

Section 2

*A*rab Americans: Making a Difference

Arab Americans: Making a Difference

There are about 3 million Arab Americans, and as a community, we've been demonstrating our loyalty, inventiveness, and courage on behalf of the United States for over 100 years. Here are just a few of the more famous ones - people you may know!

You talk about courage...

How about America's and the *world's* first jet ace? He was the Korean War hero, U.S. Air Force **Col. James Jabara**. In World War II, Army officers like **Maj. Gen. Fred Safay** fought alongside Gen. Patton, and **Brig. Gen. Elias Stevens** served on Gen. Eisenhower's staff. And in 1944, one of our Navy's ships, the destroyer escort USS *Naifeh*, was named in honor of an Arab American hero - Navy **Lt. Alfred Naifeh** of Oklahoma. More recently, West Point graduate and 4-star **Gen. George Joulwan** commanded both the U.S. and NATO forces in Europe.



Pat Danner
Congresswoman
from Missouri

Some of us work in our nation's capital, like 20-year veteran Congressman **Nick Joe Rahall II** of West Virginia, and Congresswoman

Pat Danner (Missouri), Congressmen **Ray LaHood** (Illinois) and **John Baldacci** (Maine), and new Congressmen **John E. Sununu** (New Hampshire) and **Chris John** (Louisiana). There's also U.S. Senator **Spencer Abraham** of Michigan. Today, the first Arab American ever appointed to a U.S. Cabinet position is the Secretary of Health and Human Services, **Donna Shalala**.



Donna Shalala
Secretary of
Health and Human
Services

On TV, one of CNN's political commentators is the former White House Chief of Staff and Governor of New Hampshire, **John Sununu**. America's longest-serving White House Chief of Protocol was Ambassador **Selwa Roosevelt Thomas A. Nassif**, her assistant, also served as U.S. Ambassador to Morocco. A special Presidential envoy was the late Ambassador **Philip Habib**. A 50-year veteran with United Press International is the dean of the White House press corps - feisty **Helen Thomas**, who's covered eight presidents since 1961.

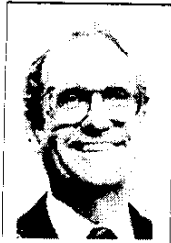


John Sununu
Former New
Hampshire
Governor and
White House
Chief of Staff

Others who have served in high elective office include former U.S. Senate Majority Leader **George Mitchell** (D-ME), former U.S. Senators **James Abourezk** and **James Abdnor**, both of South Dakota; former Congressional members **Mary Rose Oakar** of Ohio, **George Kasem** of California, **Abraham Kazen, Jr.** of Texas, and **Toby Moffett**



Helen Thomas
Dean of the White
House Press Corps



George Mitchell
Former Senate
Majority Leader

of Connecticut. **Victor Atiyeh** was the popular governor of Oregon.

Arab Americans are grocers and governors, physicians and farmers, Indy 500 champs and taxicab drivers, financiers and factory workers, bakers and bankers, salesmen and senators, TV stars and TV repairmen, teachers and preachers, Heisman Trophy-winning quarterbacks and neighborhood sandlot heroes. Name it, and an Arab American has probably done it.

For example, the Heisman Trophy-winner who threw the “miracle touchdown” pass for Boston College some years back was **Doug Flutie**. He was the first American college quarterback to pass for 10,000 yards. Today, he’s a superstar in the Canadian Football League. And Flutie is no fluke! There’s also NFL quarterback **Jeff George** and NFL coach **Rich Kotite**. Don’t forget former linebacker for the Chicago Bears and NFL Hall-of-Famer, **Bill George**, or former Cleveland Brown **Abe Gibran**. The former owner of the Miami Dolphins was **Joe Robbie**.



Doug Flutie
Heisman Trophy
Winner

In pro basketball, there’s **Rony Seikaly** of the Orlando Magic. In college basketball, UCLA’s fiery coach, **Jim Harrick**, took his team to the NCAA playoffs eight years in a row, winning the national championship in 1995. And the late **George Maloof, Sr.** owned basketball’s Houston Rockets. Major League baseball player **Joe Lehou**d played with the Boston Red Sox.

