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When in Israel, serve soup

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Abigail Klein Leichman • Local | World
Published: 28 October 2011



Chaya Goldsmith, right, with other volunteers at a Hazon Yeshaya soup kitchen during Sukkot.

On her twice-yearly trips to Israel from New Jersey, Chaya Goldsmith has steamed rice at a Hazon Yeshaya soup kitchen, picked vegetables for Leket national food bank, assisted the elderly at the Yad LeKashish: Lifeline for the Old, made signs for the ALYN Pediatric and Adolescent Rehabilitation Center bike-a-thon, danced with children at Keren Or-Jerusalem Center for Blind Children with Multiple Disabilities, and whatever else she can do to assist a variety of Israeli charitable endeavors.

It is not that Goldsmith ignores needs in her own backyard — she has also volunteered as a matchmaker, Kosher Meals on Wheels driver, and worker in a Bergen County homeless shelter and hospital.

"There are needs here, too, but in Israel it's for the Jewish people," says Goldsmith, one of several local residents organizing a Nov. 12 dinner at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in Battery Park to benefit Hazon Yeshaya. The largest humanitarian network in Israel, Hazon Yeshaya offers services to orphans, terror victims, Holocaust survivors, victims of abuse, sick and disabled people, and single-parent families. Its nutrition program provides 400,000 meals every month, and it runs free dental clinics, after-school programs, and vocational classes.

"I read about the organization years ago in The Jewish Standard and I always like to do volunteer work when I'm in Israel, so I decided to check it out," says Goldsmith, who was back in the soup kitchen during Sukkot. Her husband, Mark, and his law partners recently helped ALYN open a facility to house parents visiting their hospitalized children.

The Goldsmiths, who live in Teaneck, are among many North Jersey residents who do much more than write checks to charitable groups in the Holy Land.

"Aside from touring or visiting relatives and shopping, it's become part of the accepted routine to set aside time to volunteer during a trip to Israel," says Shoshana Shore, a former Edison resident who now works at Jerusalem-based Ohr Meir & Bracha: The Terror Victims Support Center. Each Thursday, volunteers help assemble hundreds of Shabbat food baskets for families laid low by terrorism.

"I play 'Jewish geography' with whoever comes through the door, and I find that many of our volunteers, whether adults or bar/bat mitzvah kids or students here for a year after high school, are from New Jersey," says Shore.

Looking at the guestbook, she notes volunteers clocking in from Englewood, Clifton-Passaic, Upper Saddle River, Fair Lawn, Teaneck, and Bergenfield.

MOST POPULAR

Matching b'nai mitzvah with mitzvot Keshet Olam provides critical connections

Lois Goldrich • 2 October 2011
Local

Several years ago, as Noah Shlufman began the road that would carry him to his bar mitzvah, his father made a discovery.

As Dan Shlufman joined other parents at his synagogue to discuss the year ahead, students were sent to a different area of the shul to discuss bar/bat mitzvah projects.

"We sent them down with the educational director and past students to talk about different projects," said Shlufman. "It seemed a bit ad hoc — like reinventing the wheel."

He also realized, he said, that organizing b'nai/b'not mitzvah projects was precisely the kind of venture the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey (JFNNJ) might be involved with.

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The technology factor School turns to high-tech to stimulate students

Deena Yellin Fuksbrumer • 2 October 2011
Local

When students in Rabbi Aaron Ross's Torah study class learn a new topic, they do more than just scrutinize the text. They go to the Wiki, fill out the Google Doc, watch teacher-produced videos about the unit, and take part in online discussions of the material with Ross and their classmates.

"It's a lot more fun than having them go home and teach themselves the material from the book," mused Ross, a middle school Judaic studies teacher at Yavneh Academy I Paramus. "The Wiki is a hub for all sorts of media where they can post pictures, videos, VoiceThreads, and articles to teach each other. What it facilitates is amazing."

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Frisch activists thrilled 'A lot of prayers have been answered,' they say

Larry Yudelson • 12 October 2011
Local

For the student activists at the Frisch School in Paramus, the prospect that Gilad Shalit might be returning home after years of captivity was thrilling.

All the students at Frisch had prayed for Shalit's release. A psalm was recited daily on his behalf.

For some students, however, advocacy for Shalit was an extracurricular avocation.

"It's pretty unbelievable, because it's so sudden," said Michaela Elias on Tuesday afternoon, shortly after Israel Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's startling announcement. "Right now we can only continue praying like we've been doing for five years."

Michaela, a 17-year-old senior, along with her sister Tali, a 16-year-old junior, had written a song and created a website advocating for Shalit's release.

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Last year, the organization's founder, Leora Tedgi, hosted a bat mitzvah party for girls coming to volunteer with Chana Reichman, the rebbetzin of Englewood's East Hill Synagogue. On these regular jaunts, the girls and moms not only pack vegetables and challah but also "twin" with similarly aged girls among the group's 400 client families.

"There's a connection between Jews no matter where they live," says Tedgi. She relies on the good will of Jews outside of Israel to contribute both time and money. "We cannot do it ourselves; we need help from our 'family' abroad."

