



During these emergency times,  
VFI continues to respond to  
current needs in Israel.

# THE volunteer CONNECTION

## Interview With Pamela Lazarus, Our Sar-El Program Coordinator



Like Oprah and Barbra, the mention of Pamela brings instant name recognition. She is the official greeter with her own turf in the reception area in terminal 3 at Ben Gurion Airport. Like the Statue of Liberty, she is the first friendly face volunteers see when they arrive.

Pamela's official title is Program Coordinator, but it seems she is involved with much more. She is perpetually on her cell phone tending to scheduling, mediating, problem solving, planning, and mothering the female IDF soldiers.

A native of Chicago, Pamela received her degree from the University of Wisconsin. She worked as an elementary school teacher and paralegal in a law firm. She has a son Danny, a globe-trotting writer, and a daughter Samantha, a lawyer who has had two tours with Sar-El. Pamela's hobbies include travel, reading, and sports, and she stays fit by walking to work in Jaffa. She also tutors in English.

Pam found out about Sar-El in 1997 and soon completed nine volunteer tours. She was active with VFI and became President of the Chicago-Mid West VFI office. Moving to Israel permanently in 2002, Pam lives near the beach in Tel Aviv. General Davidi brought Pam into the Sar-El civilian team in 2001. She now reports to him and Israel Geva.

**TVC:** What exactly falls under your role?

**PAM:** I coordinate the activities of the English-speaking volunteers, insure their transport, followup on their work assignments, and strive for general happiness and smooth operations.

**TVC:** When the security issues become prominent, what happens with volunteers?

**PAM:** When the times get tough our volunteers keep coming and we actually see an increase in volunteers. I think the majority of volunteers feel that way.

**TVC:** What are your principle concerns these days?

**PAM:** Insuring we have enough work on the bases is an ongoing and vital consideration.

**TVC:** What is your connection with the Madricot?

**PAM:** They are vital to our program and I have a strong connection with them. Since I am non-military, they talk out problems with me and I help them with personal relationships with volunteers and job issues.

**TVC:** How many bases are open this summer?

**PAM:** We have more than 25 bases open. In addition to our regular adult groups, we  
*(continued on page 2)*

## Presentation Guidelines for VFI

Describing your VFI/Sar-El experience to the press or the public can be tricky.

You cannot say that you "volunteered with the IDF." This is just not true, is against the law, and is a misleading statement. Refrain from mentioning specific military bases, exact locations, weapons, guns, ammunition, military equipment, or photos of military hardware.

So what can you say? How about:

"I volunteered for the VFI/Sar-El program, which places volunteers on bases to work in non-combatative maintenance and supply roles, and in hospitals and nursing homes. Sar-El is a non-profit organization based in Israel."

But there is a lot more you can talk about. For instance:

- Why you were motivated to volunteer?
- How was your Israel travel experience?
- Adventures and highlights while on the program, on the streets, and in the cafes.
- The international mix of people you met, lived, and worked with.
- What was your greatest satisfaction?
- What life-changing things you personally received as a program volunteer.
- Why others might also enjoy the program.

If you are uncertain about what to write or say, please contact VFI at 866.514.1948.

Thanks for spreading the word about  
Volunteers for Israel.

“ We would laughingly remind each other to return in time for the masseuse, champagne, and strawberries the army had ordered for us later in the day. ”

—Bev Cohen

## Interview With Pamela Lazarus

(continued from front page)

have the American Taglit-birthright Program add-on, the International Youth Group of 17-25 year-olds, and a large contingent of French kids. The Beit Oded hostel is open and full on weekends.

**TVC:** How are the special programs such as the recent Independence Day celebration working out?

**PAM:** Great. In May, we had over 100 volunteers participating in paid post-Sar-El activities. Hundreds of volunteers were at Masada for a special program. A great time was had by all. We are always trying new special programs.

**TVC:** What is the most pleasant aspect of your job?

**PAM:** Interacting with volunteers. The real Israel is not the way it is depicted on American television. I love to see first-time volunteers enjoy the beaches, cafes, museums, and the vibrant life style during their off hours. Construction and renewal activities can be seen everywhere in Tel Aviv and Israel. My best friends are volunteers who repeat the program. Many have made aliyah.

**TVC:** What are your general thoughts on the Sar-El opportunity?

**PAM:** I think the experience is a life-changing event for many volunteers, and I love to help them. It's a way to see the country and live and work with Israelis.

## Volunteers for Israel Mission Statement

The mission of Volunteers for Israel is to connect Americans to Israel through volunteer service.

We achieve this goal by partnering with military and civilian organizations that enable volunteers to work side-by-side with Israelis.