And **Fred Saigh** once owned baseball’s St. Louis Cardinals.

In auto racing, **Bobby Rahal** won the Indy 500 in 1986, later becoming the all time earnings champ among Indy car racers. The founder of the Professional Bowlers Association is **Eddie Elias**. In the ring, **Petey Sarron** won the world featherweight championship in 1936-1937; while **Zuhair “Steve” Mansour** was weightlifting’s Grandmaster of the World in 1990. And a three-time U.S. national chess champion is Seattle’s **Yassir Seirawan**.



Bobby Rahal
Race Car
Champion

Among America’s activists, can you think of two people who have saved more lives than the founder of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), **Candy Lightner**, and America’s – and probably the *world’s* – foremost consumer advocate, **Ralph Nader**? Back in 1960, **Ralph Johns**, a key white participant in the civil rights movement, encouraged the famous Woolworth ‘sit-in’ at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Getting down to business: the founder of an international, billion-dollar engineering firm, Jacobs Engineering Group, is **Dr. Joseph Jacobs**. A former chemist with dozens of patents became Armand Hammer’s successor as Chairman of the Board, President and Chief Executive Officer of Occidental Petroleum – **Dr. Ray Irani**. **Najeeb Halaby**, former head of the Federal Aeronautics Authority, was CEO of Pan-American Airlines. After trotting the globe



Rony Seikaly
NBA Basketball
Star

for Ford Motor Company, solving problems and directing new ventures, **Jacques Nasser** is now President of Ford Automotive Operations (all world-wide car, truck and components operations combined in one entity). **John Mack**, president of one of America's largest investment banking firms, Morgan Stanley Group, built it into a global powerhouse - which merged with Dean Witter to form the world's biggest securities company. An internationally respected financial expert and economic forecaster is **Dr. Ray Jallow**. **Paul Orfalea** founded the world's biggest international chain of copying service stores, Kinko's; while **Waleed** and **Malik Ali** founded MPI, the world's largest home-video distributor of documentaries.

Entrepreneur **Tony Ismail** founded the Alamo Flag Company in Dallas and built it into the largest retailer of flags and related items in the U.S. today. Wood-working furniture maker **Sam Maloof**, whose quality pieces are in demand, has had many of his creations exhibited in museums.

Turning to law, the Texas lawyer who won the biggest settlement in U.S. history, on behalf of Pennzoil (\$10 billion dollars!), is one of this country's most successful attorneys, **Joseph D. Jamail**. In the famous "zoot suit" trial of the 1940's, **George Shibley** defended unjustly-accused Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles.

In entertainment

Canadian-born singer-songwriter **Paul Anka** became one of America's first pop teen idols. The late ukelele plucking, falsetto-singing **Herbert Khaury** became famous as



Paul Anka
Singer and
Songwriter

"**Tiny Tim**." And in the world of rock, there was the late, legendary **Frank Zappa**. On the West Coast, **Dick Dale** was the "King of the Surf Guitar." One of today's stars is singer-dancer **Paula Abdul**. And the first teenage singer ever to have her first two singles both hit Number One is **Tiffany**.

Speaking of Music, two of America's landmark shows on radio were created by two Arab-Americans, **Don Bustany** and yours truly - "American Top 40" and "American Country Countdown." Recently, I added "Casey's Top 40", "Casey's Countdown" and "Casey's Hot 20."

On Broadway, playwright **Fred Saidy** wrote two classics, *Finnian's Rainbow* and *Bloomer Girl*. Opera prima donna **Rosalind Elias** hit the high notes at the Met. And, for avant-garde "Dancer of the Year" in 1992, *The New York Times* picked a 20-year Broadway veteran with the Paul Taylor Company; he's **Elie Chaib**.