Many of these involved donors choose one or two organizations as the focus of their overseas benevolence. For example, Steven and Eileen David of Englewood dedicated a playground at Sanhedria Children's Home in Jerusalem and visit the home whenever they are in Israel.

"I meet the Davids every time they come to Israel, and they are always interested in the children's welfare," says Miriam Braun, director of program development at this residential treatment center for boys with a history of severe abuse.

Sanhedria is partially supported by the Ministry of Welfare, but depends on others to provide everything from new school backpacks to sufficient professional staffing.

"We take it on ourselves to give the extras and hope the Jewish community will help us," says Braun. "Year after year, Bergen County gets very good representation because many yeshiva high school graduates from this area volunteer here, and they tell their parents and friends and rabbis. The parents get very enthusiastic and often come to visit us when they're here."

Many North Jersey bar mitzvah celebrants hold their parties at Sanhedria and donate gift money as well. "All of this helps our boys heal, and makes their orbit a sunnier place," Braun says.

ALYN is another favorite. Teams of riders from Bergen County fly over for the Wheels of Love bike-a-thon year after year. On Nov. 6-10, Jeff Erdfarb of Teaneck plans to participate in his 11th ride.

"I feel it's important to help children anywhere they might live, especially children with physical handicaps," he says, noting that about half the patients at ALYN are Arabs. "I feel it can help bridge the gaps between people," he says. "Anything you can do to help Israel is very important, and I've made unbelievable friends on these trips over the years, both American and Israeli."

Not surprisingly, children's charities resonate strongly with active donors.

The Parker families of Englewood — brothers Drew, Jeffrey, and Michael — joined their brother and sister four years ago to establish the Shirley Margolin Parker Home for Infants at Bet Elezraki, an Emunah residential facility for 240 Israeli children from abusive homes.

"After our mother passed away, my four siblings and I were looking for a way to honor her as a family," explains Michael Parker. "My mother had a real, genuine, heartfelt passion for Israel and a very deep genuine love for children, so we met with the head of the home. He said there was a need, unfortunately, for a place for infants who had been abused or neglected and they hadn't been able to serve that segment."

Following a 2006 trip to Israel to assess the situation, the Parkers helped Bet Elezraki purchase and renovate a building to accommodate about 14 babies and young children in crisis. "My mother imbued that love of Israel in all of us, so we blended that with the opportunity to help children she felt strongly about," says Parker.

Seventeen years ago, Teaneck residents Becky and Daniel Wolf donated \$1,000 of their engagement gift money to Beit Issie Shapiro (BIS) in Ra'anana, which provides a range of services to children with special needs.

"We tried to pick one place to give a significant donation every year," says Becky Wolf. "We wanted it to be in Israel and something to do with children. My husband served in the Israeli army and we both spent a year here post-high school and felt a strong connection to Israel."

Over Sukkot, the Wolfs — now board members of the American Friends of BIS and yearly visitors with their three kids — were at the facility celebrating their daughter Gabriella's becoming a bat mitzvah. A student at Yeshivat Noam in Paramus, Gabriella raised more than \$5,000 for BIS and brought books to Liri, a 12-year-old BIS student.

Wolf notes that BIS's innovations in special needs are known worldwide, and physical therapists in North Jersey are familiar with its methods. The organization established Friendship Park, Israel's first fully accessible and inclusive playground, whose design and programs are being replicated in Israel and other countries.

"Every year for the past four years, I have been selling mishloach manot [Purim baskets] to benefit Beit Issie, and when our youngest was born I asked for donations instead of gifts," says Wolf. "Even if I get just one person to look at their website and donate, it's worth it."

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World

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Rep. Anthony Weiner resigned and apologized in the wake of a scandal in which he lied about sexually explicit exchanges on social media outlets.

"I am here today to apologize for the personal mistakes I have made and the embarrassment that I have caused," Weiner (D-N.Y.) said at a news conference Thursday at a home for the elderly in Brooklyn where in the past he has announced his intention to run for office.

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From praise to anger, Jewish response to Obama's speech runs the gamut

Ron Kampeas • 20 May 2011
World

WASHINGTON — From accolades like "compelling" to accusations like "Auschwitz borders" to radio silence, to label the Jewish response to President Obama's speech on Middle East policy as diverse understates matters.

The very breadth of the Middle East policy speech — 5,600 words and covering the entire Middle East and decades of history — helps explain the wildly divergent responses from Jewish groups and opinion shapers, even among some who are otherwise often on the same page.

One could as easily pick out points for Israel — slamming the Palestinian Authority's pact with Hamas as well as its bid for unilateral statehood — as one could the demerits — for many, the most explicit endorsement of the pre-1967 lines as the basis for future borders by any American president.

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Obama: 1967 borders with swaps should serve as basis for negotiations

19 May 2011
World

WASHINGTON — President Obama said the future state of Palestine should be based on the pre-1967 border with mutually agreed land swaps with Israel.

In his address Thursday afternoon on U.S. policy in the Middle East, Obama told an audience at the State Department that the borders of a "sovereign, nonmilitarized" Palestinian state "should be based on 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps."

Negotiations should focus first on territory and security, and then the difficult issues of the status of Jerusalem and what to do about the rights of Palestinian refugees can be broached, Obama said.

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