Today, the First Cleveland Mosque actively promotes interfaith dialogue to enhance the understanding of Islam. This celebrated cornerstone continues to encourage a positive image of American Muslims.

By JAMES W. WADE III
Staff Reporter

One of the oldest mosques in the nation is housed right here in our backyard. Hence the name, the First Cleveland Mosque was the first ever mosque in the city and second in theUnited States. Established in 1937 by Al Hajj Imam Wali Akram, the mosque will be celebrating its 75th anniversary this weekend. The festivities will take place over the course of two days, Friday, Sept. 14 and Saturday, Sept. 15.

Friday is family/community day and will be held at First Cleveland Mosque,3613 E. 131st Street. The festivities will commence after prayer (which begins at1:30 p.m.). There will be food, vendors, lectures and activities for the children including rock climbing, pony rides, bounce houses and more.

The banquet will be held Saturday at LaVilla Conference andBanquetCenter,11500 Brookpark

Road, with a reception and silent auction from4-5 p.m.The banquet starts at5:15. The Keynote speaker will be Imam Zaid Shakir. Other speakers in attendance will include: Altaf Husein, Ayesha Prime and Qasim Khan.

First Cleveland Mosque remains a testimony of the powerful attraction that Americans have toward the beliefs and culture of Islam.

Al Hajj Imam Wali Akram, born Walter Gregg in Caldwell, Texas onAug. 4, 1904, was introduced to Islam in the early 1920s and went on to establish the First Cleveland Mosque in 1937 with the creation of the Muslim 10 Year Plan. The mission of the First Cleveland Mosque was to entertain and educate the Muslim community. Imam Akram continued to spread the Islamic message of peace, love and unity, which made the First Cleveland Mosque the milestone of peace-making among the diverse religious groups of Greater Cleveland.

Over the years, the First Cleveland Mosque preserved demonstrating consistency and growth. In fact, First Cleveland Mosque was instrumental in the development of several other Islamic institutions throughoutCleveland.

Since the genesis of the First Cleveland Mosque, this historic institution resided at the following locations throughout the city of Cleveland before relocating in 1975 to its current edifice at 3903 E. 131 Street:

- 5611 E. 55th Street (1937 – 1939)
- 7605 Woodland Avenue (1939 – 1966)
- 12715 Miles Road (1966 – 1969)
- 13405 Union Avenue (1969 – 1975)

In 1984 Imam Wali Akram passed down the position of leadership to his oldest son Al Hajj Imam Mahmud Abdul Akram, who served as the Imam of First Cleveland Mosque for five years.

During his tenure, he continued to teach the community the value of unity, harmony and love, which has been promulgated by the leadership of First Cleveland Mosque since its inception.

Imam Abbas Ahmad, a grandson of Imam Wali Akram, assumed the leadership of First Cleveland Mosque in 1989, becoming its third and current Imam.

While growing up, I had the chance to enjoy the Akram family over the years, being a good friend with one of the grandson's, Bilal. To this day, he still invites me to the annual family get-togethers.

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The 75th Anniversary Commemoration, themed "The Legacy Continues Through Education and Community Service", is a testament to longevity of the First Cleveland Mosque.

Editor's Note: Coming this October, Call & Post readers will have the chance to learn more about Imam Wali Akram as we present a series on this great man, his family and his legacy.