



THE volunteer CONNECTION

Interview With Sar-El's Managing Director



Israel Geva, Sar-El's Managing Director since 2004, oversees the civilian side of Sar-El while coordinating with the military side. Mr. Geva reports to General Davidi, Chairman of the Board. Previously, as a colonel in the Israeli Air Force, he focused on acquisition of American high performance aircraft and had duty assignments in California, Utah, and Texas.

TVC: Sar-El is now 24 years old, how did you do last year?

Geva: In general, we did very well. We previously had our 100,000th volunteer arrival during 2004. During 2005, 30 different countries provided volunteers. We received over 1,400 French speaking volunteers, 650 volunteers from Russia, and about 700 from the United States. Our 4-year average now stands at 4,400 volunteers per year from abroad. We also have a local program for wounded, handicapped youth, and veterans. In 2005, all of our volunteer programs together provided a total of 420,000 working hours to the army.

TVC: On how many IDF bases does Sar-El actually maintain a program?

Geva: During the winter months we may have up to 10 active bases. In the spring and summer, our program blossoms to 30 bases. We are always looking for new bases that can use volunteer assistance. Occasionally we leave bases due to the changing needs of the armed forces.

TVC: What makes a successful base?

Geva: The greatest measure of success depends on the base commander. The commander requests the support from Sar-El and schedules the work. Most commanders are very enthusiastic about Sar-El volunteers and go out of their way to accommodate our needs. The most successful bases tend to have enough work accompanied by a well organized work schedule.

TVC: What differences have you noticed among the English speaking volunteers and the French or Russian volunteers?

Geva: There is more commonality amongst the volunteers than differences. All come to identify themselves with Israel, all are very efficient and are enthusiastic about working in Israel. They love Israel, and we love them all.

TVC: For 2006 and beyond do you see any changes or enhancements to the program?

Geva: We are looking at changes needed to make the program more attractive. One goal is to add more young people to our programs, the "birthright" program is a good example. We also are looking at work level planning.

Geva: To sum up, many thanks for your hard work and devoted support for Israel. To all the volunteers I would like to say, "We love you all. Please come to Sar-El and enjoy an experience that you will never forget."

Want to Learn a Secret? Call the Ambassadors!

Some feel that VFI/Sar-El is a best kept secret. This may be true. But we are actively trying to change that perception.

However, with our modest budget, VFI cannot afford mass advertising and promotion. We are relying on former volunteers to spread the word among their family, friends, and community. VFI alumni need to do more.

To more effectively spread the word, VFI launched the "Ambassadors for Israel" program. "Ambassadors" reach out in a very direct way to enlist VFI volunteers. They have personally experienced the program in Israel and seek others who want the same wondrous adventure.

VFI provides Ambassadors with brochure packets, posters, DVD's, and business cards to help them develop contacts and promote the VFI/Sar-El program. Ambassadors are mentored by experienced VFI personnel to promote the program and are able to conduct interviews and process volunteers.

VFI recently sent out 600 e-mails, and 60 people responded indicating their interest in becoming Ambassadors — a great response and a good start. For adequate coverage, we need people in all states to step up to the challenge. We need YOU!

If becoming an "Ambassador for Israel" seems like a good idea to you, please call us at 866.514.1948 or e-mail info@vfi-usa.org.

“ It's just so rewarding. You can't stop talking about it. You want to go back. ”

Ed Kohl

Hamilton Pitt of Chicago

Hamilton Pitt represented VFI in the Chicago area for over 10 years and will soon retire as recording Secretary of the VFI Board. For over 32 years Hamilton taught American history for the City Colleges of Chicago and then retired to South Texas. Hamilton was elected last year as VFI's Recording Secretary. After suffering a stroke he is retiring his Board position.

As a youth he remembers supporting Israel in the 1956 war. His parents remained baffled as to his continued interest in Israel as years passed. In 1982 he worked on Kibbutz Metzger and returned in 1987 to spend 11 months on the VFI Program, based at Beit Oded in Jaffa. He had two more tours with VFI and visited several times as a tourist.

An Episcopalian, Hamilton's faith explained a portion of his interest in Jewish history and Israel. However, it is his strong commitment to Zionism, from observing Israel's struggle in its early years, framed by events like the Eichmann trial and movies like "The Diary of Anne Frank," and "Exodus," that solidified his lifelong support for the Jewish state.

Hamilton remembers so many friendships made over the years, but especially Arlene Pascal, Norm & Doris



Levitz, Charlotte Kaplan from VFI - Chicago, Pam Lazarus, and Sar-El's Dr. Davidi.

To Contact VFI

Web site:

www.vfi-usa.org

General inquiries and questions:

866.514.1948

E-mail:

info@vfi-usa.org

VFI Regional Alumni Reports

Illinois Region: The Midwest regional alumni meetings are held the second Tuesday of every month, except April and October, at 8:00 p.m., at 8610 Niles Center Road, Skokie, IL. For information, call 847.677.3817.

