

First Syrian family arrives safely Wednesday in Orangeville



By Marni Walsh

Emad and Razan Alhajali arrived safely in Canada Monday night with their two young children, Fatema and Hamoudi, after a 30-hour journey.

Waiting for them at Pearson International Airport were Brian and Philomena Logel, who spearheaded the Headwaters Refugee Sponsorship Committee that worked for months to bring the family out of a refugee camp in Jordan. They are the first of Syrian families to arrive in Dufferin and just four of the 25,000 refugees expected in the next few months.

The young family appeared healthy and happy Wednesday afternoon as they met local press and a CTV reporter who worked with an e-translator, somewhat unsuccessfully, to communicate, as no one present spoke Arabic. It did not matter? everyone was just happy to welcome the family.

The children were cozy in donated snowsuits in the chill of December and quickly brought Dad a hat when he stood outdoors in the cold too long.

Brian Logel said both Hamoudi (a 7-year-old boy) and Fatema (an 8-year-old girl) were "incredibly patient children."

They know how to wait; the family were refugees in Jordan for nearly four years? the children have waited more than half their lives for Syria's civil war to end. But now they are in Canada, and Brian said they were running out into the cold without their coats to experience the new falling snow. This year, it seems, they will need their patience to wait to build their first snowman.

The family is staying with Brian and Philomena Logel while their townhouse is being prepared by the sponsorship group in Orangeville. The sponsorship group is responsible for helping the family with their rent as part of the \$30,000 required to bring the family to Canada.

The outpouring of love and support for the family has been almost overwhelming. Along with the support the sponsorship committee has received from the community, surpassing the \$30,000, a Halal butcher from Grand Valley has offered to supply a holiday turkey for the family, and a company in Brampton is sending snow toys for the children.

Philomena has already taken Fatema grocery shopping and says she could see that the cost of food was a worry for the young mother. She said money to help the family with their budget is probably the best thing people could give if they would like to help. Donations can be made through Westminster United Church in Orangeville? making note that the funds are for the Headwaters Refugee Sponsorship Committee.

Before the war in Syria, Emad was in construction and Razan was a nurse; their first focus will be on improving their English in order to work and integrate the children into the school system. The family is still learning English and understands several phrases, but, as Brian said, "We have had no trouble understanding each other."

The Alhajali's are looking forward to Emad's brother, his wife and four children arriving to live in Orangeville as well. They will be

brought to Canada through another area sponsorship group. Philomena Logel says the government papers have gone to Jordan, which is a big step.

In the afternoon, the Logel's treated their new Canadian family to the tradition of a winter walk into the woods to get a Christmas tree. Philomena said that without a doubt, "This will be our most rewarding Christmas ever."