We promote solidarity and good will among Israelis, American Jews, and other friends of Israel.

## VFI Regional Alumni Meetings

**Mid-Atlantic:** The Mid-Atlantic Region held a Reunion on June 25 in Silver Spring, MD. Forty people attended from the greater Washington, DC, area and far away. Joining us was our National past president Rickey Cherner and former Board Member Mordechai Pancer, along with current Board Member David Liebman, Secretary Wade Bolton, and Treasurer Marian Sacks. In attendance were volunteers who first went on the program in 1983, VFI's very beginning, to those who returned from their first program only weeks ago. Also, six people who have never volunteered through VFI and who are now looking forward to experiencing the great adventure of volunteering in Israel.

**Philadelphia:** Our May alumni meeting featured Joe Aronson, artist and folksinger, who spoke about Jewish history through humor. This is Aronson's second appearance before our appreciative group. On May 21, Philadelphia

and VFI celebrated Israel's 58th Independence Day with booths, food, camel rides, entertainment and fireworks. Our Fall and 2007 quarterly alumni meeting program will be finalized soon.

**Illinois:** 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 Rd, Skokie, IL. For info, contact 847.677.3817.

**San Francisco:** For alumni reunion meetings schedule, call 510.839.2900.

**Los Angeles:** For alumni reunion meeting schedule, call 323.661.7898.

**New York City:** VFI volunteers proudly marched in the NYC Salute to Israel Parade on June 4, 2006. Carrying the VFI banner up Fifth Avenue, they enjoyed the pleasant day and festivities with the contingent from the Jewish Agency.

## VFI President's Message Changes...



In the 10 years prior to June 2002, we experienced a decline in the number of volunteers from the United States. Attempting to reverse that trend, General Davidi and the SAR-EL Board decided to create a parallel recruiting structure in the United States called the Associate Program. That decision was a blow to VFI's morale, credibility, finances, and our relationship with SAR-EL. We have worked very hard to reverse that decision.

General Davidi and the SAR-EL Board have now decided to reintegrate the Associate Program with VFI. VFI will once again be the primary recruiting organization for the SAR-EL program in the United States. Although not all details have been finalized, we expect a public announcement by General Davidi at any moment. VFI is very pleased with this decision.

On behalf of VFI, I would like to welcome the volunteers who have gone to Israel through the Associate Program in the last few years. VFI looks forward to working with you. We have several former Associates who are now active members of the VFI Board. We welcome you and all volunteers to actively participate with VFI and to work toward the fulfillment of our mission: To Connect Americans to Israel.

Additionally, 2007 will be the 25th Anniversary of the SAR-EL program. To celebrate this milestone, we expect to have some special programs both in the United States and Israel. This would be a great time to start thinking about your next trip to Israel!

B'Shalom,

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

## Editor's Corner



The Volunteer Connection is dedicated to your life-changing experience—volunteering in Israel. If you are not receiving e-mails from VFI updating you on activities, it is because we do not have your current e-mail address.

To correct this today, simply send an e-mail to [info@vfi-usa.org](mailto:info@vfi-usa.org).

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE FREE UPON REQUEST to [info@vfi-usa.org](mailto:info@vfi-usa.org) or toll free 866.514.1948.

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

— **Steve Plotkin**, Editor. [steveplotkin@erols.com](mailto:steveplotkin@erols.com), 1340 Brighton Way, Newtown Square, PA 19073, 610.358.5366, Fax 610.361.8896.

# Metro-New York: Looking for a Few Good Women and Men

VFI is looking for a few good women and men to assist and work with the VFI NY office in Manhattan at 42nd Street and 8th Avenue.

We are looking for people who can give us their time, skills, energy, and passion for Israel, and perform the following tasks:

- Talk to potential volunteers
- Connect with returning volunteers
- Conduct interviews of volunteers
- Assist us with our outreach efforts
- Find opportunities to present the program in your community and in Metro-NY
- Administrative tasks associated with our recruiting efforts

Some tasks can be performed at home, but some must be done at the VFI-NY office. We will provide you with technical support, as well as cover the expenses you incur doing work for VFI.

If YOU are the ONE, please contact us at 866-514-1948 or 212-643-4848 or send e-mail to [info@vfi-usa.org](mailto:info@vfi-usa.org).

## Introducing Ed Kohl, Our National Coordinator



Ed Kohl, the VFI National Coordinator, was previously the VFI regional director for Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. As National Coordinator, he oversees the activities and administration of the national and regional offices.

