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Fridays, February 8,
15, 22

NJJFF Reel Film Series
Winter Session

Monday, February 25
Regional Celebration

Sunday, March 3

Supermarket Sweep
Fundraiser

Thursday, March 7

Live From Greater
MetroWest

Hurfeish

By Natalie Elgrabli

Federation's Youth Futures story in Hurfeish began in 2006 during the Second Lebanon War. The notion of collaboration with a non-Jewish population was raised and found intriguing.

The Druze village of Hurfeish, now one of Federation's seven partner communities in Israel, was considered a natural choice in light of the shared values and history that bind the Druze minority and the Jews in Israel. In addition to creating a living bridge between our Greater MetroWest community and the Druze culture, this connection strengthened the relationship between different ethnic groups in Israel by acquainting Hurfeish with Rishon LeZion, a Federation partner community with a unique connection more than 35 years old.

The Youth Futures initiative is dedicated to the advancement of children. It is funded by Federation's Annual UJA Campaign.

I decided to visit Hurfeish to see the program in action. As this was my first visit to a Druze village, I wasn't sure what to expect. Soon, houses topped with red slates stood out in contrast to the evergreen of the pine forest that surrounds the picturesque village. I could almost spot Lebanon through the clouds and found myself wondering if living so close to the border affected one's life.

Upon my arrival, I visited one of the two elementary schools. Aya Cheraldin, the school's principal, told me of the school's history of struggle and achievement. More than half of the students come from families who receive welfare services. Youth Futures develops each child's unique set of skills through the assistance of a meaningful adult figure (a Trustee), whose relationship with the child resembles a "big brother." Recognizing the growing need, Federation now supports Youth Futures in our other partnership communities of Arad, Ofakim, and Merchavim.

The opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints expressed by the various authors of articles in this e-newsletter do not necessarily reflect the opinions, beliefs and viewpoints of Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ.

Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ
Headquarters: 901 Route 10 | P.O. Box 929 | Whippany, NJ 07981-0929 | Phone: 973/929.3000
Regional Office: 1391 Martine Avenue, Scotch Plains NJ 07076-9920 | Phone: 908/889.5335

www.jfedgmw.org • webmaster@jfedgmw.org

CAMPAIGN UPDATE

On Sunday, 220 people attended the Step Up for Israel Advocacy Summit to learn how to respond to misinformation and false accusations about Israel. The Queen Esther Tea held at the Union Y brought together 130 women from throughout Greater MetroWest to learn some new fashion tips.



Now in operation for five years, the successful Hurfeish program currently serves 48 children ages 8-12 alongside three Trustees. Twice a year every child's progress is reviewed by his/her teacher, the principal, and a psychologist in order to recognize potential difficulties. Ideally, children that fit the criteria are offered a place in the program, where they meet twice a week with their Trustee; once as a group and once individually.

In addition to the attention and care the children at the program get from their Trustees, equally important is the collaboration between the Trustee, school, social services, and the child's family, as a way of ensuring the "whole" child is addressed. "This collaboration is crucial," stated Nabila Shenan, Youth Futures school coordinator, "since problems at home often translate into problems at school and so we need the family to be on board.

Because of the conservative nature of Druze society, parental support has not always been a given; it has greatly improved over time. Yet, one has to remember that this is a small traditional village and to open one's home and share problems with strangers, even if their intentions are honest, is not easy for these families. Interestingly, it seems that the change in public opinion led to the air of prestige the program now enjoys, with more children applying than the budget can support. This is presenting a new challenge that must be addressed.

The Trustees are intensely dedicated to "their" children. "When you meet the same children for three years you form an attachment that is as important to you as it is to them," said a Trustee.

One story this Trustee remembered well regarded a 10-year-old boy who had learning challenges and outbreaks of rage. "He was so shy that he would not agree to meet me in school," she recalled. The Trustee didn't give up, and in



coordination with the boy's mother, met him at his home on a weekly basis until he was ready to meet in school.

With the added encouragement of his teachers he started speaking in class and eventually volunteered to sing at a public event. The Trustee concluded, "It was amazing to see the change in him through the years. Furthermore, the boy's younger brother is now in the program, so one can see how the program affected the entire family."

It became important for this Trustee to see that "her" child succeed in school and in making friends. These sentiments are what drive this project onward. At the same time, it reflects on the willingness of the community to adapt to changes in the hope of creating a better future for its children.

Natalie Elgrabli, a former shlichah (Israeli emissary) in historic Central, is Israel Center associate for Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ.

Monthly Matters

A Synagogue "Home" Open to All By Rebecca Wanatick

How do you live Jewishly in our Greater MetroWest community? Do you work out at one of the JCCs or the Y, send your children to Jewish camps, belong to a synagogue? Personally, my connection to Jewish life in our community began when I was pregnant with my first child and we were "synagogue hopping."

