

CULTURE

# Month of worship

Ramadan is a celebration focused on family, friends and faith

BY NABAA ALI  
The Shorthorn staff

A month of devout fasting, charity and deepening faith awaits students as Ramadan begins this week.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic Hijri calendar. For 30 days, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset to cleanse their bodies and souls. There are two meals during fasting days: the pre-dawn meal, suhoor, and the fast-breaking meal eaten after sunset, iftar. It's the holiest month in the Hijri calendar, as Muslims believe it was during this month that God revealed the first verses of the Quran, Islam's sacred text, to the Prophet Muhammad.

The start and end date of Ramadan varies each year because the Islamic Hijri calendar follows moon phases. The beginning of the holiday is determined by the sighting of a new crescent moon. This year, Ramadan is predicted to begin March 22.

Fasting is about abstaining from eating and drinking and also refraining from bad actions, said Saja Daoud, Muslim Student Association fundraising coordinator and chair. It's an all-around spiritual cleanse and purification.

Daoud said Ramadan is her favorite time of the year because she gets to spend more time with her family and her culture.

"It's so beautiful in so many ways," she said. "We fast all day and struggle together, and then, at the end of the day, everyone gets together, friends, family, they all eat together, then we get to go to the mosque and pray together every evening."

Architecture sophomore Amari Richardson said he converted to Islam during Ramadan in 2018. Richardson is the only Muslim in his family and spent previous Ramadans by himself at home, breaking his

fast at work or at school. This will be the first one where he will be surrounded by other Muslims, as he plans to attend Jumma, which are congregational Friday prayers, and have iftar with friends from the Muslim Student Association.

"It's a month of truly understanding your creator, understanding yourself as a person, as a human being," Richardson said. "It's a spiritual journey that's much deeper than any of us can really understand."

Daoud said attending prayers at the mosque during Ramadan brings the community together as they perform acts of worship and then hang out afterward.

"A lot of us are really busy during our day-to-day lives, but everyone is going to pray during Ramadan," Daoud said. "It gives you a chance to see everyone, it's really nice."

She said the community usually breaks their fasts at home right after the sun goes down and gathers at the mosque for a night prayer called Taraweeh. Friends and families spend the night praying, getting refreshments and sharing special Ramadan dishes.

"Before the sun comes up, your whole family wakes up together in the middle of the night and eats breakfast," Daoud said. "My family, we're all very busy on different schedules, so we never really get to sit and eat together too much, except on Sundays maybe, but during that month, we all have breakfast together every single day, and it's

something that's so beautiful."

Computer engineering freshman Zahraa Hasan said in Iraq, where she's from, they break their fast with dates, lentil soup, a yogurt drink and hydrating fruits like watermelon. Like other cultures, her family celebrates Ramadan with cultural dishes.

"In Baghdad, we usually sleep during the day because the summers are really warm, so Ramadan is celebrated mostly at night after our fasting is already broken and we've gained more energy," Hasan said. "Lights are turned on, prayers start, kids are outside playing and people gather outside together to socialize before the next fasting day."

Hasan said she tries to bring pieces of the Ramadan culture here by going to mosques, having gatherings at her house and being more spiritually and religiously aware.

It's tough to endure fasting throughout the month, she said. Because she's not eating or drinking, her body can't focus on her studies as much as usual. However, over the years, she's learned how to balance school life with Ramadan by doing her assignments in 30-minute increments after she breaks her fast instead of in one sitting.

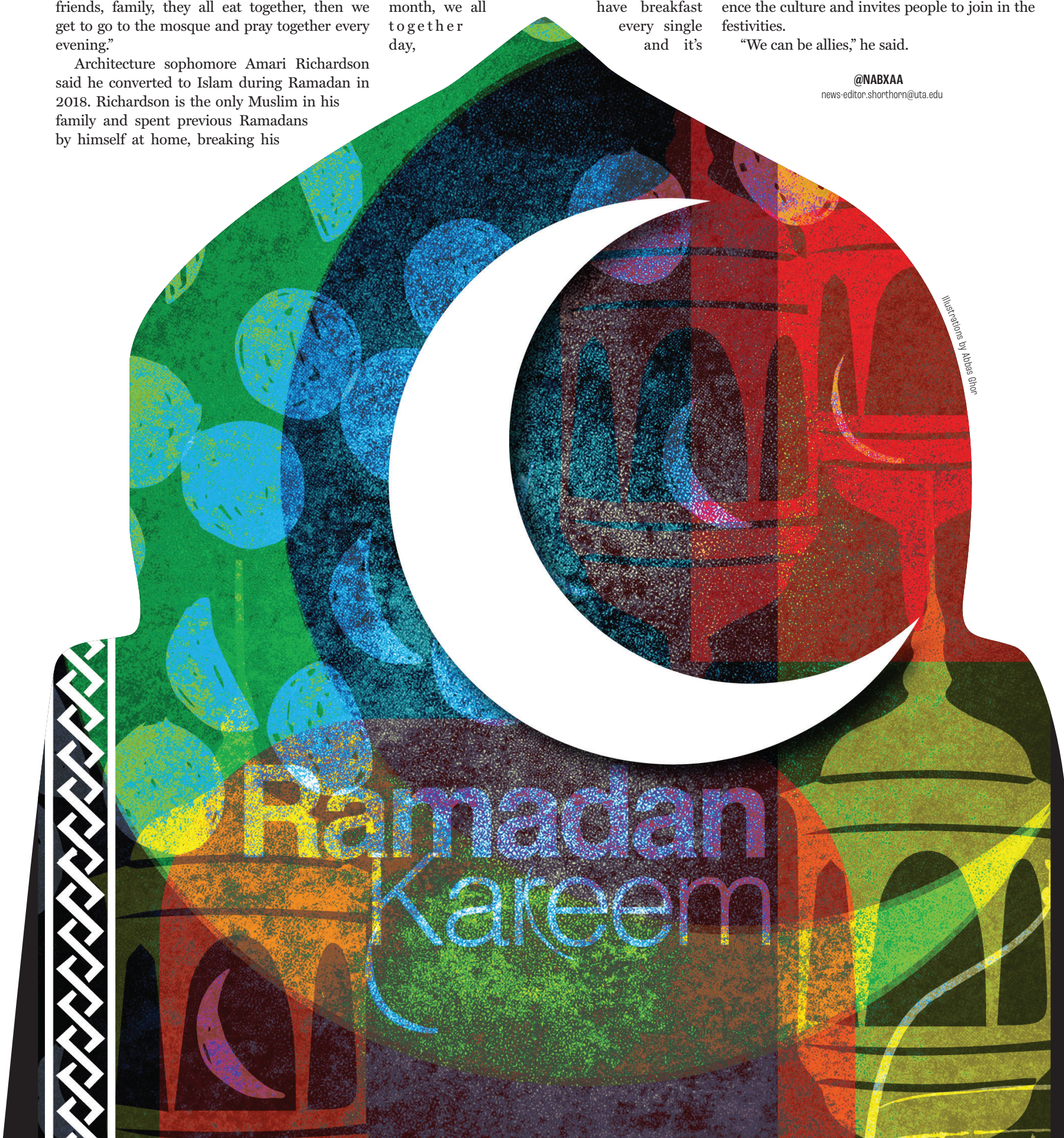
Richardson said he wants people to learn about Ramadan with an open mind and experience the culture and invites people to join in the festivities.

"We can be allies," he said.

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