

'Ishmael & Isaac' forge alliance

As world leaders struggle to find remedies for the Middle East conflict, a group of local Palestinians and Jews have forged an unprecedented alliance.

Calling themselves Ishmael & Isaac, the group's goals include raising funds for the innocent victims of the violence between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Earlier this month, Ishmael & Isaac's inaugural event drew more than 600 people to the InterContinental Hotel, raising about \$100,000 for a pediatric unit at a Palestinian hospital and an Israeli ambulance service.

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Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, the group does not intend to express a position on any future peace plans.

Instead, Ishmael & Isaac will focus its efforts on building bridges and healing wounds – primarily by recognizing and aiding the suffering of the many Jews and Palestinians who have been impacted by terrorism and warfare in the Middle East.

Ishmael & Isaac's founders include David Goldberg, vice president of the Ohio Savings Bank and a leader of Northeast

Ohio's Jewish community; Khalid Bahhur, a Palestinian native who serves as the commissioner of Burke Lakefront Airport; Samir Muhammed, chief deputy of the Cuyahoga County Recorder's office; and Anita Gray.

The group's name is a Biblical reference to the sons of Abraham, who played key roles in the founding of both the Islamic and Jewish religions.

"The Ishmael & Isaac project is very simple," Anita Gray explains. "We've got a bunch

of good people who are helping other good people in a far-off land." Gray, who has visited the Middle East on numerous occasions, notes that group members view their participation as a labor of love. "We believe that we can impact the lives of others. We feel that if Jews and Palestinians can work together here, then there may be hope for peace in the Middle East."

The Ishmael & Isaac organizers hope that their efforts will inspire the Jewish and Palestinian populations in other communities to form similar dialogue groups.

Individuals who would like to learn more about Ishmael & Isaac or would like a hand in shaping the group's future are welcome to attend an open meeting tonight (June 17) at 6 p.m. in the English Oak Room in Tower City Center. For information, call Laura Goldberg at (216) 588-1123.