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OHIO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY RECEIVES INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR MULTICULTURAL EFFORTS

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) has received international attention for its multicultural outreach efforts, with a recent feature in *Arab News*, a leading Middle East-based English language daily newspaper which circulates in more than 20 countries.

The article, published Nov. 28, cites ODPS' Office of Multicultural Affairs, part of the Ohio Homeland Security division, as a national leader – with Ohio being the only state to have a dedicated multicultural affairs office in its public safety/homeland security agency. Established in 2005, the Office of Multicultural Affairs recognizes the importance of developing relationships with the many different communities throughout Ohio in order to achieve cooperation, understanding, mutual respect and harmony between Ohio's diverse communities and those providing vital services to them. Omar Alomari, a professor of Islam and Middle Eastern culture at local universities, leads the office's efforts.

"Establishing relationships and building trust with our diverse communities was a major challenge. We had to market ourselves," said Alomari. "We talked to various organizations within the communities about their concerns and convinced them this was for the benefit of the community as a whole."

To date, ODPS has achieved success in building relations with the Muslim/Arab community and law enforcement personnel and has a number of community town hall meetings planned for 2008 to further discussions and relationship building among diverse communities, including a joint effort with the Columbus Community Relations Commission and the Hispanic community.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs is serving a cultural leader not only for ODPS and other agencies in Ohio, but also among other states. From the relationships that the Office of Multicultural Affairs helped initiate, ODPS is now bringing all of its eight Divisions into a process to better educate, serve and protect all Ohioans in all aspects of public safety.

To provide the best service to all of the state's residents and visitors, ODPS has instituted a Cultural Competency Initiative (CCI) that will assist in implementing policies, procedures, training and relationship-building that will help ODPS become more in sync with Ohio's communities. ODPS is continually broadening its focus and learning about the state's growing diverse populations in an effort to become a more culturally competent service provider and ensure everyone in the state has access to vital safety services.

"Through the Cultural Competency Initiative, ODPS is taking a leadership role and partnering with local governments and diverse communities to ensure everyone has access to vital services, regardless of language," said ODPS Director Henry Guzmán.

For more information on Ohio's Multicultural Affairs efforts focusing on the areas of homeland security and public safety, visit www.homelandsecurity.ohio.gov.

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