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IN AMAR

Channel 6

3/30/84

5:24

Anchor

Oregon's Governor has realized his wish to see his ancestral village. That visit was the emotional highlight of the Oregon trade delegation's trip to the Middle East. Mike Donohue is traveling with the group. He files this report from the village of Amar.

Mike Donohue

He had been expecting a hero's welcome, but nothing like this. The whole village paraded. A boy and girl scout band showed off its weeks of rehearsal and was joined by local gypsy musicians, leading the Governor up the steep winding stone streets to his father's home.

Showered with perfume, rose petals and rice, the son of the village's leading citizen was returning after 55 years, hailed as the President of the biggest and best state in America.

There was a long line of relatives to greet, second, third, even fourth cousins. We were told almost everyone in the village is related. Gifts included a town photograph and a mosaic bible passage in Arabic. Then speeches which visibly moved the Governor.

Governor Atiyeh

You know I don't get anything like this in Oregon. It's just an upwelling of affection, and you can feel it.

Mike Donohue

Equating Atiyeh's arrival with the coming of Spring, the Mayor then signaled the celebration to begin. It's a friendly village that loves to party. Drink, food and entertainment in the Bedoin tradition, more and more.

And the Governor was hip. Up for a walk at sunrise, the Atiyehs were shown scenery unchanged in the half century since the Governor's father immigrated to the U.S. He was the first to leave, later to be followed by 90% of the town's residents.

Pews in this Presbyterian Church were a gift in honor of his son's last visit to Amar.

Governor Atiyeh

These are 55 years old.

Mike Donohue

This bakery, the hub of the morning's activities, is new in Amar as is the village grade school where English is taught as a second language to Arabic. A melting pot of faces, the children of Amar resemble the scores of nationalities, eastern and western, that have lived in this village for more than 2,000 years.

(more)

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Mike Donohue

Dominating the horizon for miles around is this 12th Century Crusader castle, the Crag de Chevalier which even today influences life in the surrounding communities.

For 162 years the castle's ramparts have guarded what is still called the Valley of the Christians. Typical of the area's villages, Amar contains three churches, all of them Christian.

Before the days of powder and cannon up to 4,000 knights defended these walls until local Syrian resistance drove them back to Europe. Today the Crag stands as a monument to Syrian nationalism. Like any visit to one's roots, Atiyeh's homecoming caused him to ponder why he is where he is today.

Governor Atiyeh

Leaving this little tiny village to come to the United States, work hard, provide for the children, provide for their education, and allow his son to become involved in politics and become a Governor, that is the wonder and the beauty of the United States.

Mike Donohue

From the ancestral home of Governor Atiyeh in the mountain village of Amar, 200 miles northwest of Damascus, this is Mike Donohue reporting for Newsroom 6.

Judy Rooks

Well the Governor was their hero for the day, I guess.

Anchor

Oh, he's gonna have a hard time when he comes back dealing with Oregon the way it is now. Now being a hero when he comes back to Salem, or the same kind of hero I should say.

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