

IN THE NEWS
Rafah crossing slated to reopen

Israel will reopen a border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip on Friday. Israel closed the Rafah border crossing July 18 due to fears of terrorism, stranding an estimated 2,500 Palestinians on the Egyptian side.

Israel: Ma'aleh Adumim will not join Jerusalem

Israel does not plan to expand a settlement near Jerusalem in order to join it to the capital.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon met Thursday with Elliott Abrams, President Bush's top Middle East adviser, and denied reports that proposed housing units in Ma'aleh Adumim were part of a plan to link the West Bank bedroom community with Jerusalem.

An Israeli official said Sharon told Abrams that Israel never would contradict its standing agreements with the Bush administration, including one that prohibits building outside settlement borders.

The only way to encompass Ma'aleh Adumim within Jerusalem's current municipal lines would be to expand the settlement beyond its existing borders.

Terrorist death drives MD aliyah

Fifteen Jewish doctors are moving to Israel from North America, motivated in part by a fellow physician slain in a terror attack.

The group Nefesh B'Nefesh said Thursday that the doctors and their family members, a group numbering nearly 100 people, will arrive in Israel next week.

The doctors, from the United States and Canada, were inspired to make the move in memory of Detroit-born Dr. David Applebaum, who was killed along with his daughter, Nava, by a Palestinian suicide bomber in Jerusalem last September.

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WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

Finally free of diplomatic restraint, Dennis Ross shares his narrative

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Having juggled an armful of narratives for much of his career, Dennis Ross decided it was time to deliver his own.

In "The Missing Peace," an encyclopedic, 800-page tome published this month, Ross exhaustively details how Israeli and Palestinian "narratives" — or mythologies about themselves — beset a peace process fraught with mistrust and missed opportunities.

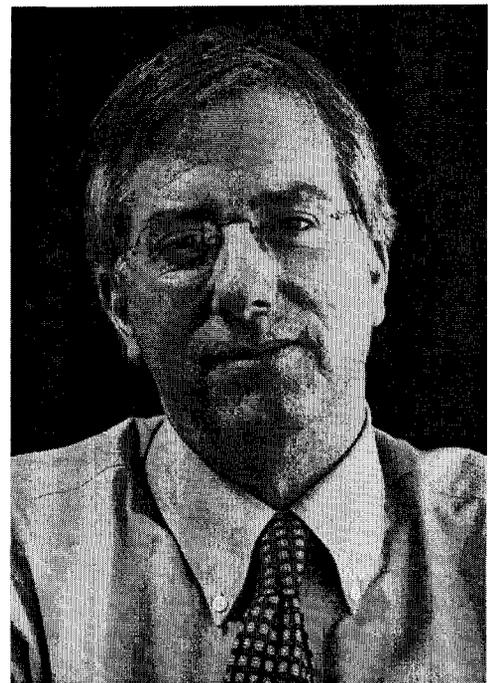
"I tell the story in real detail because I want people to understand what was happening and why,"

Ross said in a recent interview with JTA at his office at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where he has worked since leaving government in January 2001.

For Ross, the "why" has much to do with how each party — Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states — viewed its history and role, and how the failure to recognize and accommodate the other's narrative often impeded progress toward peace.

"Arafat at Camp David denies that the Temple was in Jerusalem," Ross said, describing statements by Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat at the make-or-break peace summit in July 2000. "What message does that send? If you deny the core of the other side's faith, what is the message you're sending? It's not reconciliation."

Ross helped guide Middle East policy through three U.S. administrations — Reagan, the first President Bush and Clinton — and was valued for an intuitive understanding not just of how the region's leaders



Dennis Ross.

ticked, but of what their cultures brought to the table.

Those narratives launch his book.

"A reason to write the narratives was to have" the sides "face up" to them, Ross said. "You can't rip yourself out of a narrative, but you have to recognize both narratives."

If the talk of "narratives" sounds like an invitation to a dry discussion of theory, Ross, an adept tale-teller, leavens the book with insight into the leaders.

One is Ross' description of a falling-out between President Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Wye Conference in 1998 over Netanyahu's demand that Arafat "take care of" Ghazi Jabali, the

Continued on page 2

■ *An unfettered Dennis Ross opens up about the Middle East*

Continued from page 1

top P.A. security official in the Gaza Strip, who was wanted for his role in an attack on Israeli settlers.

When Arafat asked if that means Netanyahu wants Jabali killed, Netanyahu reportedly replied, "I won't ask, you won't tell."

Arafat and Clinton stormed out of the room. Ross was assigned the task of explaining to Netanyahu why making the assassination of a top Arafat associate a condition for releasing 500 prisoners — after Netanyahu had already committed to their release — was a non-starter.

In a single parenthetical aside, Ross ably sums up three years of U.S. frustration with Netanyahu.

Netanyahu "was sitting alone, obviously stunned, and feeling he was the victim, asking me 'Why is Israel treated this way, why am I treated this way? What have I done to deserve this?' (I was struck by his belief that he and Israel were one and the same, and that he was the innocent victim of mistreatment.)"

