

Resisting extremism

Support group helps new Muslims adapt

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
Staff Writer

It began with a poor interpretation of Scripture, only made worse by misinformation and the impatience of a teacher who wanted it his way or the highway.

Muhammad Robert Heft, 33, now president of the Markham-based Paradise Forever Muslim support group, came close to stepping over the line between conservative Islam and extremism.

The organization offers housing and employment networking along with other supports for those who are in difficulty after becoming Muslim.

The blue-eyed Winnipeg-born Mr. Heft submitted to Islam following a particularly difficult period during which he drank, partied and gambled away about \$120,000 over four years.

He first tried Christianity, he said. But a trip to a Becker's convenience store in 1998 changed his path.

"A Palestinian brother looked at the cross around my neck and said that guy is not your saviour," he said. "I went back thinking I was going to convert him."

But it was Mr. Heft who was converted.

"I fell in love with the concept that God is beyond your imagination and he is not limited by any form or anything that we can perceive," he said.

As a new practitioner, he studied constantly and fell in with an Egyptian Islamic guide, whom Mr. Heft declined to name. That man is reportedly under investigation by Canadian authorities.

Over six months, a barrage of verses about jihad (the holy struggle which permits Muslims to defend themselves) were taken out of context to fit the man's "own agenda," as Mr. Heft calls it.

He claims to have had dinner with Stephen Chand, one of the 17 men arrested recently on terror allegations.

Working as an attar (perfume) purchaser and importer, Mr. Heft also took a trip to Iraq as the United States was preparing to launch its military assaults, he said.

"I was frustrated because I saw a lot of civilians were dying so I went there for the people — not for Saddam (Hussein), whom I believe was an idiot, and not George Bush, who I also believe is an idiot," he said. "My heart went out to the kids. I was seeing images of peoples' brains blown out and graphic, graphic images and it upset me and I thought I could help out."

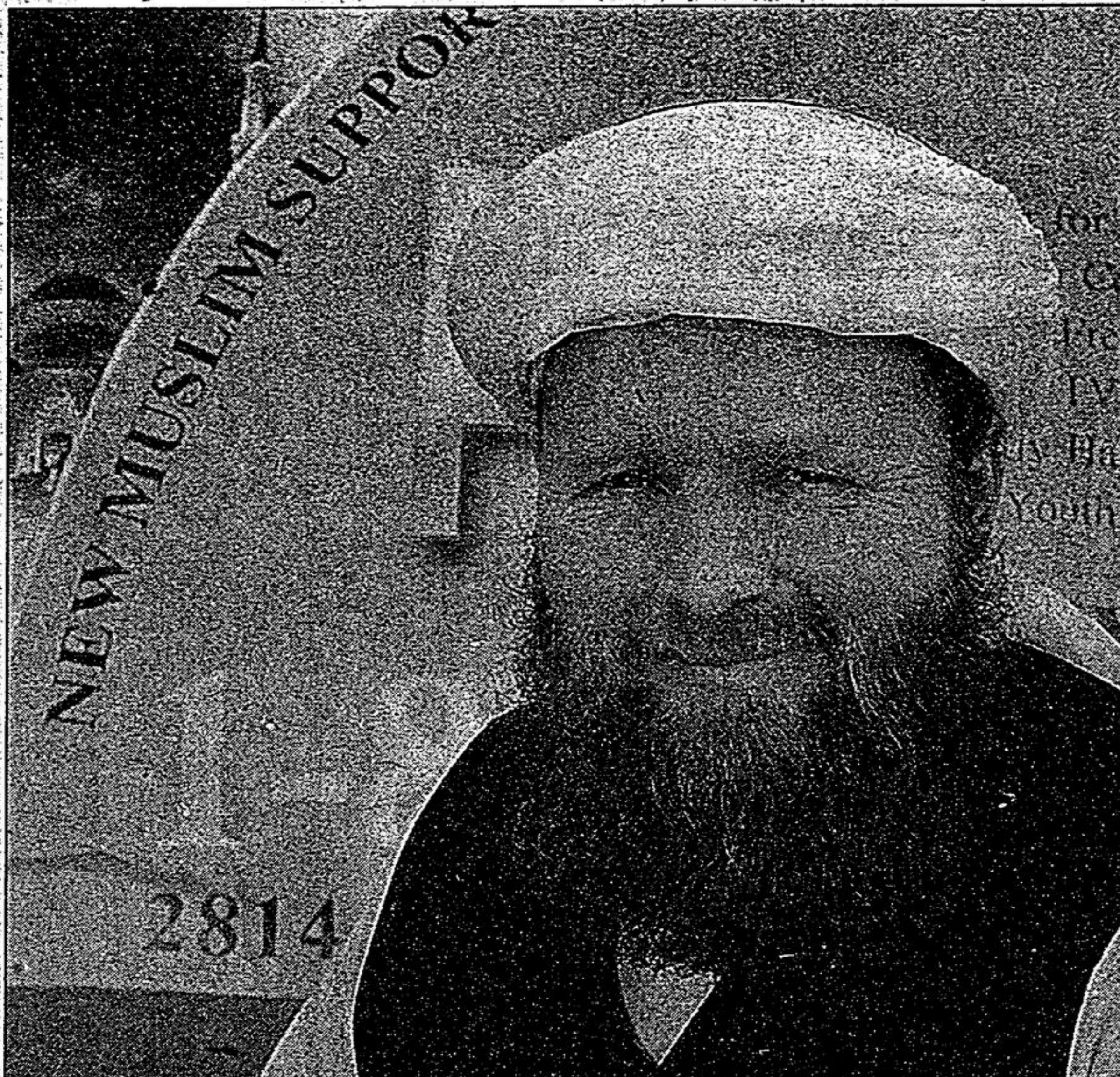
He has described his stay as being a human shield. He lived near Palestinian Hotel in Baghdad and in an electrical facility until it was bombed during the shock and awe days.