Los Angeles Region: For the alumni meeting schedule, call 323.661.7898.

Mid-Atlantic Region: The Mid-Atlantic Region has sent 41 volunteers since the beginning of 2005. Since the beginning of 2006, 12 of the 41 volunteers have gone, or are going soon.

A reunion is planned in the Washington, DC, area for late spring. In the meantime, if you are planning to volunteer or know someone who is interested, please contact Marian Sacks at mbsacks31@hotmail.com.

Marian Sacks (mbsacks31@hotmail.com) is temporarily responsible for contacting and helping volunteers serving Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Another VFI resource in Atlanta, Leon Rechtman at leon2579@mindspring.com, is also available to help volunteers. If you live in one of the states listed above and want to help VFI, please call 866.514.1948 or contact Marian Sacks.

Philadelphia Region: Our March meeting was well attended with the focus on the

featured film, *The Road to Jenin*. Our quarterly spring alumni meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 16, starting at 7:00 p.m. at the Klein JCC at Red Lion Road and Jamison Avenue in Northeast Philadelphia. Our featured speaker will talk on Jewish humor. For information, call 610.617.4048.

San Francisco Region: The San Francisco Region Reunion and Information Meeting on February 26 at Temple Emanu-El was a huge success with over 55 alumni and prospective volunteers. We all had a wonderful time discussing our experiences and the program.

Michael Bauer, Jewish Agency Shaliach and reserve Paratroop Commander, spoke on "The Life of an Israeli Soldier." Based on his own experience, he painted a vivid picture of young soldiers' lives and their numerous dilemmas. Josef Herz, National President of VFI, spoke about VFI's future plans.

Sam Borcover, San Francisco Region President, presented Diane Swanson and Al Huillade with certificates of appreciation for repeated tours of duty over the years. Several returnees expressed their appreciation for Eugene Zaubers' recruitment efforts in the Russian speaking Jewish community.

VFI President's Message

The Day of Remembrance and Israel Independence Day



This year the Day of Remembrance (Yom Ha'Zikaron) and Israel Independence Day (Yom Ha'Atzmaut) fall on May 2 and May 3, respectively. In Jewish tradition, holidays and days of observance start at sunset the prior day. The sun sets on May 1 and we have an opportunity to stop, to think, to reflect, and to remember the thousands of our brothers and sisters who have died to protect and defend the Jewish homeland in defense of their country and as victims of terror.

We, in the VFI/Sar-El family, do what we can to lighten the load of those whose time has come to defend the Jewish homeland. We do it in honor of the memory of those who have perished.

We do it in the hope that we can continue to celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmaut until the end of time. We hope and pray that those who have perished have found comfort in G-d's embrace.

B'Shalom,

— **Josef Herz**, National President of VFI

Editor's Corner



The *Volunteer Connection* is your conduit to a rich experience and adventure in Israel. If you have not received any e-mails from VFI updating you on activities, it is because we don't have your current e-mail address. To correct this today, simply send an e-mail to info@vfi-usa.org.

We are seeking your story. It will be read and your photos will be seen in this newsletter by untold members down through the ages. The deadline for the Summer Issue is July 1, 2006.

— **Steve Plotkin**, Editor, steveplotkin@erols.com, 1340 Brighton Way, Newtown Square, PA 19073, 610.358.5366, Fax 610.361.8896.

Summer 2006 Birthright Extensions

This summer, the birthright program will send 10,000 young adults on a free 10-day tour of Israel. Experience has shown that 30 to 50 percent of the participants will extend their stay in Israel, since it is relatively inexpensive to remain.

The VFI/Sar-El program can be a transformative experience for young adults. If we enroll sufficient birthright participants, they will be in special groups and with people their own age. Additional special programming is being developed for this age group.

VFI will be working with Sar-El and some of the birthright tour operators, notably Israel Experts, to provide the Sar-El program as an extension to birthright participants. Should **YOU** know someone who will be going on birthright this summer, please tell them about the VFI/Sar-El extension program and your own personal experience. **YOU** can make the difference to them and to the program.

For additional information, please visit the VFI web site's birthright section at www.vfi-usa.org/birthright.html, or call toll free 866.514.1948, or e-mail info@vfi-usa.org.

International Youth Program

July 2-20 and July 23 to August 10, 2006

International Youth Program is a special 3-week program for young people ages 17 to 25. Volunteers must be fluent in English and are placed in a special group and usually on a special base with colorful programming targeting young people.

Last summer's program was a great success. This summer we will expand the number of young participants.

Family Week Program

July 9-21, 2006

This is a special opportunity for families to spend 2 weeks together in Israel, volunteering as well as having free time on the weekends to tour or visit family and friends. There are some special activities being planned.

One or two parents must accompany children ages 14-16. The minimum age is 14. Ages 17 and above can volunteer without a parent. We recommend that families choosing this unique opportunity sign up as early as possible.