Ross has respect for, but few illusions about, some of the Arab leaders he deals with. In one harrowing passage, he describes his dread of a meeting with Syrian dictator Hafez Assad in 1994: Ross had to tell Assad that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had rejected an American offer to write into a letter that a permanent Syrian-Israel border would be based on the June 4, 1967, borders.

Ross was not worried for himself or for the process, but for the top Syrian negotia-

tor, Walid al-Moualem, who had told Assad such a letter was forthcoming. Ross knew the bad news created the possibility that Moualem, whom he liked and admired, could lose more than just his job.

The meeting ended well, and Ross records Moualem's elation.

The book will prove a valuable resource for historians because, free of the dissembling niceties of diplomacy, Ross pulls back the curtain on the calculations U.S. administrations make — for instance, regarding other nations' elections.

He shows how the first Bush and the Clinton administrations not only favored Labor Party governments in Israel, but actively campaigned for them. The admissions are a welcome relief from State Department bromides that the United States plays no role in foreign elections.

Much of Ross's scorn, in the book and in conversation, is reserved for Arafat.

"It isn't going to work until both sides are prepared to cross those thresholds themselves and in the year 2000, the Israelis were prepared to do so and the Palestinians, at least Yasser Arafat, was not," Ross said in the interview. "And the Palestinians have paid a terrible price because of that, and so have the Israelis."

Ross clearly is frustrated with the cards-to-the-chest approach of Arafat's opposite at Camp David, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, but says issues of Barak's personality pale in comparison to Arafat's historical failures.

"Could Barak's style have been different? Of course," Ross told JTA. "As I used to say to the Palestinians, 'Don't take it personally, he treats us the same way, he treats Israelis the same way.' But the fact is, when push came to shove, when he had to confront history and mythology, he was up to it. Arafat wasn't."

Ross does not spare himself. The American approach during the Oslo period — one he largely shaped — was mistaken, he said in his interview.

"There was no consequence for not fulfilling obligations," he said of the process. "Clearly, one of the most important things we should have done with Arafat was determine whether he was able to make peace or not. One of the critical lessons

is the importance of creating what would be a test for us of whether or not he was prepared to condition for peace.

"The measure should have been something like, 'You tell your public you're not going to get 100 percent of borders and Jerusalem and refugees, that there's going to have to be compromise, but what you're going to get is a fair deal and a dignified deal,'" he continues. But Arafat "never did that, ever, not once."

Israelis and Arabs also get tough advice from Ross.

"The one unmistakable insight about the Arabs is this," he writes: "No Israeli concession can ever be too big."

Ross faults Israeli bureaucrats charged with carrying out policy more than he does the leaders, whom he credits with having made a "psychological leap" in recognizing Palestinian rights.

"Whether it was getting Palestinian goods through Israeli ports, exporting cut flowers to Europe, ending the indignities of Israeli checkpoints — even during extended periods when there were not acts of terror — denying Palestinians the right to import certain products from Jordan and the Arab world, or simply obtaining permits for building, Israeli officials continued to control most aspects of life for the Palestinians," he writes.

Despite such difficulties, Ross — who has briefed Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry — advocates a return to greater engagement than the current administration

has demonstrated, albeit with the caveats about demanding results from the Palestinians.

"I would have liked to have seen it much more involved than it was," he said of the Bush administration in his interview. "To be fair to this administration, you could look at the 1990s and the year 2000 and you could certainly see that our intensive engagement did not produce peace.

"But now you can compare the intensive engagement to the disengagement, and the one thing the intensive engagement did is that maybe it didn't produce peace but it did prevent war between Israel and the Palestinians," he continued. "Disengagement did not prevent war." ■

Ross credits Israeli leaders with making a 'psychological leap' in recognizing Palestinian rights.

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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Fighting for Budapest's Jewish ghetto

By AGNES BOHM and
RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

BUDAPEST (JTA) — With more than a dozen buildings in the area of Budapest's historic Jewish quarter facing demolition, a civic group has launched a campaign to save the quarter from real estate developers.

"Some 16 buildings have already been sold to building contractors, who started to demolish them with the permission of local authorities," said Judit Godo, a member of the civic group, called Petition.

But a municipality official said that "the civic group woke up late."

"A few old buildings in this area are already demolished and the construction of modern apartment houses is almost at a final stage," the official said, adding that for decades no one had touched the buildings.

Most of the few dozen houses in question are run-down and developers don't find them worth renovating, the official said.

But Petition still hopes to preserve the character of the historic area, which has remained more or less intact since it was built in the 19th century, when Jews gained the right to buy property in the city. Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, was born there in 1860.

During World War II, tens of thousands of Jews were rounded up and held captive in the ghetto, which was surrounded by a wooden fence hastily built in December 1944.

The ghetto, in a zone known as the Seventh District, is the only place in the downtown area where traditional Jewish shops still operate, such as a kosher butcher, a Judaica bookstore, a kosher pastry shop and a jewelry store. A few buildings still bear Stars of David on their facades or iron grills and have mezuzahs on their doors.

