



WEST BANK: FIRST FEMALE MUNICIPAL MANAGER APPOINTED



Suhad Awawdeh is an energetic young woman who is helping her culturally traditional community to change and grow. This twenty-six year-old computer engineer, wife and mother impressed Idna Mayor Jamal Tmaizi with her competence and poise while working as the community's Municipal Computer Manager. When Mayor Tmaizi was searching for a new Municipal Manager for Idna, he selected Awawdeh, the first and youngest female manager that has ever held such a post.

Mayor Tmaizi anticipated that the community might be surprised by the appointment of a young woman from outside Idna to the post. Awawdeh, surprised but exhilarated by the job offer, also wondered how the community might react. While some did express concern, the mayor stood by the decision. The ground breaking nature of Awawdeh's selection becomes clear when one realizes that she is the first woman appointee to any of the 303 local municipal and village councils in the West Bank.

A community support grant from the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative led Mayor Tmaizi to press forward with promoting women leaders. In May 2009, the Idna Municipality renovated and furnished its municipal multi-functional hall through an in-kind Middle East Partnership Initiative award administered by Creative Associates. The renovation project, spearheaded by Amal Abu Asaad, impressed and inspired Idna's mayor. "After I

experienced the engagement of female members of the community and specifically Amal Abu Asaad's bringing in the Creative award, it helped change my point of view towards female leaders," said Mayor Tmaizi. The new building is being used by local leaders to conduct meetings and engage citizens in town halls.

Located just west of Hebron city, Idna has a population of some 22,000. It's now been over four months since Awawdeh officially took up her role as Municipal Manager. She also continues her work at the municipal computer center. Awawdeh says she is working hard to live up to the mayor's expectations and adds that she likes the job because it gets her out into the community to discuss their needs, thoughts and problems.

Awawdeh explains that she was encouraged by her father, also an engineer, to participate in community activities, to study, obtain a university degree and to travel. Awawdeh believes that every woman, even if they have not had such advantages, has leadership attributes but they have to be developed. "I have noticed that girls and women always see issues from a different dimension than men," she said. "Women have new ideas to develop the town and care more about public services than men. Also, women try to always demonstrate their abilities and skills because it is a male dominated society and so they must make double the effort and work hard to yield positive results."

Awawdeh's future plans include applying to graduate school to obtain her master's degree. For now, however, a cheerful Awawdeh on her way back from accompanying the mayor on an official meeting says, "I will try my best to demonstrate my abilities to serve in this position."

The Creative Associates in-kind award was funded by the U.S. State Department's MEPI Community Leadership Empowerment Program.

- Shahnaz Jubran, Program Officer
Community Leadership Empowerment Program