My husband and I were looking for the place that felt right for our growing family. We were fortunate to find a home at Morristown Jewish Center Beit Yisrael, where our family has been engaged for 14 years. Our children attended its preschool, making the synagogue their "home" from a very early age.

As my kids have grown, our synagogue experiences have changed, but they all connect our family to their "childhood home" and the greater Jewish community around us.

For many individuals with special needs and their families, finding a "home" in the Jewish community is challenging. While my children's first experiences were through our synagogue's preschool, children with special needs are frequently participating in town special needs programs to meet their therapeutic needs. Families don't have the same opportunities to find their place at an early stage, which means they can't easily connect Jewishly to the greater community.

Which begs the question of how do we, as a Jewish community, make inclusion a greater priority? How do we help families navigate the "unfamiliar road" and find their home in Greater MetroWest? MetroWest ABLE's goal is to create a kehillah shlema, a community made whole by the inclusion of all of its members.

MetroWest ABLE is a program of our Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ that supports and advocates for individuals with special needs and their families. Through involvement with our community members, synagogues, and agencies, MetroWest ABLE seeks to connect individuals with existing resources and raise the level of inclusive programming so that every family can find their "home." It's a program that's being modeled across the country.

February is Jewish Disability Awareness Month. In addition to existing initiatives to increase inclusion, congregations across Greater MetroWest are engaging in special programming. The goal? To continue to raise awareness of the need to support the meaningful inclusion of people with special needs and their families in every aspect of Jewish life in Greater MetroWest.

As we emphasize the importance of making Jewish experiences accessible for all, we begin

to change the culture of our community. We have begun to see these changes already, with congregations providing shadows for students to participate in inclusive religious school programs, membership packets that include information about necessary accommodations for your family, and Shabbat and holiday programming designed to meet differing needs.

Our synagogues are becoming “home” to a greater number of families who are finding that they do have a place in the Jewish community.

Read this first-person account of parenting a child with special needs by Heidi Rome here.

For more information on Jewish Disability Awareness Month programs and all the resources available in Greater MetroWest, visit the MetroWest ABLE website or contact Rebecca Wanatick at (973) 929-3129.

Rebecca Wanatick is community inclusion coordinator of MetroWest ABLE.

MetroWest Connects Globally

The Power of Birthright Israel

It was a spur-of-the-moment decision. Jonathan Shyne, an education major at SUNY Oswego, wasn't even thinking about Birthright when one of his friends said, “Let's go on Birthright this winter.” And so they did, on Greater MetroWest's Birthright Israel bus last month.

The rest is history; actually, it's more like “back to the future.” Summer 2013 will find Jonathan back in Israel as an ESL teacher with Federation's Kefiada program.



Shyne was one of 34 young adults ages 22-26 whose lives were changed last month by their free, 10-day trip to Israel. Samantha Kubek called her mother on Day 3 and said, “I am absolutely coming back.” She's making good on that promise — just five weeks after Birthright, she's returning to Israel on her spring break.



Shyne, who grew up in Montville, admits going into the trip as a “blank slate.” Growing up in an interfaith home (as did several other people on the trip) he wasn't “comfortable following a religion because I had no education or push from my parents to join one.” When he told some friends he was going to Israel, their response, based on media reports, was, “Why are you going there? It's horrible over there.”

Jonathan Shyne, right, and Eric Margulies He found Israel was nothing like what his friends thought.

“I was surprised by how built up it was. The greenery. How much you didn't see (of the conflict). Everyone was nicer there.”

“It was just over the top amazing,” he continued. “I had a great time. The biggest surprise was the connections and friendships. I expected to sleep on the bus, listen to my music, and go from Point A to Point B. I ended up not using my phone once on the bus and talking to people instead.”

Kubek, of Short Hills, came to Israel from a different background than Shyne. She celebrated her Bat Mitzvah at Oheb Shalom in South Orange, where she adopted a survivor through the Holocaust Council of Greater MetroWest for her mitzvah project. (She visited “her” survivor two days after she returned from Birthright.)

Her mother always spoke about how going to

Israel is like going home. “I always rolled my eyes at her,” said Kubek a little sheepishly, “but now I definitely feel that way too.”

What made the trip truly come alive for the senior at Georgetown University, and many others, was the relationships formed with the five Israeli soldiers who traveled with them for several days.

“It was amazing to see they live such different lives than we do, but they're just like us in many ways,” said Kubek.

When the soldiers and the group first met, the soldiers were all in uniforms; at the end of day, they had changed into civvies. “It was easy to forget they're soldiers because they became our friends. But then on the last day with them we went to Mt. Herzl and they were back in their uniforms. I've been to Arlington Cemetery, but it's not personal. At Mt. Herzl, every soldier knows someone.