After the war, most of the 100,000 or so surviving Hungarian Jews moved to a more wealthy district along the Danube River.

Jews from abroad, mainly Orthodox Jews of Hungarian origin living in the United States or in Israel, bought small houses in the ghetto area, which by then was regarded as a poor neighborhood.

The Hungarian government recently announced plans to halt construction in

the ghetto for up to a year while a survey is prepared to choose which buildings to save.

Some of the most precious buildings will be preserved as art memorials.

Late last month, art historian Gyorgy Szego and architectural historian Anna Perczel led a group of about two dozen people on a tour of the district to see the extent of demolition planned or under way.

The group paused at gaping demolition sites and watched wreckers tearing down a once-graceful art nouveau building. They brought with them a big stencil of a symbol representing threatened architectural heritage — an "R" surrounded by a circle with an X through it, which they spray-painted onto several buildings — including a complex that until recently was a kosher salami factory.

"This is a unique urban Jewish setting, one of the largest such areas to have survived more or less intact," Szego said. He spoke to the group outside the abandoned Rumbach Street synagogue, a Moorish-style building with a striped facade, designed by the famous Vienna architect Otto Wagner.

"The synagogues in the district are important, but the residential buildings with their courtyards were the cradle of urban Jewish life and culture in Budapest," Szego said.

"It is important to safeguard and restore the synagogues, but if you only keep the synagogues and destroy the rest, then you do not maintain the integrity of the Jewish culture that once thrived here; you only tell part of the story. Still, the synagogues are seen as part of national culture, and the courtyards are not."

Today the former ghetto area is one of Budapest's poorest districts, with among the lowest average income rates, highest population densities and highest percentage of pensioners.

Elderly Holocaust survivors make up a good part of the population, along with low-income families, including many Roma, or gypsies, who were settled in decaying tenements under the former Communist regime.

One of the reasons the neighborhood

is in such bad shape is that it has been under the threat of major urban renewal plans for a century. As far back as 1900, city planners floated the idea of punching a new boulevard through the district, which would have required the demolition of many buildings.

The boulevard wasn't built back then but the idea survived. About 100 yards of such a street were built in the 1930s until the outbreak of World War II stopped construction.

Seventh District authorities approved a new version of the plan — for a pedestrian boulevard — a few years ago. Some of the current demolition reportedly is linked to that.

The inner part of the district, where the wartime ghetto was located, is sometimes referred to as the Jewish Triangle because it's anchored by three grand synagogues, each the flagship of one of the country's three religious branches.

The Moorish-style synagogue on Rumbach Street, built in 1872, was the principal home of the traditionalist community known as the "Status Quo" community.

An early work by Otto Wagner, the synagogue has stood derelict for years, despite an aborted restoration attempt in the early 1990s.

The art-deco synagogue on Kazinczy Street, built in 1913, is the heart of today's tiny Orthodox community, which numbers only a few hundred people.

Recently restored, the synagogue forms part of a courtyard complex including the kosher restaurant Hanna, a spartan eatery where one can rub shoulders with everyone from visiting students to bearded sages.

The Dohany Street synagogue, built in the 1850s, is the flagship of Neology, the brand of Reform Judaism that is the largest Jewish movement in Hungary.

During World War II the synagogue was fenced off and its grounds were used to mass Jews before their deportation. There are mass graves of thousands of Holocaust victims in the courtyard.

During Rosh Hashanah 1996, after languishing in disrepair for decades, the Dohany Street synagogue was officially reopened after a five-year, \$9 million restoration, largely financed by the Hungarian government.

The former
ghetto area is
one of Budapest's
poorest districts.

Israeli athletes prepare for Athens Games

By DINA KRAFT

WINGATE SPORTS CENTER, Israel (JTA) — Katya Pisetsky's legs extend into a backhand walkover. Then she spins in a circle, tosses a pair of clubs 30 feet in the air, catches them, glides into a final, triumphant pose and flashes an electric smile.

The Latin-style background music stops and the rhythmic gymnast's smile melts instantly into a frown.

Pisetsky, 18, is going to the Olympics next week and her coach, Natasha Asmolov, is berating her in a mixture of Russian and Hebrew for not extending her arm far enough, for not holding her back straight enough, for not feeling the music enough.

Watching from a nearby bench are Pisetsky's ballet trainer and sports psychologist, who also have immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union.

