On Thursday August 28, I received an email from our Partnership 2Gether (P2G) chair in Vancouver, telling me that three committee members were departing the following week on a solidarity visit to Israel and he wanted to invite others along. Monday morning, I was at the airport ready to go!

I chair Calgary Jewish Federation’s P2G program which builds bridges between Calgary and Israel, particularly to the far northern region of Etzba Hagalil. After the very difficult summer, I felt compelled to go at this time.

This was actually my third visit to Israel this past year. The first was for the annual P2G meetings, the second was to visit my daughter Rachel who was on a six month Mas program teaching English at an elementary school in Tel Aviv. This most recent journey was an eye-opening experience, a roller-coaster ride of emotions.

We began our trip with a visit to the Soroka Medical Centre in Beer-Sheva. This hospital was the major medical and trauma centre during Operation Protective Edge this past summer. The hospital treated over 1116 citizens, including 740 IDF troops. The staff worked nonstop during this period. Fortunately, the ICU had undergone a complete renovation six months earlier to make it a secure unit protected from rocket fire. While visiting the hospital we had the opportunity to meet two soldiers. The first was a 20 year who has undergone 10 leg operations, with more to come. His prognosis is good and his leg will eventually heal. He was so happy and emotional that we had to come to visit. He told us that his greatest wish after his recovery would be for a scholarship to attend university.

The second soldier experienced a severe head injury on August 1 and remains in the ICU. His wife, who has not come. His prognosis is good and his leg will eventually heal. The Ziv hospital in Zefat is on the edge of our region. From the hospital, we continued on to Sderot, the city closest to Gaza, which has endured Hamas rocket fire for many years. Throughout the town, we saw rocket debris that was turned into public art sculptures of flowers and other decorative pieces. We met the mayor who described to us the resiliency and determination of the citizens who live there. We then met a group of 15-year-old kids who have grown up with constant rocket fire and who volunteered this past summer to help people in other communities cope. One amazing young girl described how she helped a single mother bathe her children. The mom was afraid to shower or bathe her kids for fear that she would not hear the siren indicating incoming rockets.

The following day, we travelled up north to our partner region of Etzba Hagalil which includes five communities, including Metulla and Kiryat Shmona. We support many programs in the region that vary in scope from social services programs, to education and high tech. It is a true partnership of which we can all be proud.

The Ziv hospital in Sderot is on the edge of our region. The hospital staff is one third Jewish, one third Arab and one third Druze – all Israeli citizens. Since last March, they have treated over 350 Syrian patients with quite severe blast injuries. They are brought to the hospital by the IDF which has a field hospital set up at the border. One of the doctors we met, an orthopedic surgeon, described to us the lengths he goes in order to save these patients from having amputations and having to return to Syria, where he believes they will not get the help they would need with prosthetics.

We met four of the Syrian patients including a 12-year-old boy with multiple injuries who arrived at the Israeli Syrian border on a donkey. Through an interpreter, we asked the patients how they were treated and how they felt about being cared for in Israel. They all shared with us how grateful they were to have been taken to Israel, where they believe they are receiving the best medical care. It was an amazing experience seeing how Israel comes to the aid of civilians fleeing a hostile neighbour.

Every trip to Israel brings new information, and new experiences, but for me, this was one of the most emotional trips I’ve ever taken. I am so proud that our Calgary community plays a part – a very small part – in the success of our national homeland. Our support of Israel, particularly of the Etzba Hagalil region, makes a significant difference in the social fabric of the country.

Since taking on the position of chair of the Calgary P2G program, I have learned that Federation and our counterparts nationally and in Israel are excellent stewards of our funds. Each and every project we fund is vetted, monitored and scrutinized. Not a penny is spent without extensive research and discussion.

As donors, you can share my pride in all the Calgary Jewish community does – here and in Israel.

Chag Sameach,

Cathy Cole
Chair, Calgary P2G
Women in Politics, Part II

Danielle Smith, the leader of Alberta’s official opposition Wildrose Party, was the second guest in Calgary Jewish Federation’s “Women in Politics” series, which was attended by approximately 60 women.

Interviewed by Federation vice-president and Calgary Herald columnist Deborah Yedlin on September 16, Smith shared her perspective on the challenges and the importance of engagement in the political process.

Women in Politics is co-sponsored by Calgary Jewish Federation, The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and CJ PAC.

In the photo: Eleanor Miller of CJ PAC, Danielle Smith, Judy Shapiro and Irena Karshenbaum representing Calgary Jewish Federation.

Important Information for Israeli Passport Holders

The Israeli Consulate in Toronto is considering sending a consular representative to Calgary in November to provide certain services listed below, where the applicant must appear in person. Such a visit will be held only if there is sufficient demand. The visiting consular representative can only assist with the following services (which cannot be completed through the mail with the help of a notary public):

- Application for issuance of a first passport – for a person who has never held an Israeli passport;
- Application to renew / extend a minor’s passport (the minor’s presence is required);
- Application for issuance of a travel document in lieu of a lost / stolen / damaged travel document;
- Notification of birth (the minor’s presence is not necessary if a passport is not required);
- Notification of change in marital status;
- Application for a name change;
- Application to revoke Israeli citizenship.

If you are interested in one or more of the services mentioned above and in order to allow us to determine whether such a visit will be held, please contact Judy Shapiro at jshapiro@jewishcalgary.org or 403-444-3153 as soon as possible.

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