“We sat down and all sang Hatikva,” continued Kubek. “One of the soldiers spoke about all of the things they have to go through in the army to get the different pins they wear on their uniforms. Then Rachaeli, who became my best friend on the trip, talked about how close we had become and she gave me her pins. I'll never forget that moment. We text every day.”

Even the staff had their “aha” moments. Rozi BenAmi, a Greater MetroWest shlichah (professional emissary) spoke about how amazing it was for her to see Israel through the eyes of a tourist. “The whole trip was like a gift,” she said.

The experience doesn't end when participants come home. With their home base being Greater MetroWest, it's easier for alumni to attend Federation events and reunions and keep up on Facebook and Twitter. According to several participants, there's a constant text thread.

At the end of every trip, a few participants are selected by staff to have a first or second Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Shyne was one of those chosen. It felt right to him. The ceremony took place overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem.

“Even before the trip, I would say I don't believe in religion...However, with the love and acceptance that this religion and culture have to offer, I don't know how I'd be able to identify as anything other than a Jew.”

RabbiSpeak

God and the Super Bowl

By Rabbi Joshua Hess

Does God care about who wins the Super Bowl? It's a question that has been asked numerous times in sports.

There's no denying that the Super Bowl, with its half-time show and million dollar commercials, commands a tremendous amount of attention unequalled by any other sporting event. In 1985, the public celebration of Ronald Reagan's inauguration was shifted from the constitutionally required day of January 20, a Sunday, to the following day, Monday, so as not to conflict with Super Bowl Sunday.

Most people laugh at the foolishness of whether God cares about this particular game and insist that God has more important things to be worried about. In their minds, the person who believes that God cares about football is somewhat delusional.

To provide what I feel is the correct answer to this question, it's helpful to reframe the conversation. Does God care about each and every human being on earth? I think so. Indeed, the Talmud tells us that a blade of grass doesn't sway in the wind without God commanding it to. Whether you agree or not (much ink has been spilled over its theological implications), the point is that God cares about us. We may not like His decisions, we may get angry at Him at times, but God cares.

At the time of this writing, Ray Lewis led the Baltimore Ravens to an AFC Championship rematch against the New England Patriots. I don't know whether God will grant him a spot in the Super Bowl, but he quite loudly and proudly believes that God granted him these last couple of victories.

After the first playoff game he wore a “Psalm 91” shirt and declared that because God is his refuge, he was victorious. After their stunning victory

against the Denver Broncos, he preached the holy words of Isaiah to Sal Paolantonio, “No weapon formed against you shall prosper,” and concluded by claiming that “man cannot change what God has already blessed and destined.” A few years back, I wrote an article defending Buffalo Bills wide receiver Steve Johnson, who similarly blamed God for causing him to drop a game winning catch against the Pittsburgh Steelers.

These men and many others know that God cares about them and their success. They understand that God desires a close relationship with everyone and appreciates every prayer – from the “mundane” to the “holy.” Three times a day, many Jews recite the majestic words of King David, “God is close to all who call upon him sincerely.” If we care, then God cares. It’s as simple as that.

So does God care who wins the Super Bowl? Well, not exactly. But He will be at that game rooting for each player, owner, fan, and concession stand worker hoping that the experience of the Super Bowl will, win or lose, enhance and deepen their relationship with Him. While some may claim that God has more important things to worry about, I believe that God is everywhere. I don’t place limits on the limitless.

As we savor the last football game of the season, keep in mind that even God has priorities. Let’s not forget that first and foremost, our obligation is to our community. Federation is the most important vehicle for community building and communal growth. I hope we all identify the Greater MetroWest Federation as an organization whose great work on behalf of the needy in our community and in Israel, for our teens, seniors, synagogues, as well as the other crucial services it supports, is worthy not only of our monetary support, but also of our time and effort.

By doing so, we will undoubtedly strengthen our relationship with God.

Rabbi Hess is religious leader of Congregation Anshe Chesed, Linden, maintains a popular sports and religion blog, “the FANatic rabbi,” and is co-founder of PopJewish, a blog that looks at the intersection of Jewish wisdom and pop culture.

CRC: Action Alert

Learn to Advocate for Israel in February

The Community Relations Committee of Greater MetroWest NJ (CRC) has designated February as Israel Advocacy Month. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to get the education and training you need to be part of a growing community of passionate and active advocates for Israel.

We understand that advocacy can be intimidating but we know that it’s necessary, not just in the U.S. policy domain but in the public relations war against Israel. This includes responding to misinformation and false accusations in the media, on college campuses, and in several church-based groups, among other places, in addition to interacting with elected officials.

To be a successful advocate one needs to inform oneself on the history and how to handle hard questions, how to discern the truth of a media report and respond, and how to engage others in the community who are taking action against Israel through the Boycott, Sanctions and Divestment campaign or inaccurate and misleading reporting.

