

## MAINE CITY BRACES FOR NEO-NAZIS, COUNTERPROTEST - CONTENTION CENTERS ON SOMALI REFUGEES

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LEWISTON, Maine - Richard Robichaud padded along a fraying section of downtown Lisbon Street yesterday, soldiering through the slush and past chest-high banks of snow to buy Mace for the women who work at a nearby variety store.

Robichaud wants them to be prepared. He isn't sure what today will bring, when dozens of neo-Nazis, hundreds of strident protesters, and thousands of pro-diversity marchers are expected to converge on this small mid-Maine city.

"We don't need people from out of state or out of town to come here," said Robichaud, 44, a disabled man who acts as a watchdog for a few tattered blocks. "Leave us alone."

All across this struggling former mill city, residents seem stunned that their quiet home has been targeted for a neo-Nazi rally designed to frighten the 1,100 Somali refugees who have moved here since February 2001.

"All of our lives are being controlled by this event," said Kaileigh Tara, a former mayor. "People are stressed, there's heightened anxiety, there's a fear of living here."

The World Church of the Creator, a national white supremacist group, is scheduled to rally at 1 p.m. today on the outskirts of Lewiston. Across the city at Bates College, a projected 3,000 demonstrators will gather simultaneously to preach tolerance. Between and surrounding the two events will be the largest law enforcement presence in state history.

"The best thing we can hope for coming out of [today] is that there are a minimal amount of incidents," said Phil Nadeau, the assistant city administrator. "If there are only a couple of minor arrests, we'll be very fortunate."

The arrest of World Church leader Matthew Hale in Chicago this week on murder solicitation charges has ratcheted up the tension even further, police said, because of fears that his supporters will use the event as an angry protest. Hale, whose top deputy will replace him, had been scheduled to address the World Church rally with a speech titled, "The Invasion of Maine by Somalis and How We Can End It."

Today's legacy is viewed as so significant - not only for overwhelmingly white Lewiston, but for the reputation of the entire state - that the Bates gathering will include newly inaugurated Governor John Baldacci, US Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, both of Maine's US representatives, and a host of officials from across the state.

The mayor of Portland, James Cloutier, is leading an open-invitation motorcade from Maine's largest city to the event. By contrast, Lewiston Mayor Laurier Raymond, who wrote a controversial letter last fall urging Somalis to stop moving to Lewiston, left for Florida late this week and will not be in the city today.

His letter, prompted by the cost of providing municipal services for the new residents, attracted international attention and spurred Hale to schedule today's rally. City officials were dismayed by the World Church's plans, because they believed Lewiston had made progress in integrating the Somalis into the community.

Although the purpose of the pro-diversity rally has garnered broad support, some Lewiston residents say that what began as a show of solidarity for the Somalis has been co-opted by little-known, agenda-driven groups.

Critics of globalization, an anti-military pollution group, and advocates for transgendered people, for example, are expected to be among dozens of organizations at the Many & One rally at Bates.

John Clifford IV, president of a Greek Orthodox church where Baldacci spoke against racism yesterday, withdrew his church from the rally because he thought its focus had been blurred.

"Originally, it was supposed to be the response of Lewiston to these Nazis, and to make an example of who Lewiston is and to support the Somali people," said Clifford. "Then, it just turned into all these other guys with their own agendas coming in."

Mark Schlotterbeck, a Methodist missionary who helped organize the Bates rally, said the coalition-building effort has been an inspirational exercise that has found common purpose for diverse races, human rights groups, and homosexuals, among others.

Today's events will be a watershed in the city's history, predicted Tara. If the racist message of the World Church of the Creator is drowned out by the voices of diversity, she said, then the progress made between longtime Lewiston residents and the Somali newcomers will have been worth the painful, awkward adjustment.

"People will refer to this moment as what happened before, or what happened after," Tara said.

Caption: PHOTO

1. Mohamed Haidra of Lewiston's Somali community spoke at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church yesterday as Governor John Baldacci listened. / GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / ESSDRAS M SUAREZ

2. Abdirizak Mahboub of the Somali community in Lewiston (holding papers) spoke to reporters yesterday in front of the Somali Community Center, denouncing the rally planned for today. / GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / ESSDRAS M SUAREZ

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