

Israeli vets again at home in Pittsburgh

By ORIT GREENBERG, *Chronicle Special Staff*

June 7, the Henry Kaufmann Family Recreation Park pool was cold and empty, the parking lot deserted and the food stand closed, but there was lots of laughter, music and food at the Robinson Pavilion as 10 Israeli veterans and their Pittsburgh host families commemorated their last day together with a farewell dinner.

Celebrating 22 years of playing host to the American Friends of Israel War Disabled, the Pittsburgh Jewish community once again entertained, educated and welcomed the Israeli Vets.

This year's families included: Laura Ellman and Peter Ennis, Debbie and Dan Frankel, Ronna and Richard Harris, Lynn and Steven Irwin, Helen and Gerald Kobell, Davida Fromm and Mark Malvin, Judy and Jon Shimm, Tova and Joel Weinberg, Amy and Lou Weiss, who chaired the program, and Roberta and David Zeve. For the third year in a row Barbara Booken organized the program that allows the Veterans a tour of Washington D.C., a trip to Niagara Falls, a taste of New York and a great time in Pittsburgh.

"Barbara organized all the logistics of the program, which is really the hardest part," Lou Weiss said. "Amy and I recruited the families." The Weiss's have been involved with the program in many capacities since 1993. This year they hosted the madrich of the group, Avi Ream.

Receiving special recognition for his bravery, Ream, who was a medic stationed in Lebanon, lost his leg in a PLO minefield while saving a Lebanese woman and her son.

"These soldiers have made the most incredible sacrifices for Jewish people all over the world," said Weiss as he reflected on Avi's and the rest of the group's courageous acts.

A kibbutznik from Maagam Michael, Emmenol Maloll, endearingly referred to as Dooby, was injured after parachuting out of a plane and becoming entangled with another soldier.

"I spent two years in a hospital. At first I was paraplegic; it took me a year to get better," explained Maloll, who is now a grandfather.

Many of these heroic stories were stated throughout the two weeks as the host families and vets shared time together.

"Everything was very nicely organized," Ream said. "Every activity represented an interesting experience in itself." Along with the trips outside Pittsburgh, the program included numerous events such as, a city tour, a day at Kennywood, the JCC, and Fallingwater, a Pirates game and of course, shopping.

"The kabbalat Shabbat I shared with the Weiss family was especially impressive... they are a one-of-a-kind family," Ream remarked. "The entire Pittsburgh Jewish community is lovely and warm, but the host

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Israeli vets at home here again

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families that were selected are particularly special."

He concluded, "We (the vets) had an exceptionally warm welcome and felt a special relationship with all the families."

Nessy Naggar, who stayed with the Weinberg's, said, "For me it was an experience that I will never forget." Marking his first trip to the U.S., he claimed that "there was not one dull moment... Lou did an exceptional job."

'...one vet represented another religion. Amer Birany, a Druze...'

He was also impressed with the JCC, "especially its involvement with the young generation." With two daughters of his own, he felt close to the Weinberg's family and very much at home.

The Frankel's had the privilege of hosting Keren Itzik who was the only woman and at 21 years of age, the youngest member of the group. A Hebrew University student, she suffered from the pain of her injury, but she kept up with everyone and enjoyed her experience in the States.

Amy Weiss shared, "Because there was such a range of ages (early 20's to late 50's) it was nice to see the dynamics of the group."

The Israelis represented various regions of Israel and one vet represented another religion. Amer Birany, a Druze, a religious sect originating among Muslims, was from Dalyat El-Carmel. Hosted by the Zeves, Birany became a spokesperson and provided information about his religion to the host families and other members of the Jewish community.

In the end, the vets made new friends from the States and from Israel.

"This group has developed a special bond and we will keep in touch when we return to Israel," declared Naggar. Yehiel

Hayun, Aharon Rahimi, Eran Mizrachi, Lior Ron, and Barak Brener completed the group.

"This delegation is important because it not only represented Israel's wounded soldiers, but Israel as a country, and I hope these sponsored activities will continue," Ream said.

"It made me very happy to see the young generation so involved in this endeavor...it assures continuity within the Jewish community," explained Maloll. "In Pittsburgh I have discovered a warm and giving community and people who are ready to give without expecting anything in return...and that is truly beautiful."

Lou Weiss succinctly stated, "The program is wonderful for the vets, but it's more wonderful for the hosts and their children."

To become a host family next year or to receive more information about American Friends of Israel War Disabled contact Barbara Booken at 422-3236.



VETS pose in the nation's capital.

Yeshiva girls school renewed

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"We are beginning a library which we did not have room for before, and a very nice computer room which we are hoping to utilize next year."

There is also a state-of-the-art science lab which became functional three months ago. The lab is equipped with Bunsen burner and electrical outlets at each work station, as well as an emergency safety shower.

"With the size of the rooms, the teachers have a chance to plan and create projects," they weren't able to in the past, said Deren enthusiastically.

As for the girls, "children adapt so fast and easy. The excitement, with the girls saying, 'come look at our new floor' or 'the windows are here,' made me so very pleased at the girls optimism."

Unlike the old CDS building, a new entrance has been built in the rear which makes it handicapped accessible, and there are plans to eventually install an elevator.

Alexandra Knox, the school's director of secular studies, is also pleased with the new facilities.

"The fact that we have the great room downstairs (the large space serves as an auditorium, lunch room and activity room) (allows us to) have regular physical education classes which we weren't able to have before.

"We have a computer lab which we are developing new curriculum for right now. Our library is wired," to interact with other libraries, as well as university programs, around the country and world. There is also a nurses station (infirmary), and a specialized resources room.

"What I think has made a huge impact on our girls are the aesthetics of the new building — the more vibrant the building, the better the learning process."

New windows have been installed in the rooms which take advantage of natural sunlight but reduce glare, giving an

open, bright and sunny feel.

The soon to be opened preschool on the lower level, has play lofts built in each room. Themes of these brightly painted lofts include 'the neighborhood', 'the castle' and 'the city'.

There is still significant work which is planned, according to Rabbi Rosenfeld.

"It will be done eventually, in stages," as money becomes available, he explained. "We still need more funds."

Rabbi Rosenfeld said that the new facilities would have been impossible without the grant from the Renaissance Campaign. Aside from the monies raised for all of the day schools, however, Rabbi Rosenfeld said there is other value in a Renaissance-type campaign.

"The unity of the community was beautifully brought out," by the campaign he said.

"All in all, it's going to make for a happy atmosphere of learning."