You can be an advocate for Israel whether you consider yourself “left” or “right” on Israeli matters. We are calling on everyone – left, right, and center – who believes that Israel has the right to exist to come together in support of Israel.

Our most recent efforts began in October 2011 when the CRC launched the Step Up For Israel (SUFI) initiative and the community responded. Forty synagogues have implemented a movie series and established ongoing programming for college and high school students. They are also helping to create a community advocacy corps, and are leading our community in building awareness, becoming educated, and honing advocacy skills.

The Step Up For Israel Advocacy Summit, which was held yesterday, kicked off the month of advocacy training. Experts looked at how efforts to delegitimize Israel is impacting grassroots support for the Jewish State. They provided

specific tools for advocating for Israel and how to become involved locally.

February programs include:

- Step Up For Israel 2 Movie Series is being made available FREE to all synagogues and Jewish organizations in Greater MetroWest. The series will enable your synagogue/organization members to hone their knowledge base and create a local advocacy corps. Check your synagogue bulletin for dates.
- On February 8-10, the CRC, in partnership with the Israel Program Center of Greater MetroWest NJ, is hosting the second Talk Israel Retreat for Jewish college students in New Jersey to forge a Jewish college community of advocates.
- On Thursday, February 14, at 7 p.m., Temple Beth Shalom in Livingston is hosting “Changing The Times?” This interactive briefing featuring CAMERA will focus on understanding the nature of the bias against Israel in The New York Times and the ways concerned readers can respond.
- On Monday, February 18, at 2 p.m. at the Regional Office on the Wilf Jewish Community Campus in Scotch Plains, Dr. Mordechai Kedar will discuss “Why Is the Middle East Such a Difficult Area for Americans and Westerners to Understand?”
- CRC is working with JTeenMW to implement the SUFI high school curriculum. A Write On For Israel community-wide teen program is set for March 15.
- Israel Matters Exhibit. The exhibit will be displayed at Rutgers University during “Israel Hate Week” (otherwise known as Israel-Apartheid Week) WHEN, at the NJ State House for the 65th celebration of Israel’s birthday, and at other college campuses and locations.

Act Now!

- Participate in local Step Up For Israel programs
- Add your name to CRC action alerts and petitions, and participate in rallies and

programs. Every signature and voice counts!!

- Join the CRC Israel & World Affairs Committee and the newly launched Interfaith Christian Outreach Subcommittee to build relationships with local Christian-based groups.

To keep updated and to register for programs, “Like” us on our CRC Greater MetroWest Facebook page or visit www.jfedgmw.org/crc.



Members of the Greater MetroWest community continue to help victims of Hurricane Sandy locally, and especially in our partner community of Union Beach, through Federation’s Give Help initiative. More about our efforts to date can be found in the November, December, and January issues of Speak EZ.

Simon Kaplan of Mountainside, the owner of Value City Furniture, donated \$78,000 worth of furniture to Union Beach residents, who were invited to shop (for free) at the company’s East Brunswick store on January 26. Read more here.

AkzoNobel, through Riccardi Bros., donated 15 five-gallon containers of paint to Union Beach.

Temple Sinai in Summit donated \$6,721 to Federation’s Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund.

To date, Federation has organized four volunteer days in Union Beach with over 120 community members participating. On January 20, volunteers did demo work on apartments for senior adults who have been displaced since the storm. A fifth volunteer day is scheduled for Sunday, February 17. Volunteers can register here.

15 members of the Summit Jewish Community Center’s Teen Experience, together with their parents, volunteered in Union Beach on January 27, an effort facilitated by Federation.

Herb Rozansky, 83, of West Orange, will be celebrating his second Bar Mitzvah on May 23, 2013. As his “mitzvah project,” he has chosen to do small carpentry jobs in Long Beach Island. He was a member of Federation’s volunteer team in Union Beach on January 20 and plans to go back

Speak EZ

on February 17.

Federation gave \$5,000 to Chabad Jewish Center in Hoboken, a community supported by Jewish Family Service of MetroWest, to help with repairs sustained from the storm.

The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, born from the sale of Newark Beth Israel Medical Center in 1996, has as part of its mission improving the health and well-being of the most vulnerable people of MetroWest NJ. After discussions between Federation and the Foundation leadership following Super Storm Sandy, the Foundation agreed to spearhead and fund a Day of Health in Union Beach on January 19, during which 300 people were seen and 175 flu shots were dispensed. Jewish Family Service of Central NJ, a Federation partner agency, helped connect the Foundation with the Visiting Nurse Association Health Group of Red Bank, which provided the medical services. Follow up will continue for six months.

Thank you, Greater MetroWest, for your dedication to tikkun olam, repairing the world. You are helping to make our world a better place.