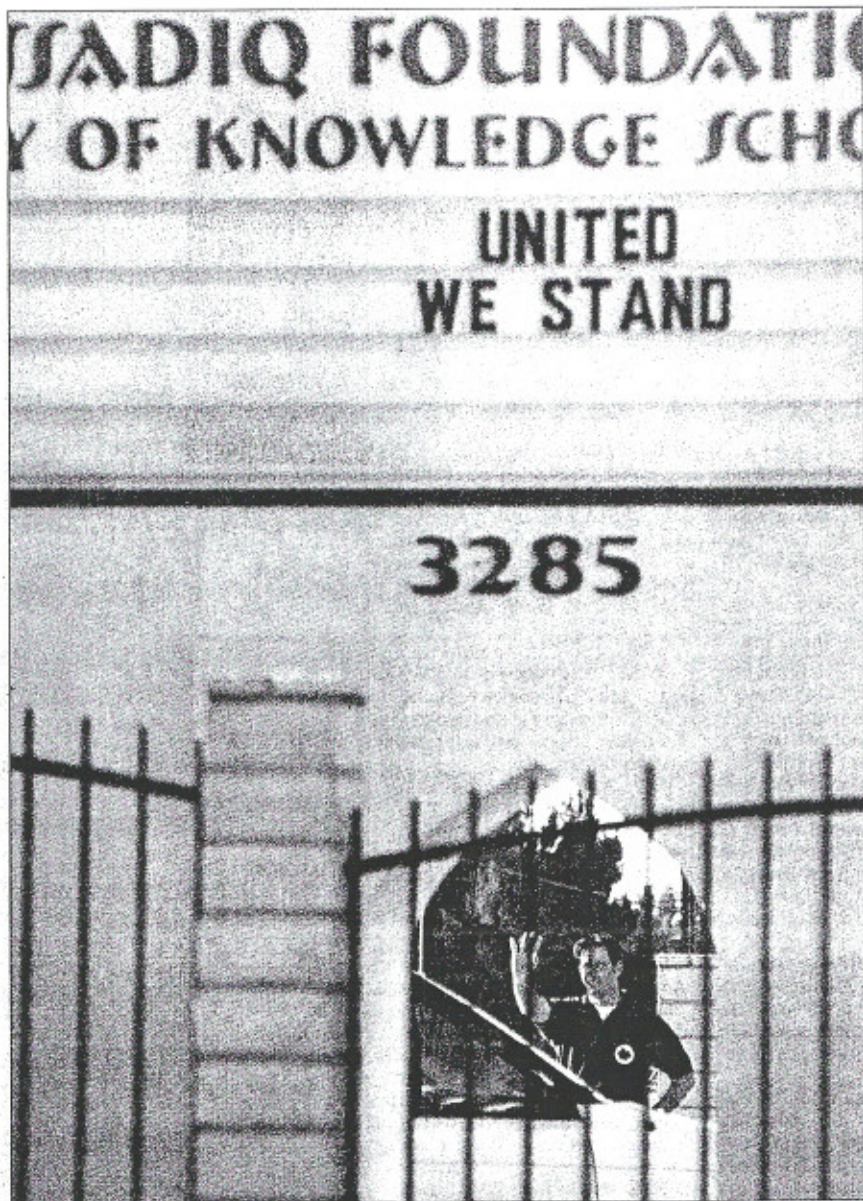


Greg Creel, 38, a member of the Claremont Quakers, waves to vehicles entering the City of Knowledge School in Pomona as he stands watch in a show of support for the Muslim community. Below, Church of the Brethren member Shirley Boyer of La Verne talks with a woman as she leaves the City of Knowledge School. The woman told Boyer, "We are just so relieved to see you out here."

PHOTOS BY CHRIS URSO
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Standing watch in solidarity

■ Members of Christian churches guard Islamic schools and centers to prevent harassment in response to terrorists' acts.

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POMONA — Every weekday morning since last Wednesday, Greg Creel has stood watch outside City of Knowledge School. He is one of about a half-dozen non-Muslims who are showing support for the Islamic school each day by helping to guard it.