Ed has facilitated over 70 volunteers both as a Sar-El Associate and VFI national board member, director, and ambassador. Ed says, "Serving as an ambassador gives me double satisfaction as I benefit VFI directly and reward Sar-El with our volunteers."

In the southeastern Michigan area, Ed is active in Israel advocacy, AIPAC, StandWithUs/Michigan, the Federation, Adat Shalom Synagogue, and other organizations.

## Why Volunteering for VFI Is Not for You.

All volunteers are great, but occasionally they forget why they come to Israel. The reason is to help Israel and lend moral support to the Israelis. Sometimes volunteers lapse into thinking they are coming to a seaside hotel resort, and not on a volunteer work program.

Here is why volunteering is probably not for you:

- There is no internet on the army base.
- You have to wait until Thursday afternoon or Friday or Saturday or Sunday morning to check e-mail, do shopping, go to airline offices, see family, do laundry, etc.
- It is very hot in Israel during the summer. If that's a problem, plan to come in the fall or winter or spring.
- Most bases do not have air conditioning or washing machines.
- Most bases have outdoor bathrooms, very nearby, but not in the barracks.
- Most bases require a lot of walking from barracks to dining room and gates.
- You will have to carry your suitcase.

What would you do if:

- You have to bunk or work with someone you really don't like?
- Someone has to sleep on the top bunk?
- You have a work assignment you don't like?
- It is very hot and there is no air conditioning?
- The clincher: You must bring three copies of your paperwork?

**WELL, MOST VOLUNTEERS SAY "BRING IT ON."**

## VFI, Me, and Israel



Deborah Cole

[honeybee951@msn.com](mailto:honeybee951@msn.com)

My first visit to Israel was in a tour bus in 1988. I knew I had to return in a way that would provide me a more personal connection with everything Israel had to offer.

Upon returning to Florida, I spotted a small intriguing ad for VFI. I never experienced summer camp as a child and I work in the sterile environment of an operating room. Switch green scrubs for green fatigues? Go to Israel and get "down and dirty" on an Army base and "camp" in soldiers' barracks that might not even have a potty in the same building?? Sounded like a fun mishugenah adventure to me — sign me up!!

My first VFI duty was in 1989, and was a fantastic experience! Since then, I have made 9 VFI tours during my 13 trips to Israel. I enjoy the different bases and work. My very favorite was the army base/archeological dig combination program in 1997. Unfortunately this particular program is unavailable, but may return someday.

I did consider making aliyah, but was not able to bring that to reality. However, VFI provides me the opportunity to meet a second personal goal: working the amount of time with the IDF that I would have been required to serve as an Israeli citizen. I am well on my way to that goal thanks to VFI.

I have witnessed huge growth since 1988. I have deep respect and admiration for the Israelis, and especially the 18 to 25 year-olds. They have the maturity, responsibility, and flexibility to endure the events of the past decades, but also continue to build a thriving country.

My greatest reward from the program, besides the sense of satisfaction from personal work contribution, is my growing network of friends and "mishpachah." Through VFI, I have been blessed to know people who have deeply touched and enriched my life, while working side-by-side with them for the benefit of Israel.

I hope VFI continues to be successful in its efforts. "Kol HaKavod" to everyone who contributes to Israel's strength and road to peace (soon! please G\*d).

# Volunteer Program Schedules for 2006 and 2007

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

## Year 2006

Aug. 6 - 24, Aug. 20 - Sept. 7  
 Sept. 3 - 21  
 Oct. 15 - Nov. 2  
 Nov. 5 - 9, Special 1-week program  
 Nov. 5 - 23, Nov. 26 - Dec. 14  
 Dec. 17 - Jan. 4, 2007,  
 Dec. 31 - Jan. 18, 2007

## Year 2007 —

**25th Anniversary Year**  
 Jan. 21 - Feb. 8  
 Feb. 11 - Mar. 1  
 Mar. 4 - 22, Mar. 18 - 29  
 Apr. 15 - May 3  
 May 6 - 22  
 May 27 - June 14

June 17 - July 5, International Youth Program  
 June 17 - July 5  
 July 8 - 26, International Youth Program  
 July 8 - 26  
 July 29 - Aug 16  
 Aug. 19 - Sept. 6

Sept. 16 - Oct. 4  
 Oct. 7 - 25  
 Oct. 29 - Nov. 15  
 Nov. 18 - Dec. 6  
 Dec. 9 - 27

See our web site for frequent special programs.  
[www.vfi-usa.org](http://www.vfi-usa.org)

**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.**

## VFI Officers and Board for 2006/2007

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—Steve Plotkin, Editor, [steveplotkin@erols.com](mailto:steveplotkin@erols.com)

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 Ken Kabbb

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