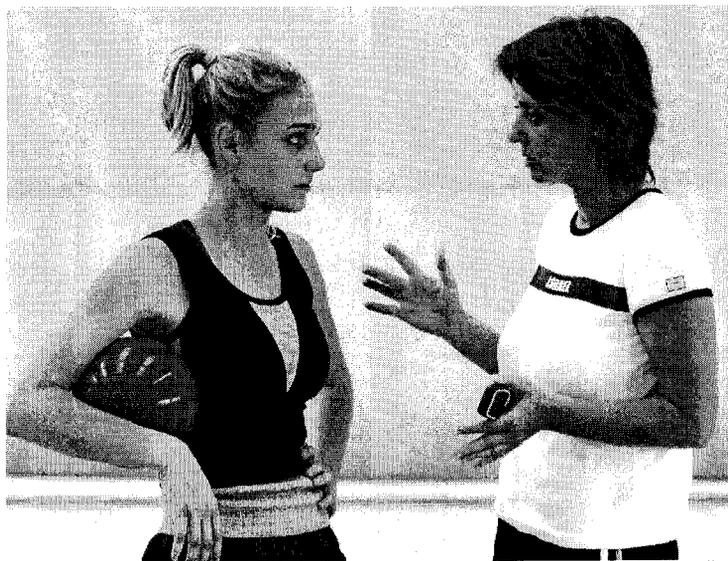
Immigrant athletes from the former Soviet Union make up about half of the team Israel is sending to the Athens Games in August, bolstering the country's Olympic hopes and the Israeli identity of the newcomers.

Many of the coaches and the medical staff are also immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

"Immigrants from Russia have given sports an amazing boost because so many of them are already professionals in their field," says Asmolov, 43.

There are 36 Israeli athletes on the Olympic team, 15 of whom are immigrants from the former Soviet Union. There are also two marathon runners who are immigrants from Ethiopia — the first time Ethiopian immigrants have been represented on the Israeli Olympic team. Israelis are competing in 11 events: track and field, judo, wrestling, tae kwon do, tennis, gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, kayaking, swimming, windsurfing and target shooting.

Since March, the immigrant athletes on the Olympic team have been receiving a monthly stipend of \$1,500 from the Jewish Agency for Israel to help support them



Brian Hendler

Rhythmic gymnast Katya Pisetsky, 18, a Russian immigrant to Israel, listens to her coach, Natasha Asmolov, at Israel's Wingate Sports Center.

financially while they train.

The Jewish Agency has been raising funds for the athletes together with the United Jewish Communities.

Some of the best prospects for an Israeli medal rest with Pisetsky's fellow athletes from the former Soviet Union: Canoe/kayaker Michael Kolganov, who won the bronze in 2000 in Sydney, will again be competing, as will wrestler Gocha Tsitsiashvili, who has won a world championship, and Alex Averbuch, a pole vaulter who has won a European championship.

Asmolov trains Pisetsky, who came to Israel in 2001, with the same stringent methods Asmolov grew up with in Belarus, where she competed as part of the national team. The pair train about eight hours a day, with a focus on exacting precision and discipline.

Stretching out after her morning practice, Pisetsky, whose shoulder-length blond hair is tied back into a ponytail, says that the most exciting moment of her life was landing in Israel for the first time from her native Ukraine.

The second most exciting moment, she says, was placing 10th in the European Rhythmic Gymnastics Championships in Kiev, where she qualified to compete for Israel at the Athens Olympics.

As she stood under the Israeli flag, Pisetsky says she did not feel at all torn as to where home was. "I felt Israeli," she said.

Next year she will be drafted into the army. As a top athlete, she will be able to divide her time between training and soldiering.

"Top athletes become role models both to native-born Israelis and Russians," says Efraim Zinger, head of the Israeli Olympic Committee. "Sports is an excellent vehicle to help the process of absorption into Israel."

Zinger also noted that many of the immigrant athletes did not come here as ready-made world class athletes but have benefited from expert training — often from fellow immigrant coaches.

Sports helps in feeling more Israeli, Pisetsky says. It

was at the gym in Petach Tikva where she learned Hebrew and made her first Israeli friends.

In 1990, Asmolov immigrated to Israel from Minsk, the capital of Belarus, and soon after opened the Petach Tikva municipality's rhythmic gymnastics center, where Pisetsky trains. Pisetsky knew she wanted to continue her career when she immigrated to Israel so she and her family moved to the city, which is outside of Tel Aviv, to be close to the gym.

As many as 250 girls now train at the gym in Petach Tikva. Pisetsky is the second member to be going to the Olympics.

"Israel is now on the world and European map," Asmolov says.

But the road has been hard and marred by cultural differences. There were complaints in the early days, she says, that the staff was pushing the girls too hard.

Asmolov has utilized the Russian training framework — not just a coach and a gymnast, but also a psychologist, a masseuse, physiotherapists and a dietician. But challenges remain, she says.

"It's a small country with lots of problems. It cannot compete with a country like Russia in terms of money that go toward sports and the tradition behind it, but we need to invest in sports on the same level other small countries do."

Pisetsky, meanwhile, says she is looking forward to representing Israel.

"Seeing the Israeli flag and hearing the Hatikvah, that is what moves me most." ■

THE 2004 OLYMPICS

Israeli officials help secure Olympic Games

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Israel will play a key role in security preparations for the upcoming Athens Games, training Greek police in crowd-safety contingencies and the protection of VIPs in case of a terror attack.

As part of a seven-nation security task force, Israel — along with the United States, Australia, Britain, France, Germany and Spain — is leading the mammoth effort to secure the first Olympics since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Although Israeli officials are tight-lipped about exactly how the Jewish state will be helping out behind the scenes, reports have indicated that Israel will dispatch naval vessels to patrol the extensive Greek coastline while Israeli military and intelligence officials will be coordinating with their Greek counterparts, the U.S. Army and NATO throughout the 16-day event, which begins Aug. 13.

