

Fresno businesses to close Friday in remembrance of Armenian genocide

By Andrea Castillo

- Armenian genocide: The 100th anniversary

Here are upcoming events organized by the Armenian Genocide Centennial-Fresno Committee:

- **April 23, 5 p.m.:** Requiem service, Ararat Cemetery's Memorial of the Unknown Armenian Martyr, 1925 W. Belmont Ave.
- **April 23, 7:30 p.m.:** Monument unveiling, Fresno State Maple Mall.
- **April 24, 9 a.m.:** Flag raising ceremony, Fresno City Hall, 2600 Fresno St.
- **April 24, 7 p.m.:** Traditional community commemoration, St. Paul Armenian Apostolic Church, 430 S. First St., and Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church, 3767 N. First St.
- **April 25, 7:30 p.m.:** Fresno Philharmonic concert, "Witness & Rebirth: An Armenian Journey," Saroyan Theatre.

For a complete listing of events, go to agcfresno.org.

Dozens of Fresno businesses will be closed Friday in remembrance of the Armenian genocide.

It all started with Town & Country Dry Cleaners in northwest Fresno, owned by Maral Manoukian and her brothers. In early February, the family put up signs letting their customers know they would be closed for the centennial anniversary of the start of the genocide.

It is common in Armenia and places with heavy Armenian populations, such as Toronto, Syria and Lebanon, for shops to close every April 24. In Glendale, a city in Los Angeles County with a large Armenian population, many stores and [the school district](#) will be closed.

Manoukian said that when the family lived in Montreal, her parents would close their shop and the children would skip school that day each year to march in Ontario for the Canadian government to recognize the genocide (which [it did in 2004](#)).

When the family moved to Fresno, they learned Armenian business owners did not hold the same tradition. So the business stayed open year after year, with some family members participating in commemoration events while others stayed back to assist customers.

"This year being the 100th anniversary, our family wants to participate," she said. "All of our grandparents went through the genocide, so we're very passionate about it."

The Manoukians' idea caught on. Paul Jamushian of the Armenian National Committee of America said at least 40 businesses will be closed Friday.

Manoukian said a family friend who is a photographer helped professionalize their homemade sign. They told business owner friends, who told their friends. The idea spread quickly. People still were asking Tuesday for signs to hang in their shops.

“We didn’t know it was going to get a life of its own,” she said.

Among the other businesses closing Friday are National Raisin Company in Fowler, Ara Karkazian Watch & Jewelry Company and Kebab Express.

Other business owners told the Manoukians they could not close Friday, but they still wanted to show their solidarity. They came up with another sign, reading in all caps, “In remembrance of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide Friday, April 24th.” Businesses with those signs include La Boulangerie, the Elbow Room and Uncle Harry’s New York Bagelry & Coffeehouse.

Manoukian said her family has received a lot of positive reinforcement for their decision to close. Some customers who saw the sign also asked about the genocide, turning it into a learning opportunity, she said.

“I just want people to be aware of it, to talk about it so that our country will recognize it and maybe through that process, Turkey will accept what has happened,” she said. “We did this for our own. We didn’t think this would get to the magnitude of what has happened now. We’re speechless.”

This week is packed with events marking the 100th anniversary of the genocide. Among those unique this year is the unveiling Thursday of Armenia Street in downtown Fresno in what used to be an Armenian neighborhood.

Berj Apkarian, honorary consul of Armenia in Fresno, along with Mayor Ashley Swearingin, will unveil the new street name — what is now Santa Clara Street. From O Street to Van Ness Avenue, Santa Clara will permanently become Armenia Street.

The unveiling will take place at 3:30 p.m. on the corner of Santa Clara and M streets.

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