"We, as humans, tend to

look for scapegoats and for an evil 'them,'" Creel said. "It was just a natural conclusion for us to come here and show our support."

Since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the East Coast, the City of Knowledge has lost about 40% of its students. Parents are afraid the school could be a target of retaliation, Principal



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Haleema Shaikley said. Political leaders say Islamic extremists are the prime suspects in the attacks, and Arab Americans and Muslims around the country have reported a sharp increase in harassment and even hate crimes.

Creel, 38, is a member of the Claremont Quakers. After the hijackings, the congregation became "quite concerned about the safety of the Muslim community," Creel said. At a Sunday meeting, members decided they would do something to help.

Most, if not all, of those standing guard at the school's doors are Christian. Volunteers from the La Verne Church of the Brethren answered a request from school leaders at an interfaith meeting the Friday after the attacks to watch over the school, Pastor Chuck Boyer said.

Mike Wolfson, a neighbor of the school and member of the Church of the Brethren, said he stood at the gate one morning because he wanted to help fight the perception that Islam condones terrorism.

He could barely speak without becoming overcome with emotion.

"You have to do something," he said. "There is no fighting this thing without the actions we take for one another. ... It's so frustrating to watch what we watched and do nothing. These kids need to go to school and not feel the rebound of hatred. ... These are lovely, law-abiding people."

Boyer said he'd like to see a relationship grow between



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Cassandra Vargas, left, an instructor at City of Knowledge School in Pomona, talks with Shirley Boyer, center, and Marie Snell. Boyer and Snell are volunteers from Church of the Brethren in La Verne and have been showing up greeting parents, students and teachers before classes at the campus.

the Muslim community and his church. He said dinners could be shared at homes or interfaith prayer services held.

"I don't know who's been the most blessed — the Muslim community or the people who have gone and stood with them," he said.

Other non-Muslims have offered to go shopping with Muslim women fearful of threats or attacks, Shaikley said. Volunteers have also been showing up at the school of the nearby Islamic Center of Claremont in Pomona, said Abdalla Areig, secretary at the center.

Creel said he and the other volunteers are not there to provide protection but to show solidarity, to say to passersby, to students and parents, that any violence against Arab Americans and Muslims will hurt them as well.

"It's to show the community, these people, that we are one community," Creel said, adding he'll be there "as long as they need me."

But Shaikley, principal of City of Knowledge, said the volunteers do, in a very real way, protect the school.

"You don't have to be armed to protect," she said. "I'm very proud of them and very overwhelmed by their support. This [the attack] is everyone's loss."

By standing at the gates, she said, "they are counting themselves as one of us."

The school has about 90 fewer students since it opened earlier this month. That's about \$1,000 a day in lost tuition, Shaikley said.

"For us, it's a lot," Shaikley said.

Some parents have enrolled their children in pub-

lic school. Others are keeping them at home. One mother wears a floppy hat to hide her hijab, or head scarf, Shaikley said.

"I can't convince anyone to come back," she said.

When the school opened the Monday after the attacks, Shaikley added a surveillance camera. A father sits in front of the school door. One of the gates to the parking lot is locked after students arrive. And "we've increased our prayers for all innocent people's safety," Shaikley said. One mother, who was too frightened to give her name, said she pulled her three children out of the school and is keeping them at her Diamond Bar home for an indefinite amount of time.

The woman said her children want to go back and she wants them to return to City of Knowledge, but doesn't know when or what will make her feel safe enough to allow that.

"I have to take a risk," she said. "I can not live in fear all my life."

The volunteers are helping some parents feel safe.

"Seeing us stand here gave ... [a mother] courage to bring her son back to school," said Marie Snell, a member of the La Verne Church of the Brethren, who has been standing guard with her husband, Marvin. "I think we're doing some good."

Najla Abdulsater, president of the parent-teacher association, said she appreciates the volunteers. Abdulsater, who lived through fighting in Lebanon, said seeing them in front of the gate changed how she felt about her adopted home.

"That moment, I felt I'm truly an American. I'm a part of this country," she said.