Security operations are expected to

cost an estimated \$1.2 billion, nearly four times what Australia spent on the 2000 Summer Games in Sydney.

Despite assurances from Greece that the security situation is under control, questions loom as to whether or not Greek security services will be able to keep 10,500 athletes, along with some 2 million spectators, safe should a terror network such as Al-Qaida try to attack the world's largest sporting event.

Israeli police officials who have been helping train their counterparts say the Greeks are ready.

"I think they are very prepared and will be able to handle the Olympics," Izhak Tzur, the head of the Israeli police's training division, told JTA. He and the head of Israel's border police will be in Athens during the Olympics in an advisory capacity.

More than 70,000 police officers and soldiers will be helping provide security for the Games.

NATO is lending a hand in the security push, with plans to dispatch air and sea patrols, a stand-by special forces unit and a unit that deals with nuclear, biological or chemical threats.

In an interview with the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Greece's public order minister, Giorgos Floridis, said Israel had helped his government develop feasibility studies on security and develop plans for handling suicide bombers as well as providing assistance on how to gather intelligence on potential threats and terror organizations.

The Israeli Olympic Committee would not give details on security arrangements for the Israeli athletes, but said they would be cooperating fully with the local authorities.

Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service will maintain a presence in Athens, protecting the Israeli delegation as it has at every Olympics since the 1972 Summer Games in Munich when 11 Israeli athletes were killed by Palestinian terrorists. ■

Israeli and Arab kids ka-cha! their way to understanding

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — In matching white karate garb, Israeli and Palestinian youths kick, spin, jump in the air and softly land.

The group, all students between the ages of 10 and 15, has taken to the mats for four days of intensive training near the temple where Greek legend says the Oracle of Delphi called for warriors to lay down their arms and compete on the athletic field instead.

The oracle's vision led to the first Olympic Games; and last week the group of young Israelis and Palestinians, together with counterparts from another conflict zone — the Greek section of Cyprus — gathered in Delphi to learn about conflict resolution through the martial-arts values of respect and self-control.

The Festival of Budo, as organizers have dubbed the four-day gathering, came three weeks before the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, which begin Aug. 13.

The Japanese word Budo is loosely translated as "martial arts," but literally means "the way of stopping conflict." The idea is that martial arts is not about fighting, but dealing with and controlling con-

flict both within oneself and with others.

The 16 participants may not speak the same language, but they share the language of the sport — whether in classes in a West Bank village, Tel Aviv or Cyprus.

"We all practice the same martial art, we communicate in Japanese, the orders our masters tell us we all understand. When they tell us to do something we do it together and it looks amazing," said Daniel Belik, 12, a green belt in karate from Ra'anana, a Tel Aviv suburb.

The trip, in which the students are taught by Japanese martial-arts masters, was sponsored by the Japanese government and the Peres Center for Peace. It was organized by the Institute of World Affairs in Washington and Budo for Peace, an Israel-based organization founded by Australian-born Danny Hakim, a sixth-degree black belt who moved to Israel after 10 years of studying martial arts in Japan.

"The idea was for kids to get together and break down two important elements in conflict — ignorance and fear. Ignorance is about the other, the idea that all Palestinians are terrorists or kids that throw rocks and that all Palestinians

think Israelis want to lock them up," Hakim said in a phone interview from Delphi. "By meeting kids the same age, doing the same budo, that disappeared."

"When you are doing martial arts, you learn to deal with your own fear," he said. "Here they can become friends and talk."

The program follows one launched a few years ago, after Hakim approached another Israeli, Amos Davidowitz, director of Israel and Palestine projects at the Institute of World Affairs.

Davidowitz staged OlymPeace events that brought 250 12-year-olds and 100 educators from 15 countries to Greece in 2001 and 2003 for a multicultural peace program based on sports and arts.

For Nedaa Mahmoud, a 14-year-old girl from Issawiyah, a village of eastern Jerusalem, the recent event was the first time she interacted with Israelis her own age.

Mahmoud, who has a black belt in karate, said she was surprised at how well she got along with the Israelis — four of whom were Jewish and two of whom were Arab.

"They are not as we were always told they are," she said. "Some were really nice and loving people." ■

Donor pushes Jewish culture in Poland

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

KRAKOW (JTA) — During a visit to Poland this summer, Tad Taube recalled the moment when his mother learned that her father had been killed at Auschwitz.

"It was in 1942 or 1943," said Taube, a California-based philanthropist.

"She had adored her father; he was the central figure in her life. When she got the news, I distinctly remember that she spent the next six months crying. And that was followed by other communiques about family members who were killed."

Born in Krakow in 1931, Taube and his parents escaped Poland on the eve of World War II. But he lost 70 percent of his relatives in the Shoah and, even growing up safe in America, he said, "I was totally immersed in the tragedy of the Holocaust."

When Taube left Poland in 1939, the country was home to 3.5 million Jews. Some 3 million of them were killed in the Shoah.

