

## Going home . . .

# Love for Syrian homeland not limited to Atiyeh clan

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By ALAN K. OTA  
of The Oregonian staff

Gov. Vic Atiyeh remembers little of his first visit to the Syrian village of Amar, except the big celebration that greeted him in the place he sometimes calls "my home."

The year was 1929, and America was descending into the Great Depression.

Atiyeh, who was 6 and still in short pants, had journeyed to Amar with his homesick mother, Linda — a native of Beirut — his uncle, Aziz, and his twin brothers, Edward E. and Richard A. Atiyeh, who were 8 at the time. His father missed the trip because of business commitments.

The governor, who celebrated his 61st birthday last month, recaptured a little of the magic of that time when he returned to Amar Thursday for the first time in 55 years.

The Atiyeh family is not alone in its affection for Amar. Other Oregonians have warm memories of the tiny tile-roofed village on a hillside just east of the Mediterranean Sea.

Although Amar, which is about 90 miles north of Damascus, has only 500 residents and lies 7,000 miles from Oregon, it has much in common with the state.

There are about three times as many descendants of Amar natives living in Oregon today as there are present-day residents of the village. Several of the Oregonians have prominent positions in government and industry in their new home.

Sam Joseph "Sami" Kahl, a carpet store owner, was born in Amar. He was appointed by the governor, his first cousin, to be a member of the Oregon Racing Commission in 1983.

Multnomah County Circuit Judge Philip T. Abraham, Daniel C. Hanna and Albert Azorr Jr. are all the sons of Amar-native fathers, who worked their way up as laborers and became construction contractors in Portland. They were raised in the gregarious Syrian-Lebanese settlement that once straddled Southeast Foster Road.

Abraham has been a Multnomah County Circuit Court judge since 1981. "We were raised in a ditch," he recalled in his chambers, chuckling. "My father said he was going to make sure none of us would have to do manual labor. And he was right."

Hanna, the founder and president of Hanna Industries, a \$40 million-a-year Milwaukie business, has a large picture of Amar in his home. He holds the patents on the Hanna equipment used in 6,700 car washes in 50 countries around the world.

Azorr is a retired investigator for the Internal Revenue Service and now works for the organized crime unit in the office of Attorney General Dave Frohnmayer. When all the Azorr clan meet at Blue Lake each year, they number about 150 persons.

"My uncle lives in the old family home" in Amar, Azorr said. "The mud house where my mother and father first lived is there. While I've never been there, those things mean a great deal to me. I have a very special place in my heart for it."