



Retail Business Services

AAPI Heritage Month: Introducing Ahmed Al-Salih

May 11, 2021





Retail Business Services – the services company of Ahold Delhaize USA – is celebrating Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month by shining a light on some of our great associates with Asian or Pacific Islander heritage. This week, meet Ahmed Al-Salih, Senior Software Engineer for Retail Business Services, shares his quest to fulfill a lifelong dream.

Ahmed Al-Salih is used to journeys. When he first joined the organization in 2015, he would commute 100 miles each way from his home in New Hampshire to the office in Scarborough, Maine. Before that, he traveled more than 400 miles from his native Iraq to Syria; then 6,600 miles from Syria to the U.S.; and, in late 2015, another 800 miles to North Carolina, where he now lives and works out of the Salisbury campus. And all of this traveling is in pursuit of a lifelong goal – to earn a doctorate degree.

"Most of my uncles are doctors or professors, and my grandfathers on both sides are doctors, so I had no choice but to follow in their footsteps and pursue a PhD," Ahmed said, laughing. "Education is very important in my family."

Born and raised in Baghdad, Ahmed grew up in a country navigating war, political conflict and unrest. It was a turbulent time, certainly, but he has many fond memories of his childhood.

"The memories I have are of elementary school, riding my bike, running with my friends in the street and playing soccer with stones – things that are realities everywhere," he said. "It was just normal life, but because of the wars there weren't many opportunities. It wasn't easy to travel or take vacations somewhere else, so it was very much like a closed community."

Despite the insularity, he describes Baghdad as a city rich in diversity.

"Historically, Baghdad was a major stopping place for people going on a pilgrimage to Mecca," he said. "So, people from India, from Central and East Asia would all stop in Baghdad to rest and to sell crafts and goods they brought with them. They brought their culture, their foods, their religions – and all of those influences still exist within the city today. Baghdad became a pillar of culture and learning. So, education wasn't just important in my family – it's important to the city, as well."

Determined to pursue his dream of becoming a software engineer, Ahmed earned an undergraduate degree in Computer Science from the University of Baghdad. He quickly became an IT jack of all trades, working on everything from server administration to databases, as well as coding software. But he always knew he needed to leave Iraq if he wanted to pursue his career goals.

"I wanted to see how to link all these projects together," he said. "I wanted to have a larger vision."

So, shortly after he graduated, he began gathering paperwork to emigrate and to show that his degree met the standards of other nations.

"Otherwise, all my studies would have gone to waste," he said.

In 2007, Ahmed moved to Syria. Three years later, he came to the U.S. as a refugee with a clear goal.

"I wanted to complete my education here," he said. "I was accepted at Southern New Hampshire University, so I moved to the Manchester area to get my master's degree. It was a slight challenge to learn the system in the U.S., but I wanted to follow my dreams to be a software developer."

In 2014, he graduated with honors and began looking for a doctoral program. As he searched for the perfect fit, he began working with Retail Business Services and said the company made him feel at home. Over time, Ahmed moved to North Carolina where he is now based out of the company's Salisbury office. He builds applications for the great local brands of Ahold Delhaize USA while pursuing his PhD in computer science and cybersecurity at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Things have certainly changed since Ahmed lived in Baghdad; today, his mother lives with him in North Carolina, and the childhood friends he used to play soccer with as a child have settled across the globe. When asked about Baghdad, Ahmed said there is a common misconception he wants to correct.

"People think it's very hot because it's in the Middle East, but I've been to Florida – and Florida is much hotter than Iraq," he said with a laugh.

Keep an eye out for more associate features this month!