

Mosque/Facility will offer other services

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week approved a plan to relocate the mosque to a former bait-and-tackle shop on Velp Avenue.

Some neighbors have expressed concerns about the new religious center, mindful of the fact that Muslim extremists were responsible for the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"It's just kind of scary," neighbor Pat Meyer said. "But I'm also open to giving it a chance."

Leaders of the Islamic Center hope the non-Muslim community will visit the new mosque and take the opportunity to learn about Islamic beliefs.

In addition to regular prayer services, they say, the facility will offer lectures, children's programs and occasional special events, such as food drives.

Hamayun Mian, a spokesman for the group, said the 2001 terrorists were radicals whose violent actions conflict with the peaceful teachings of Islam. Mian urged the public to avoid stereotyping all Muslims based on fear.

"The way you learn and grow and nurture is by understanding one another," he said. "If you want to learn, you have to learn with an open mind."

The society is paying about \$300,000 to acquire the former Bob's Bait and Tackle shop at 1512 Velp Ave., which had been vacant for about five years.

Green Bay aldermen agreed to rezone the west-side property to permit the mosque following a brief but heated debate about religious freedom.

Surrounding residents and business owners voice mixed feelings about the plans.

Ed Holtz, owner of Quality Auto Repair, 1400 Velp Ave., said he would prefer seeing a new business locate there, to help generate economic activity in the largely industrial area.

"What are you going to buy from the mosque?" Holtz said. "It's not going to help my business."

Resident Phil Bartz, who lives in Deer Brook Apartments, hopes that critics do not overreact and try to prevent Muslims from practicing their chosen religion.

Referring to his Lutheran beliefs, Bartz said, "I'm sure people frown on my religion, too."

The scrutiny descends on the Islamic Society during Ramadan, one of the holiest times of year for Muslims.

Followers of Islam fast from dawn to dusk throughout the 30-day celebration, and continue their usual regimen of prayer five times daily, whether at home, work or mosque. The month then ends with one of Islam's most festive holidays.

During Friday's service, the minister, Mohamed Zakarya, led those in attendance in the traditional chanting, recitations and kneeling with faces to the floor. He also urged them to remain steadfast in honoring Islamic history and observances.

"This is the chance of the year," he said. "Do your best."

ONLINE CHAT

Join reporter Scott Williams in a live online "Talk Back" chat about Green Bay's new mosque at 11 a.m. Monday at www.greenbaypressgazette.com.

ONLINE TODAY

Hamayun Mian of Green Bay talks about the Islamic faith at the Islamic Society of Wisconsin's Green Bay area mosque in Ashwaubenon. To watch the video and see photos of a prayer service at the Islamic Society of Wisconsin's Green Bay area mosque, click on this story at www.greenbaypressgazette.com.

A new member of the mosque, Khadar Gedi, who recently relocated from California, brought his 2-year-old son, Amir, to the service.

Anti-Muslim fervor has heightened so dramatically since the 2001 terrorist attacks, Gedi said, that Islamic believers in the United States feel targeted. He called it ironic that some neighbors oppose Green Bay's new mosque out of fear of Muslims.

"If anything, we have fear of them," he said. "We're scared that people will take this issue to extremes."