Turning to television, **Lucie Salhany** became the first woman to head a television network, as chair of Fox Broadcasting CO., then of United Paramount Network. Among TV directors, two Arab Americans have each helmed over 300 episodes for the networks. **Asaad Kelada** has done numerous pilots for series like "Family Ties" and episodes of "The Facts of Life", "Who's the Boss?", "WKRP in Cincinnati", etc. After directing Broadway hits like "Sweet Charity", "Mame" and "The Unsinkable Molly Brown", **John Bowab** switched to TV and has directed "Soap," "Benson", "Bosom Buddies", "The Facts of



Lucie Salhany
First Woman to
head a TV
network

Life”, and the last season and a half of “The Cosby Show.”

SUPER-FACT

Did you know that the highest-rated episode in television history was the last episode of “M*A*S*H”? And who played the role of not-so-crazy Corporal Klinger for its entire 11-year run? A talented Arab American from Toledo, Ohio, Jamie Farr.



Jamie Farr
Corporal Klinger
on “M*A*S*H”

On NBC-TV. “Saturday Night Live’s” bandleader for many years was guitarist G.E. Smith. (His family’s Lebanese name, Haddad, means ‘blacksmith’!)



Danny Thomas
Comedian, Actor,
Humanitarian

The best known Lebanese in America was also the founder of St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital – the late, great comedian and actor **Danny Thomas**. His son is a television and film producer and multi-E Emmy winner for “The Golden Girls” and other TV shows -**Tony Thomas**. Danny’s daughter is Emmy Award-winning **Marlo Thomas**, the first actress ever to play a single, independent young woman living apart from her parents in a TV series, “That Girl.”

The leading man who starred in the movie “Flashdance” was Michael Nouri, later seen in TV’s “Love and War” sitcom. Tony Shalhoub and Amy Yasbeck appeared in the hit sitcom



Marlo Thomas
Award-winning
Actress

“Wings” – the first time two Arab-Americans have been featured in the same TV series. Amy also played Maid Marian in Mel Brooks’ film “Robin Hood: Men in Tights”; while Tony co-starred in the 1996 film comedy “The Big Night”. Crusty but soft-hearted Mel in TV’s “Alice” was portrayed by the late **Vic Tayback**. One of the co-stars of the series “Empty Nest” was **Kristy McNichol**. A star of TV’s “Head of the Class” was once picked by People magazine as one of the “50 most beautiful people in the U.S.” – **Khrystyne Haje**.



Vic Tayback
Mel on “Alice”

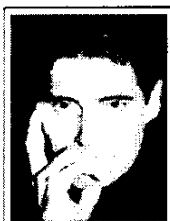
Two other fine movie and television actors who also starred in popular TV dramas are **James Stacy**, who played the title role in “Laramie”, and **Michael Ansara**, who played Cochise in “Broken Arrow.”

An award-winning comic actress from San Diego played a fun-loving nun in the “Sister Act” films, **Kathy Najimy**. Currently she Co stars as Olive, a Lebanese-American, in NBC-TV’s “Veronica’s Closet” with Kristie Alley. Lovely **Salma Hayek** has also lit up the big screen (in “Fools Rush In”) and the small screen (in cable-TV’s movie, “The Hunchback”, as the gypsy, Esmeralda).



Kathy Najimy
Award-winning
Actress-
Comedian
 (“Sister Act”)

The former head of Carolco Pictures, handling the Rocky, Rambo and Terminator films, was “billion dollar producer”, **Mario Kassar**. The producer of the epics “The Message: The Story of Islam” (a biography of the Prophet Mohammed) and “Lion of



Michael Nouri
Actor
("Flashdance" and
"Love & War")

the Desert", not to mention all the blockbuster "Halloween" chillers, is **Moustapha Akkad**.

The director of Jim Carrey's loony comedy hits "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective" and "Liar Liar", as well as Eddie Murphy's "The Nutty Professor", is **Tom Shadyac**. (He also co-wrote "Ace Ventura".)

One of show business' legendary talent managers was **George "Bullets" Durgom**, who, through the years, managed Jackie Gleason, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Marilyn Monroe, to mention a few. Two of today's top recording artists have husband-managers of Syrian descent: **Emilio Estefan** manages and produces wife Gloria, while **Rene Angelil** manages his discovery, wife Celine Dion. The cinematographer who designed Cinemobile - the first customized van for filming on location - while working on the TV series "I Spy" was **Fouad Said**. For this achievement, he received a Technical Academy Award in 1970.