Naturally, Taube said, it's important to remember these victims and mourn their deaths.

But it's equally important to recognize, remember and build on the rich Jewish culture, creativity and civilization that was murdered along with them, he said.

"When many Jewish people come to Poland, they fly into Warsaw, go straight to Auschwitz, then want to get out," he said.

"But until the war, Poland had the most prolific, culturally diverse, creative Jewish population anywhere, ever," he said. "We can't afford to relegate those 3.5 million people to a postscript in history."

■
This assertion could be the motto of the Polish Jewish Heritage Program, a new philanthropic focus of his Taube Family Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture.

The program, the Taube Foundation's first international operation, has two goals. One is to foster positive interest in Poland among American Jews.

The other is to support the remarkable revival of Jewish culture in Poland since the 1989 collapse of communism, and to further awareness of this resurgence among Jews and non-Jews.

The foundation awarded multi-year grants totaling \$420,000 to three key Polish institutions that for years have worked to foster Jewish culture and promote knowledge and understanding of Jewish culture, history and traditions among Poles.

The institutions — the annual Festival

of Jewish Culture in Krakow, Krakow's Center for Jewish Culture and the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw — will serve as partners for the foundation as it seeks to establish a broader network, Taube said.

The foundation also provides some support for Rabbi Michael Schudrich, the American-born rabbi of Warsaw and Lodz.

"We're planting seeds," said Taube, who also president of the Koret Foundation and a trustee of the Hoover Institution. "And I see movement, rapprochement, reconciliation.

"It was a gamble," he said. "We didn't know we could influence changes here."

Though the foundation only began active work in Poland last year, Taube already has achieved high-profile recognition.

At a June 30 ceremony in Warsaw, he was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, the country's second highest distinction for a foreigner.

"It is an expression of respect for your life philosophy, which lets you combine achievements in business with an active participation in public life and with philanthropy," a representative of Poland's president told Taube at the award ceremony.

"We are deeply convinced that your initiatives have greatly influenced the development of Polish-Jewish relations, rooted in history but heading for the future."

Organizations such as the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee long have worked in Poland to support the welfare of individual Jews and the activities of the small Jewish communities that have emerged since the fall of Communism.

Around 15,000 Jews are believed to live in Poland today.

■
Taube, though, is one of several Holocaust survivors and Jews who left Poland just before the war and who recently have begun to shift their focus away from the destruction of the Holocaust toward programs that preserve and teach about pre-war Jewish life and culture.

Others include Sigmund Rolat, who sponsored a major exhibit this spring on

Jews in his native Czestochowa, and Aaron Ziegelman, who sponsored an exhibit on the shtetl of Luboml that has been traveling in the United States.

Their activities are aimed at the general public as well as Jews.

"Because they belong to the Holocaust generation, their perspectives on preserving heritage and fostering culture are all

the more important and have special credibility," said Shana Penn, director of the Polish Jewish Heritage Program.

Lena Bergman, of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, said focusing on Poland's rich Jewish past and promoting Jewish culture can help break long-ingrained stereotypes.

"It's a matter of educating a broad public, creating the support for normal relations," she said.

"What we are trying to do is to show the reality and richness of Jewish life before the Shoah," she said.

"We show that Jews were not victims by definition, as is sometimes asserted. We focus on life."

For example, a recent exhibition mounted by the institute centered on Jewish soldiers in the Polish military.

Taube's visit to Krakow this summer coincided with his first direct experience with the Jewish Culture Festival, a nine-day annual extravaganza that takes place in the synagogues, streets and squares of Kazimierz, the city's former Jewish district.

He said attending the festival's opening event, a concert by three cantors held in the ornate 19th-century Tempel synagogue, which was restored in the 1990s, reaffirmed his belief in his goals.

"Here we are, committed to supporting a renaissance of Jewish culture, and all of a sudden we find ourselves in an incredible synagogue, restored with love and care, along with 1,000 other people listening to cantorial music," he said.

The audience included local Jews, American Jewish tourists, and hundreds of non-Jewish Poles.

"It was an incredible experience," he said. "People were literally hanging from the rafters!" ■

We show that Jews were not victims by definition, as is sometimes asserted. We focus on life.

Lena Bergman

Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw

COMMUNITY

TRANSITIONS

■ Howard Rieger was approved as the new president and CEO of the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella organization. JTA board member Terry Meyerhoff Rubenstein was named chairwoman of UJC's Gender Equity and Organizational Effectiveness Initiative, and S. Stephen Selig III was named chairman of UJC's Campaign/Financial Resource Development Pillar.

■ Bernice Manocherian took over as president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

■ Na'amat USA elected Alice Howard national president.

■ Robert Satloff resumed his post as executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Studies after two years in Morocco.

■ Rabbi Andrew Davids was named executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America.

■ Peter Pepper was elected president of the Workmen's Circle - Arbeter Ring.

■ Shepard Englander was appointed CEO of the Cincinnati Jewish federation.

