to our children that they made them feel at ease," Makki wrote, noting that the Marines even babysat the children while tired parents rested after their ordeal. "I am extremely proud to be an American."

"As we got on the ship the Navy and Marines that has just risked their lives rescuing us treated my family and I better than I have been treated at a five star hotel," wrote Dearborn resident Dave Abdallah. "I am grateful to be living in a country that looks out for its citizens like they did."

Mayor Guido singled out the following agencies and groups for their assistance to his office during the crisis:

- The State Department, and its Task Force for Lebanon, which directly handled the assistance given to U.S. citizens leaving the country, and the staff of the department's inter-governmental affairs area.
- Governor Jennifer Granholm and the staff of the Governor's Office.
- Ambassador Feltman and his staff at the U.S. embassy in Beirut, particularly those in the Consular section.
- Former U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Vincent Battle, who volunteered to help in the effort to bring U.S. citizens home.
- The Michigan Department of Human Services.
- ACCESS.
- AACC.
- The International Red Cross.
- The government of Lebanon.
- International Social Services, an agency which provided important assistance at the receiving centers in the U.S.
- The U.S. Marine Corps.

Some U.S. citizens, including some Dearborn residents, remain in Lebanon. Some have been unable to reach the areas where official departures are taking place.

Others have chosen to remain in Lebanon for the moment, for reasons such as staying with a loved one who is not a U.S. citizen, to help them make arrangements to leave the country.

“We’re continuing to do everything we can to help the families of our citizens who are still in Lebanon, including keeping in touch with the Red Cross,” Beydoun said.