


IN THE NEWS
GOP defends Israeli defense against terror

A draft of the Republican Party's platform says terrorist attacks against Israel "are part of the same evil as the Sept. 11 attacks against America."

"We recognize Israel's right to defend itself in the face of homicide bombings and other attacks against the people of Israel," the draft platform reads, according to the Republican Jewish Coalition.

The document, which will be debated at the Republican National Convention in New York next week, also says Palestinian refugees do not have a right to return to Israel and that Israel should not have to revert to its pre-1967 borders. The platform also calls for the continuation of Israel's qualitative edge in defense technology over its neighbors, and condemns the international rise of anti-Semitism.

Israel imposes blockades in Gaza

Israel imposed blockades on the Gaza Strip in an attempt to stop Palestinian rocket and mortar attacks.

Officials said the Israeli army imposed a blockade on a road linking northern and southern parts of the strip. In addition, the Gush Katif junction was blocked to Palestinian traffic as well as the coastal road west of Netzarim, in the center of the Gaza Strip. The move came after five residents of the Israeli town of Sderot were treated for shock after two rockets fell in the town.

Arrow-2 fails test

Israel's Arrow-2 anti-missile system failed its latest test.

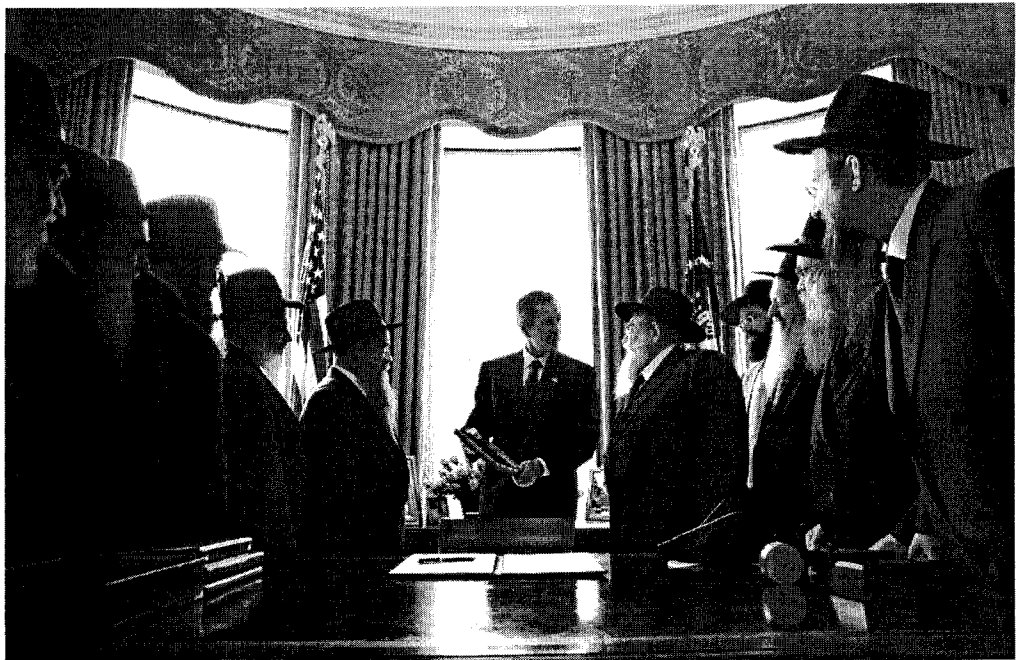
On Thursday, the Arrow failed to down an advanced Scud missile off the coast of California.

The advanced Scud boasts a multiple warhead, and although the radar unit locked on to the missile, the system failed to take down a warhead that separated from the Scud.

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WORLD REPORT

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White House

President Bush met Lubavitch rabbis at the Oval Office in March 2002.

Sensing Kerry weakness, Bush reaches out aggressively to Jews

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Republican Jews believe they can sell their party and their candidate this year on more than just a pro-Israel record.

President Bush's support for Israel is at the heart of Republican courting of the Jewish vote, but the party also is stressing other facets of Bush's leadership abroad.

They're also attacking Bush's opponent, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), for an alleged lack of leadership, and — in a change of strategy — are delving into domestic policy.

With the nation's attention soon to focus

on the Republican National Convention in New York, Jewish Republicans are hoping to highlight Bush administration actions they think could swing Jewish voters to the GOP.

Some recent polling shows that Republican inroads into the Jewish vote are minimal so far.

Yet strategists say they're intent on attacking what they see as weaknesses in Kerry's record and in his outreach to the Jewish community.

When Republicans first started talking about making inroads into the traditionally Democratic Jewish voting bloc, Republican party leaders said that they would focus on the positives of Bush's

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■ *Bush campaign targets Jews, sensing Kerry is vulnerable*

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record, rather than attacking Kerry.

Marc Racicot, chairman of the Bush/Cheney campaign, told JTA in March that he did not believe Kerry was weak on Israel, and that the campaign would focus instead on comparing the candidates' defense and security records.

But Republican Jewish officials said they began to see Kerry as potentially vulnerable in the Jewish community after his performance in front of the Anti-Defamation League in May — Kerry's only major speech to a Jewish audience so far in the campaign — and believed the Democrats were not actively trying to court Jewish voters.