■ The Jewish Education Service of North America appointed Robert Lichtman vice president for professional development and advancement and director of the Jewish Educator Recruitment/Retention Initiative.

■ The Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus appointed Rabbi Ilan Haber national director.

■ Neil Posner and Barbara Rosenthal joined the board of directors of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

■ The Jewish Funders Network appointed Judy Mann as senior vice president/ chief operating officer.

■ Jeffrey Boro was inaugurated as president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Quebec Region.

■ Bruce Pernick was elected president of the American Committee for Shenkar College in Israel.

HONORS

■ The Orthodox Union honored outgoing O.U. President Harvey Blitz and his wife, Judy. The organization also gave its National Distinguished Rabbinic Leadership Award to Rabbi Yoel Schonfeld and its Distinguished Public Service Award to Jay Lefkowitz.

■ Australian Prime Minister John Howard received the American Liberties Medalion from the American Jewish Committee.

■ Anna Szeszler, principal of the Lauder Yavne Jewish Community School in Budapest, won the Max Fisher Prize for Jewish Education in the Diaspora, named after the founding chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors.

Beit Din ruling makes woman Jewish

By BILL GLADSTONE

TORONTO (JTA) — In a precedent-setting ruling that could pave the way for legions of lost Jews to return to the Jewish fold, a top New York rabbinical court has accepted baptismal certificates, civil-war records and government documents as proof that someone is Jewish under Jewish law.

Presented with compelling genealogical evidence, the Beit Din, which requested not to be identified by name, ruled in late June that a Missouri woman who was raised in a Christian home need not convert to Judaism because she already is Jewish.

The Orthodox Beit Din ruled that Wendy Armstrong, a 34-year-old real estate professional from St. Louis, is Jewish under Jewish law because the genealogical paper trail demonstrates that her third great-grandmother along maternal lines was Jewish.

For Armstrong, who attended a Methodist church as a child and grew up "celebrating Santa Claus and the Easter bunny," the judgment means she doesn't have to undergo a conversion process

"They basically said, 'Congratulations, you're a Jew, welcome home,'" she said. "I don't have to go through a mikvah."

For Midwest businessman Craig Shapiro, who helped Armstrong prepare her evidence for the Beit Din, the ruling was a test case that clears the way for the launch of Shlach Ameer V'yavdonnee, a non-profit organization whose purpose is to help "lost Jews" find their way back to Judaism.

The Beit Din decision could have a huge effect, Shapiro said, because it recognizes for the first time the validity of using records of both Jewish and non-Jewish provenance to prove someone is Jewish.

Shapiro said he hopes to find descendants of Jews who were forcibly converted in centuries past, including child Holocaust survivors, victims of Russian pogroms, and even survivors of the Spanish Inquisition and the Crusades.

"We have a responsibility to reclaim our lost brethren," he said. "We were forced to let them go and we now have the responsibility to open up the doors to bring them home."

The phrase Shlach Ameer V'yavdonnee is from the Exodus, and translates as, "Let

My people go, that they may serve Me."

The organization plans to place a series of advertisements in various international publications, seeking people who have both a strong attraction to Judaism and a strong suspicion of Jewish ancestry. Shlach Ameer will train a team of Jewish genealogists to do family tree research for respondents who demonstrate a genuine and sustained interest in Judaism, Shapiro said.

Simultaneously, the group will utilize Chabad Lubavitch's vast international network of rabbis to provide advice, education and spiritual guidance for those who wish to reconnect to Jewish values.

"Once this thing gets going, we'd like to include free trips to Israel," Shapiro said.

For Armstrong, who had begun researching her family's genealogy as part of a spiritual quest, the discovery came to her like a blessing.

"Once I found out that my family was Jewish, it was like a light bulb went on," said Armstrong, who began taking classes, attending synagogue, lighting Shabbat candles and becoming increasingly observant

in other ways. "I just got it. It was like, 'A-ha!' It was an eye-opening experience."

Armstrong said the court ruling also has significance for her siblings and cousins because it also recognizes them as Jewish. Some have shown indifference, while others have been greatly enthusiastic, she said.

"They were so touched by what I was doing that they actually went out and bought menorahs last Chanukah so their kids would know about the Jewish connection," she said.

While doing some online research at the genealogical Web site JewishGen.org, Armstrong discovered that a branch of her family had died at Auschwitz.

Bolstered by the ruling, Shlach Ameer could begin to spark a major ingathering of Jewish exiles over the next generation, said Rabbi Chaim Mentz, a Shlach Ameer adviser who is spiritual leader of Chabad of Bel Air Congregation in Los Angeles.

"Twenty or 30 years from now, we could be bringing home hundreds of thousands of Jews," Mentz said. "Imagine all the schools and synagogues that might be built as a result of the outgrowth of the community." ■

I don't have to go through a mikvah.

Wendy Armstrong

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Eitam backs Shin Bet

The head of the National Religious Party said the Shin Bet security service should move against extremist Jews.

Effi Eitam said Thursday that Shin Bet chief Avi Dichter had persuaded him of the need to place a handful of Jewish extremists under administrative detention for fear they could resort to violence in a bid to thwart government evacuation of settlements.

