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By Karin Elton, Marshall Independent

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FINDING PEACE

Photo by Per Peterson

They're content and happy, and they appreciate the freedom their new surroundings bring, but Somali-Americans and other minorities in Marshall can't help but sometimes worry about their safety. What happened last weekend in St. Cloud affected them, too, and they want you to know: They're your neighbors, not your enemies.

On Sept. 17, Dahir Ahmed Adan, 20, attacked shoppers at a St. Cloud mall with a knife before he was shot and killed by an off-duty police officer. Ten people were injured, and a community and state were shaken by the violence.

Adan was a Somali refugee from Kenya who moved to the United States when he was 3 months old,

according to the Minneapolis Star-Tribune. He is one of many. Minnesota has the largest Somali community in the nation. According to 2010 American Community Survey data, there are about 85,700 Somalis in the United States, around 25,000 of whom live in Minnesota.

On Thursday morning, the Independent sat down with members of the Somali community to get their

thoughts and reactions to the attack. The group asked that their last names not be used. The discussion was coordinated by Pat Thomas of Adult Basic Education Southwest Minnesota, where they attend English language and other classes.

"I feel sorry for what has happened," said Safiyo, a Somali woman who has lived in Marshall for two months. "We

have to work together for our community, for our safety."

The group said the attack was not what the Muslim religion teaches.

Like people anywhere, "there are good people and there are bad people," said Faduma. "I feel bad. It makes me feel sad. People will say, 'Oh, a Muslim did that.' But we are not supposed to hurt people. A real Muslim does not harm people. (The St. Cloud attacker) was mentally sick."

"We leave our neighbors in peace," said Safiyo. "We treat people like they are our brothers and sisters."

"This person is your brother; this person is your sister," said Faduma. "How can you kill someone?"

Faduma has lived in Marshall almost 15 years, after moving to Marshall from the Twin Cities. She has three children who were born in the United States.

The group said they haven't experienced any acts of hate in Marshall, but Faduma does worry if her children will be bullied in school. She occasionally wonders what people think of her when they see her in public.

"Sometimes I worry when I go out," she said. "I think, 'That guy is looking at you because you wear the scarf or you are Muslim.' You worry too much. Are you going to come back alive? You shouldn't be judged by religion or color."

Safiyo said she feels safe walking down the streets of Marshall.

"America is peaceful," she said.

Abduraf has lived in Marshall for 10 years and has "never had a problem with anybody," he said.

If there was a racial incident, "there are laws here," he said. "We could take action, let the police know what happened to you. If someone was driving in a car, we could get the license number."

The group likes living in a small town like Marshall where it is quiet. For many in the Somali community, their lives have not always been safe and peaceful.

Iqbal saw family members killed in Somalia.

"I don't know the reason," she said. "They are mentally sick."

Since 1991, when the government in Somalia collapsed, rival factions have made the country an unsafe and violent place to live.

Faduma had an uncle "who was killed on his way to the store to buy bread for his kids," she said. "They shot him for no reason. They are sick people and need help."

Thomas said the more people interact with and get to know immigrants, the more they will like them.

"They are vital to area businesses and schools," she said.

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