Communication with the Islamic guide ended when he started asking questions about whether or not they were accurately following the teachings of the Qur'an.

During his wedding, in which he married into a Middle-Eastern family in 1999, Mr. Heft met a new teacher, who now resides in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The man helped him mentally step out of the extremist's reach.

Impatience and a lack of knowledge is a death knell to a righteous following of Islam, he said.

"I believe God is on the side of mercy and patience, patience, patience. That's where you get caught up, you want everything now, quick answers, quick solutions."



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

Muhammad Robert Heft operates a support group that helps newly converted Muslims adapt.

Trim Your Waste

York Region and its Local Municipalities will be hosting a **Public Information Session** to introduce a Joint Waste Diversion Strategy.

The Strategy aims at increasing waste diversion locally to at least 64%.

Some of the areas impacted will be:

- Improved Blue Box Diversion
- Green Bin Implementation
- Siting Community Environmental Centres

Join us at one of our Public Information Sessions and voice your opinions.



DATES AND LOCATIONS

Public Information Sessions will run from 6:00pm - 9:00pm at the following locations:

Tuesday, June 27, 2006
City of Vaughan Civic Centre
Council Chambers
2141 Major Mackenzie Drive
Vaughan

Tuesday, July 11, 2006
Georgina Civic Centre
Committee Room
26557 Civic Centre Road
Keswick

Thursday, July 6, 2006
Regional Waste Management Centre
100 Garfield Wright Boulevard
East Gwillimbury

Questions? Please call 905-895-1200 and press 3 or visit www.york.ca

Learning Disabilities?

If you or your child suffers from **LEARNING DISABILITIES** then attending this free symposium may be the most important thing you do this year. You will discover the true cause of these conditions and natural solutions and options you can use right away to overcome them.

Many children and adults with ADD and Dyslexia have seen significant improvement without medication. Dr. Turner is an international speaker and lecturer who has been featured on the *Dini Petty Show*, *National News*, *Canada AM*, *CFTO News*, *Marilyn Denis CITYLINE* and *Riley Live*. He will present a free symposium on Thurs. June 29th at 7:30 pm at the Stouffville Health Centre, 6219 Main Street.

Call 905-640-4440 to reserve your seats today!

The Regional Municipality of York

TEMPORARY ROAD CLOSURE

16th Avenue (Y.R. 73)
Markham By-pass to Reesor Road
Town of Markham

16th Avenue (Y.R. 73) will be closed to through traffic between the Markham By Pass and Reesor Road commencing Monday June 26, 2006 for a period of approximately four weeks.

The purpose of the temporary road closures is to facilitate the construction of the 16th Avenue realignment and a new intersection with the Markham By-pass.

Reesor Road, Hwy 7 and Markham By-pass are available for detour.

Please direct inquiries to:

The Regional Municipality of York
Mr. Grant Robinson, P. Eng., Senior Project Manager
The Transportation & Works Department
17250 Yonge Street, P.O. Box 147
Newmarket, ON L3Y 6Z1
Tel: 905-895-1200 or 1-877-464-9675; extension 5946
Fax: 905-836-4590

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By-law No. R-1436-2006-021



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