Israel leaves Beit Hanoun

Israeli forces pulled back from a Gaza Strip town used to launch rocket attacks on Israel.

Thursday's withdrawal from Beit Hanoun ended a siege imposed in late June after a Kassam rocket fired by Hamas terrorists killed two people in the Israeli town of Sderot.

Security sources said the operation had been only moderately successful because rocket crews had pulled out of Beit Hanoun but continued firing over the boundary into Israel. Two Kassams landed in the western Negev Desert on Thursday but caused no casualties.

Holocaust denial in Egypt

Egypt's leading newspaper published a two-part article denying the Holocaust by saying Jews invented "lies of genocide."

The columnist for Al-Liwaa al-Islami, Rif'at Sayyed Ahmad, wrote earlier this summer that the Jews created the "lie" to receive financial, technological and economic aid from the West and to make it easier to establish the State of Israel in Palestine.

In reaction to the article, the newspaper printed a clarification Wednesday saying the article was "the opinion of the writer, which is subject to discussion, agreement or rejection."

Though the editor, Mohammed Al-Zorkany, said he was surprised the article stirred controversy, Ahmad himself was unapologetic saying, "The issue should be the Holocaust that the Palestinians are going through, not the Jews."

Port strike ends

Israeli port workers ended a strike that cost the country more than \$1.5 billion. The Histadrut labor federation announced Thursday that the workers would return to work after Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to suspend for several months a plan to privatize Haifa, Eilat and Ashdod ports.

Launched last month, the strike had stranded more than 60 ships at sea as workers offloaded cargo only intermittently.

WORLD

Products to E.U. labeled

Israeli exports to the European Union will have different labels if they are produced beyond Israel's pre-1967 borders.

In a deal signed Thursday in Brussels, Israel agreed to the change that will allow it to maintain its favored-trading status with the bloc. Israel previously had refused to label which products were produced in the West Bank, Gaza Strip or the Golan Heights, fearing that the products would be subject to extra trade tariffs. Israeli exports to the European Union, the Jewish state's largest trading partner, currently stand at around \$17.5 billion per year.

Those produced in the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan account for some \$100 million of that figure.

Australians jailed for hate

Two members of an extreme right-wing group were sentenced to jail for a spate of anti-Semitic attacks. Daniel Tyrone Klavins, 26, and

Frank James Lemin, 20, pleaded guilty last week to willfully damaging buildings in Perth.

Last month, widespread daubing of buildings — including the Perth Hebrew Congregation, a kosher food store, a Chinese restaurant and a police station — sent investigators on a hunt for members of the Australian National Movement, a group headed by Jack van Tongeren, who himself has spent 12 years in prison for fire bombing Chinese restaurants.

She'll look smashing

An Israeli tennis star will compete in the Olympics after a sponsorship rift nearly kept her off the team.

Anna Smashnova-Pistolesi, Israel's top female tennis player, will play in the women's singles tournament in Athens now that her regular sponsor, Lotto, has reached agreement with Speedo, the official supplier of the Olympic team, over her Olympic garb.

Chinese help 'Jewish region' of Russia

A Chinese city donated \$12,000 to the Jewish community in Birobidjan, Russia.

The recent gift was made by the mayor of Hegang, Birobidjan's sister city located in the northeastern Chinese province of Heilongjiang, and will be used to purchase computers for Birobidjan's Hebrew school.

Next month, Birobidjan — which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year — will host a number of high-profile events that are expected to draw guests from Russia and abroad.

Birobidjan was designated by Stalin in 1934 as a Jewish autonomous region and touted by Soviet propaganda as a Communist alternative to Palestine.

Located in a Far East region of Russia bordering China, Birobidjan remains home to a few thousand Jews.

NORTH AMERICA

Evangelicals plan ties with 'messianic Jews'

A Christian fundamentalist group is planning a new alliance with so-called messianic Jews.

Bill McCartney, founder of the Promise Keepers, a Christian men's ministry, is planning to launch a new initiative with "messianic Jews" called "Road to Jerusalem," the Forward reported. McCartney, who has not made information about the new initiative public, told worshippers at an Arizona church in May,

"We are going to save the unbelieving Jew," the report said. The organized Jewish community has shunned messianic Jewish groups, many of whom, like Jews for Jesus, actually are comprised of many Christian members.

Some observers said the burgeoning new alliance could undermine ties between Jews and evangelical Christians, whose strong support for Israel has been welcomed by many Jewish supporters of Israel.

JDate digs for gold

JDate's parent company plans to list its stock on Nasdaq.

MatchNet Inc. said Thursday it plans to raise as much as \$100 million in the September listing, the Jerusalem Post reported.

The company, which is currently traded on the Frankfurt Stock exchange, was founded in 1998 by Los Angeles-based Israelis Alon Carmel and Joe Shapira.

The company owns several dating Web sites, the largest of which are AmericanSingles.com and JDate.com.

It merged last year with Tel Aviv-based PointMatch, which owns Israel's leading dating Web sites.