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Federation Briefs Middlesex on Current State of Anti-Semitism

By Harry Glazer | September 17, 2020

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Dan Rozett, manager of community and Israel engagement, Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey. (Credit: Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey)

To make sure local Jewish communities are well informed about the threats they face as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot arrive, the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey (serving Middlesex and Monmouth counties) conducted small parlor-meeting-style briefings on the current state of anti-Semitism. On Tuesday, September 8, Dan Rozett, the Federation's manager of community and Israel engagement, gave these briefings for a group of motivated community members in Highland Park and Edison, assembled via Zoom by hosts Naomi and Josh Caplan.

Rozett is uniquely qualified for his role in the Federation. He is a native of Middlesex County and a graduate of local Jewish day schools who returned to the U.S. in 2015 after living in Israel for 20 years. In Israel, he served in an IDF combat unit and combat reserves and worked in the fields of educational tourism and patent administration.

Starting his presentation, Rozett pointed out that a recent global survey of attitudes in different countries, conducted by the Anti-Defamation League, found that on average about 26% of respondents harbor some views that can be characterized as anti-Semitic. He further reported that U.S. Dept of Justice 2018 statistics show that 56.9% of all U.S.-based bias crimes that year targeted Jews. The ADL's annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents for 2019 reported that of 4,730 bias incidents of extremism in the U.S., 2,107 were anti-Semitic. Common targets were K-12 schools and universities, and Jewish institutions. In 2020, 3,420 incidents of extremism have been reported thus far.

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Of the bias incidents reported by the ADL in 2019, 2,800 were cases of white supremacist propaganda, vandalism and violence, including 42 murders. Among the white supremacist groups of greatest concern are the New Jersey-based European Heritage Association, accounting for 9% of such incidents. Rozett noted that 81% of all extremist-related murders in 2019 were committed by white supremacists.

In February of this year the New Jersey Dept. of Homeland Security raised the Terror Threat Level for White Supremacist Extremism to High. New Jersey ranked #2 in the nation for anti-Semitic incidents in the ADL's 2019 audit. Recent high-profile incidents in the state included the deadly attacks in Jersey City by two Black Israelite nationalists and the arrest of a White Supremacist planning an attack at the Menlo Park Mall in Edison.

Current trends in anti-Semitic agitation include propaganda blaming Jews for causing or profiting from the coronavirus and encouraging extremists to spread the virus to Jews. Extremists have also increasingly been using "Zoom bombing" as a means of gaining publicity and demonstrating their disdain for Jews.

Pivoting to what the Jewish community can do to fight these troubling trends, Rozett shared that the Jewish Federation's efforts focus on advocacy, bridging communities and government relations. The Jewish Federation also has a very active program supporting Jewish institutional security—headed by Amy Keller—that regularly offers briefings and workshops, shares authoritative resources and contacts and consults with individual shuls and yeshivot. This arm of the Federation has developed very close ties with law enforcement agencies in the state and has helped bring in millions of dollars in federal and state security grant funding to Jewish institutions in Middlesex and Monmouth.

Rozett ended his report by asking that community members help out—by volunteering for the Federation's community relations committee, contributing to the Federation's security efforts, speaking up, sharing facts and showing strength.

Community members who participated in the Zoom meeting found the briefing very informative. "The presentation was really eye-opening," said Mindy Berman of Highland Park. "Though I knew that anti-Semitism is on the rise, I was very surprised that the number of anti-Semitic incidents in New Jersey in 2019 were the second highest in the nation. I was also surprised that 21 hate groups are being tracked in New Jersey. The speech reminded me that we must always be vigilant to identify and root out anti-Semitism. Importantly, Dan Rozett emphasized that if an incident happens in our community, we should not put it on social media. This is now an automatic reaction, but Dan pointed out that it can be counterproductive."


"It was certainly alarming to see how much extremist activity is taking place locally, and important to note that it is not just isolated incidents of 'lone wolf' individuals," said Mark Abraham of Highland Park. "There are organized, concerted efforts to misinform, harass and cause harm. All of us need to share the facts and help counter these efforts."

Following up on Rozett's comments on the importance of bridging communities, meeting participant Josh Fine—a borough councilman in Highland Park—pointed out that a new group has been formed locally to bring together the Black and Jewish communities—the Middlesex Black-Jewish Coalition. Rozett praised the initiative and asked to be kept advised of it.

Speaking to The Jewish Link after the Zoom meeting, Middlesex Black-Jewish Coalition co-chair Norma Vargas-Greenberg reported that the group is co-chaired by Ashton Burrell, who is also chair of the Highland Park Human Relations Commission. The coalition has 12 members and spent the summer getting to know each other and engaging in tough conversations on stereotypes, racism and anti-Semitism. The group plans a formal announcement shortly of its formation and intends to focus on community outreach, advocacy, educational activities, movie screenings and efforts to improve school curricula, as a means of bridging the gap between communities.

By Harry Glazer

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82 anti-Semitic incidents of harassment and White Supremacist propaganda in Monmouth and Middlesex Counties in 2019



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Screenshot of Dan Rozett's Sept 8 presentation. (Credit: Harry Glazer)

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