Hebrew Anyone? The Ulpan-chik Option

VFI's goal is to strengthen the connection between volunteers and Israel via physical labor and interpersonal contact. Most volunteers do not speak Hebrew and in many cases that may limit volunteer interactions with Israelis. At one time, there was an Ulpan (Hebrew school) option to the Sar-El program which required a 3-month commitment. That option however, was eliminated mainly due to government budget shortfalls.

VFI is testing a new language option: the Ulpan-chik option. This option brings a qualified Hebrew teacher on your base, offering 8 hours of intensive practical Hebrew, class to be held in the late afternoon or evenings. The spoken Hebrew will focus on practical words, phrases, and idioms that you can use on the program and on the streets of Israel.

We are planning for 20 students per class. Volunteers will be able to register in the United States (preferred) or while on the program. There will be a modest fee to pay for the teacher, perhaps \$20. Our initial test is set for May 2006. If successful, we will make this a regular feature of your volunteer program. For additional information about this new option, e-mail info@vfi-usa.org or call 866.514.1948.

NYC Salute to Israel Parade - June 4, 2006

The New York City Salute to Israel Parade will be held on June 4, 2006, from noon to 4:30 p.m. The parade route begins at 57th Street and Fifth Avenue and continues north on Fifth Avenue to 79th Street. This year, participants from VFI will march with the contingent from the Jewish Agency and will receive a new VFI tee shirt.

If you want to support or participate in the parade, please e-mail info@vfi-usa.org or call 866.514.1948 for details. If you wish to help organize our participation, please e-mail jaherz@vfi-usa.org.

My Most Memorable VFI Tour

—By Kay Warren

I have enjoyed three VFI tours on four different IDF bases, but last fall I had the most unique experience. I was assigned to an operations base attached to a military court and prison. Most evenings we listened to soldiers' stories of their border duty and assignments within Gaza and the West Bank. We were stunned into silence when one soldier described his unit's mission to arrest a suspect in Ramalla that very night. We worried all night until we heard that they succeeded and faced no resistance.

Our job was to inventory and pack the regiments' gear for a major move. The work was sporadic, so our Madricha arranged a visit to the court. A military lawyer briefed us before entering the courtroom. The accused was one of four Arabs arrested for shooting into a group of soldiers at a checkpoint. Fortunately, they hit no one. The charges were the following: unlicensed weapon ownership, reckless endangerment of human life, attempted murder, and membership in a terrorist organization.

Although eyes peered through door slots as we passed the holding cells, the Arabs gathered outside paid no attention as we entered the courtroom, which looked like a traffic court in my hometown. There were three judges in military dress and three armed guards. The accused, a handsome, bearded elder, smiled at his two adult sons in the audience and joked with a guard. Because everyone in Israel has the right to a trial in his own language, the trial was conducted in Hebrew and Arabic. The translator bounced on his chair as he turned between the judges, the defendant, and the attorneys.

The proceeding was an attempt at plea bargaining. The defendant admitted to the first two charges, but not the latter two. The judges decided not to accept the plea bargain until more research was done regarding his relationship to terrorist organization members in his village who bore his same last name.

Amnesty International representatives took notes during the trial. They said this court would get high marks for respectfully protecting the defendant's human rights. We wondered where else in the Middle East this would possibly happen.

**Did you know the SAR-EL
work program includes?**

FREE accommodations, plus

FREE kosher meals, plus

FREE work uniforms, plus

**FREE lectures, possibly guided trips,
and immense personal satisfaction.**

Volunteer Program Schedules for 2006

Programs start only on the specific Sundays (or following Monday) shown below. Volunteers can join for 2, 3, or more weeks.

May 14 to June 1, May 21-25, May 28 to June 15
 June 11 to June 29, June 25 to July 13
 July 2 to 20 - International Youth Group
 July 9 to July 27, July 9 to July 21 - Family Group
 July 23 to Aug. 10 - International Youth Group
 July 23 to Aug. 10
 Aug. 6 to 24, Aug. 20 to Sept. 7
 Sept. 3 to 21
 Oct. 15 to Nov 2

Nov. 5 to 23, Nov. 26 to Dec. 14
 Dec. 17 to Jan. 4, 2007, Dec. 31 to Jan. 18 2007

See the website for frequent special programs.
www.vfi-usa.org

Interesting Web Sites

www.vfi-usa.org – Volunteers for Israel web site
www.sar-el.org – Sar-El web site
www.25waystohelpisrael.com – 25 Ways to help Israel
www.mideasttruth.com – Mideast Truth
www.jpost.com – Jerusalem Post
sarelcanada.org – Canadian Volunteers for Israel web site
www.sarel.telarian.com – Blog with photos

VFI Officers and Board for 2006

Josef Herz, President, WA, 425.235.8280, jaherz@vfi-usa.org
Marian Sacks, Vice President, MD, 301.603.9099, mbsacks@vfi-usa.org
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—Steve Plotkin, Editor, steveplotkin@erols.com

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Harold Levy

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