"The ADL speech was totally underwhelming," one Jewish Republican said. "It showed his strategy was to move closer to the president and hold the base he already has."

That analysis has led to an increased effort by Republican Jews.

In addition to highlighting Bush's support for Israel, the appeal to Jewish voters has centered on the administration's leadership against terrorism, Bush's efforts against global anti-Semitism and his leadership in volatile times.

By contrast, they portray Kerry as someone who has not led on Middle East issues, and — customizing their broad "flip-flopper" argument for a Jewish audience — say he has taken contradictory stances on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"The message is, 'We don't know where John Kerry really stands,'" said Matthew

Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition. "Right now, given how important things are and how many lives are at stake, John Kerry is a risk the Jewish community can not afford."

The campaign appears to be testing different anti-Kerry messages, with a variety of results.

Jewish voters continue to be concerned by a statement Kerry made during the Democratic primaries suggesting that former President Jimmy Carter or former Secretary of State James Baker could serve as envoys to the Middle East. Both men are seen in the Jewish community as being biased toward the Palestinians.

Kerry since has stepped back from that proposal, and aides have suggested that the comments were entered accidentally into his speech.

The Bush camp also has had some success in undermining Kerry's stance on Israel's West Bank security barrier. Kerry was critical of the fence in comments to the Arab American Institute last summer, but later clarified his remarks.

Bush backers are working to juxtapose Kerry's record with Bush's on issues Jews care about.

In a coordinated effort, the White House released a 24-page booklet highlighting Bush's actions over the past four years on such issues. It lists all of the times Bush met with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, lit Chanukah candles at the White House and spoke out against anti-Semitism.

It also includes laudatory quotes from a wide range of American Jewish leaders, including several who disagree with Bush on other issues.

It's unclear to what extent Bush's strategy is working.

Republican Jews continue to stress anecdotal evidence that more Jews are coming to their side, and the Republican Jewish Coalition says its membership has grown from 3,000 people in 2002 to 10,000 this year.

But Democrats contend the Republican effort has been for naught. In a recent poll conducted by a Democratic polling firm, only 22 percent of American Jews said they favored Bush over Kerry, statistically even with the number Bush received in

the 2000 election.

Kerry campaign officials say they believe the poll shows their base of support in the Jewish community is strong.

"We've made it very clear from the beginning that we will take no community and no part of a community for granted, least of all the American Jewish community," said Jay Footlik, senior advisor on Middle East and Jewish affairs for the Kerry campaign.

Footlik said Kerry's campaign is working to educate the community about Kerry's "impeccable" record on Middle East issues and his views on domestic issues.

At first, it seemed the White House would virtually ignore domestic concerns when talking to Jewish voters.

But that policy is changing: The White House and the Bush/Cheney campaign both are looking to highlight positive effects Bush's domestic programs have had on Jews.

The goal is to prevent Jewish voters from automatically dismissing Bush because of domestic issues.

Strategists contrast it to the Kerry campaign's efforts to position Kerry as comparable to Bush on Israel and the Middle East, hoping Jewish voters will move past those issues to domestic topics, where they feel they will fare better.

Sen. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), a key Jewish champion of the Bush campaign, said he believes Jews might support Bush's stance on faith-based initiatives if they understood it better.

"There's an understanding that if a Jewish agency is doing good things in the community, it should be just as likely to get a government grant as one without a Star of David on the door," Coleman said.

The emphasis on faith-based initiatives is an interesting choice for the Republicans, considering that a majority of U.S. Jews, and most Jewish organizations with the exception of Orthodox groups, do not support the program and fear it breaches the separation of church and state.

Republican Jewish officials say there was a need to portray the administration's domestic policies as not outside the mainstream. They also are touching on the president's work on the economy and health care.

It's unclear to what extent Bush's strategy is working.

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Chinese city reaches out to world Jewry

By BEN G. FRANK

HARBIN, China (JTA) — While much of the world is focusing on China as an awakening economic giant, this enterprising city of over 4 million in northeastern China is increasing efforts to reach out to world Jewry.

Stand at the entrance of the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences — under whose aegis the Harbin Jews Research Center falls — and observe visitors to the two-year-old, 400-photo “Jews in Harbin” exhibit.

They’re tourists from Chicago and New York, ambassadors and officials from Israel, missions from American Jewish organizations, scholars from Australia and the United States and children from Harbin schools.

The Xinhua News Agency recently announced that the academy and its Jewish research center are restoring two synagogues and a Jewish school at a cost of \$3.5 million, with funding coming from the governor’s office.

“We want to bring that historical friendship into current friendship,” Qu Wei, president of the academy and the Harbin Jews Research Center, said in a July interview with JTA. “We want to show the cooperation between the Israeli people and the Chinese people.”

A week earlier, Wei and the center’s deputy director, Li Shu Xiao, greeted Israeli Trade Minister Ehud Olmert, whose grandfather is buried in the Harbin Jewish Cemetery, which the center calls the largest in the Far East.