Among other Oscar winners: Best Actor for the movie "Amadeus" - **F. Murray Abraham**. Winner for Best Screenplay Adapted from Another Medium - his novel, "The Exorcist" - **William Peter Blatty**. The first woman to receive an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay - for "Thelma and Louise" - **Callie Khouri**. For Best Song - "Last Dance" from "Thank God, It's Friday" - composer **Paul Jabara**. And set decorator **Emile Kuri**, nominated



Spencer Abraham
U.S. Senator from
Michigan

eight times for films like "Mary Poppins", won the Oscar twice - for "The Heiress" and Disney's "20,000 Leagues under the Sea".

In the world of fashion, the prestigious CFDA Menswear Designer of the Year Award for 1990 and 1991 went to Arab-American **Joseph Abboud** of New York. He's the only designer to win the award two years in a row.

Staying with apparel a moment, **J.M. Haggar** of Haggar Slacks manufactures more men's slacks than anyone in the world. In addition, **Farah Brothers** manufactures men's and women's slacks; and **Maloo Brothers** manufactured Mod-O-Day women's dresses.

For an inspiring success story, try that of writer-lecturer on business and success, **Nido Qubein!** When he came to the United States as a teenager, he could barely speak English. He went on to become president of the National Speakers' Association and the youngest member inducted into the International Speakers' Hall of Fame.

In education, **Jack Shaheen**, Emeritus Professor of Mass Communications at Southern Illinois University, and author of books like *The TV Arab*, is CBS News' consultant for the Middle East. Columbia professor **Edward Said** is a well-known literary and social critic, as well as a respected music reviewer, whose column appears in *The Nation*. For many years, **David Adamany** was the President of Wayne State University in Detroit.



Edward Said
Literature and
Music Critic and
Author

The 1990 Pulitzer Prize for biography (*Jackson Pollack. An American Saga*) went to the author of three other national bestsellers as well – writer - publisher **Steven Naifeh** of South Carolina.

In science and medicine, one of America's most famous pioneers is Houston heart surgeon, **Dr. Michael DeBakey**, who invented the heart pump. Today he's Chancellor of Baylor University's College of Medicine. The winner of the 1990 Nobel Prize for Chemistry is Harvard's **Dr. Elias Corey**. Geologist **George A. Doumani's** explorations helped prove the theory of continental drift; he has a mountain peak named after him in Antarctica. Another American geologist, **Farouk el-Baz**, born in Egypt, helped plan all the Apollo moon landings and later pioneered the use of space photography to study the Earth.

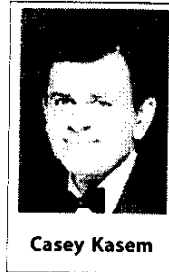
Finally, the courageous astronauts who lost their lives aboard the space shuttle *Challenger* included several racial and ethnic groups: African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic-American, Anglo-American, Jewish-American – and Arab-American: schoolteacher, **Christa McAuliffe**.

We've all heard this quote before: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country"...a famous quote by an Irish American President – John F Kennedy – that inspired an entire generation.

These words were first written by, among others, the Arab-American author of *The Prophet*, **Kahlil Gibran**. And that sentiment, so beautifully expressed by Gibran more than 70 years ago, has inspired Ameri-

cans of *all* heritages.

WE ARAB AMERICANS AND OUR FAMILIES ARE PROUD OF OUR HERITAGE AND PROUD TO BE AMERICANS.



Casey Kasem

It's this pride that keeps us all asking, "What can we do for our country? the good old U.S.A."

Arab American Institute Foundation
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The Arab American Institute Foundation sponsors and supports programs that promote awareness of Arab American contributions to life in the United States. AAIF priorities include research and education on Arab American demographics, cultural heritage and leadership development. The foundation also supported activities that encourage exchange between Americans and counterparts in the Arab world, particularly in the area of democracy training.

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