

Special Mentschen

Na'amat's Women of Inspiration

BY
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On December 3rd, Na'amat Hamilton proudly hosted a "Women of Inspiration" tribute evening to honour four remarkable women from our community. The women, Mary Blum Devor, May Cohen, Sharon Marcovitz Hart, and Gloria Silverman, were chosen for their inspiring and longstanding contributions to social action and for their embodiment of the values and ideals promoted by Na'amat. With involvements ranging from health care to education to community outreach, each of these women has generously given of themselves in knowledge, time and compassion. They have been exemplary role models and have built networks of support and connection with and for the many people whose lives they have touched.

The evening also served as a fundraiser for Na'amat, a Jewish women's organization with chapters in several countries, whose primary mandate is to help fund a broad spectrum of social services for women and children of all faiths in Israel. The majority of day care centers in Israel are run under the auspices of Na'amat and the recent Hamilton fundraiser was held specifically to help finance the restoration of



Honourees May Cohen and Sharon Marcovitz Hart listen to proceedings

the Carmiel daycare center, a facility damaged by this summer's rocket attacks. Funds raised will go towards both the repair

a musical background, and a bountiful dessert selection following the formal event presentations. Each honoree was introduced by a friend, colleague or family member before speaking to the audience themselves. Gloria Silverman, though unfortunately unable to be there physically, was with the group in spirit and thought and had passed

along her comments to be shared with those present. The evening was well attended and successful, bringing together individuals from all over the community and beyond, in support of a good cause and in well deserved recognition of four outstanding individuals.

An open letter to the community from Gloria Silverman

*Dear Friends,
Words cannot express the gratitude that I feel towards all of you for your incredible support, prayers, letters, cards, flowers, donations and good wishes that have helped see me through this illness. I hope to be home in the very near future to continue my convalescence. Again my heartfelt thanks.*

of the physical grounds and structures and to the treatment of the traumatized children and families who depend on the center for support and safety.

The tribute evening was held at Beth Jacob synagogue and included an initial reception with wine and hors d'oeuvres,

Book on Jewish Identity Wins National Jewish Book Award

Hamilton resident and Wilfrid Laurier University associate professor, Faydra Shapiro, has just been awarded a 2006 National Jewish Book Award in the United States for her book, *Building Jewish Roots: The Israel Experience*. The book, which began as a PhD thesis while she pursued a doctorate at McMaster University, offers an exploration of how participants build rich and varied Jewish identities through their experiences in Israel at the long-established Livnot U'Lehibanot program.

Livnot U'Lehibanot (meaning to build and to be built) is a non-denominational Israel experience program based in Tzfat and Jerusalem that provides educational and community service programs for Jews of all ages and backgrounds. Dr. Shapiro argues in her book that Israel Experience Programs offer participants the power to shape and choose their own Jewish identities.

Dr. Shapiro speaks from personal experience. She herself was a participant at Livnot in the early 1990s and credits the experience as playing a "small but decisive part" in her journey towards becoming an observant Jew.

"It made me hungry to learn more," she said during a recent telephone interview from Israel where she is currently on sabbatical with her family.

Dr. Shapiro said she embarked on her research by questioning whether Israel Experience programs were of value. She said that those who have researched this area in the past have measured success by an increase in former participants' level of observance, philanthropy to Jewish causes or engagement in Jewish life. In her own research Dr. Shapiro said she didn't always see these measures of success. Some former participants had become less religious. Others had never been back to Israel. But she was unwilling to conclude that these findings indicated failure.

"What I concluded", she said, "is that people who had done Livnot had a measure of



Faydra Shapiro

Jewish literacy that they didn't have before and therefore could make more informed decisions about the kind of Judaism they wanted for themselves... It [the Livnot experience] made passive Jews into active choosing Jews".

Dr. Shapiro quoted Alan Dershowitz as calling 'passive Judaism' one of the biggest problems in contemporary Jewish life. Mr. Dershowitz has decried the fact that the majority of young Jews end their Jewish education at the age of bar mitzvah, and speaks of the urgent need to provide opportunities for further exploration of Judaism.

Dr. Shapiro agrees that Israel programs are powerful boosters of Jewish identity, but feels that the age at which young Jews are participating in these programs plays a role.

"The average 16-year-old doesn't have a lot of control of his or her life", she said, adding that the "wow" factor felt in the immediate aftermath of the experience be given a chance to subside.

"You have to measure [the experience] over time and not just base your judgments on how people feel during the weeks and months that follow."

Dr. Shapiro believes that young adults in their 20s are the most likely to benefit from Israel Experience programs.

"We need to give our young adults – especially in the ages at which they're making choices about marriage and family – the tools to make choices for themselves so that they're not victims of the passive larger North American culture, in terms of their Jewish life", she concluded.

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