Olmert’s father, Mordechai, escaped with his parents from war-torn Russia after World War I. Mordechai Olmert was a founder of the Betar Revisionist youth movement in Harbin, and he and his wife — whom he met in Harbin — were among the first to emigrate from here to Israel in the early 1930s.

In the 1920s and 1930s, thousands of Jews fleeing Communist Russia and Nazi Germany found refuge in this northeastern Chinese city, located near the Russian border.

From the late 19th century, Harbin had been something of a Russian city on Chinese territory. A spur of the Trans-Siberian railroad known as the Chinese Eastern Railway, built and operated by Russia, ran through town.

Jews who wanted to flee the oppressive life in the Pale of Settlement found relief and a home in this Russian enclave. The czar even encouraged Jewish immigration to the area in order to populate it.

By the end of World War I, the 10,000 Jews here made Harbin the largest Jewish center in the Far East. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, thousands of Jews and White Russians — fugitives from war, Bolshevism and famine — arrived in the city.

By the 1930s, at least 20,000 Jews lived in Harbin, where cultural life was heavily Russian and Jewish.

Why the outreach to the Jewish community today?

Barry Jacobs, a China watcher and director of strategic studies for the American Jewish Committee, says the Chinese “have great respect for the success of the Jewish Diaspora, both intellectually and economically.”

In a telephone interview from his office in Washington, Jacobs added that “the Chinese people see the Jewish people as a useful colleague and supporter economically and politically. They also see Israel as a dynamic and successful state that offers China a valuable example of high-technology and development.”

One finds further insight in the Harbin Jews Research Center itself. One of the center’s goals is “to study the successful experiences of Jewish people in economy, science and technology, culture and education,” according to the mission statement in the center’s brochure.

Bates Gill, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies says, “China is undertaking a very proactive, omni-directional policy, in which they are actively reaching out internationally in friendship.”

From Aug. 30 to Sept. 3, the center will host an academic conference called “The History and Culture of Harbin Jews,” drawing scholars from the United States, Israel, Russia, Australia and China.

After the conference, a 30-member mission from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which once provided welfare to Jewish refugees in

China, is due to arrive in Harbin as part of its trip to the Russian Far East.

The center’s literature expresses China’s friendship with the Jewish people and says the Chinese “look forward to their return.”

When Jews lived in Harbin, they were welcomed and anti-Semitism was limited to White Russian hooligans and gangs, which often were encouraged by the Japanese occupiers.

The Jewish exodus began with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, followed by World War II, the Soviet occupation of 1945-47, China’s Communist revolution and the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

By 1951, nearly all the Jews of Harbin had emigrated, mostly to Israel but also to Australia, the United States and other countries.

Walking through the former Jewish district, Li points out formerly Jewish-owned movie houses, banks and cinemas, the famous Moderne Hotel, the former Jewish hospital and

orphanage and other Jewish communal institutions.

Li has spent his adult life researching the material, and he has made several trips to Israel to visit the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv and meet with former Harbiners.

The Jews and their institutions here are long gone. Only one Jew now lives here permanently — an Israeli named Dan Ben Canaan who settled in Harbin as a foreign language teacher and English radio broadcaster — while some Jewish students are studying temporarily in schools here.

The former Old Synagogue, built in 1909, now is a hotel. Next door stands the former Jewish school, now a Korean school.

Nearby is the so-called “New Synagogue” — completed in 1921 — which is now an empty, government-owned building.

Though Judaism is not officially recognized by the Chinese government, work is scheduled this fall to reconstruct the New Synagogue, the first of the two shuls to be restored as a museum and the site of the “Jews in Harbin” exhibit.

Harbin once was a locus of Jews and Jewish institutions, though now all are long gone.

Republicans promise long, detailed platform

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Republicans promise that a substantive, tough party platform this year will present Jewish voters with a sharp contrast from the relatively scrawny Democratic document — but they may find that delving into details could prove devilish.

The Bush campaign is going into particulars but allowing a platform committee to hash through the proposed document on the eve of the convention.

That means the platform is more likely to approach the 100-some pages of the GOP's 2000 version than the svelte 37 pages of the Democrats' 2004 platform, Ginny Wolfe, one of the senior Republican platform staffers, told JTA.

Going into such detail will help reinforce Bush's reputation as a friend to Israel, but it carries risks for the president on domestic issues where Republican views are less in line with those of many American Jews.

Wolfe said she could not go into specifics before the delegates got the draft platform, but she offered some guidance based on the 2000 platform.

"There will be an extensive section on foreign policy and our commitments around the world, and strong support for our friends around the world, including the State of Israel," she said. "The difference between the Republican platform and Democratic platform is that ours is both broad and substantive."

Democrats, stung in the past by Republican accusations that the party is divided and weak, wanted to avoid the raucousness often associated with platform drafting. They therefore sought to avoid issues that divide the party base, focusing instead on unifying issues such as job creation, health care and promotion of alternative forms of energy.

The result is that the Democrats devote just 223 words to the Middle East, against the thousand-plus words the Republicans gave the issue in 2000 — and which Wolfe suggests the GOP will match this year.

"This section of the document will reflect a deep understanding of world realities today," Wolfe said. "There are many friends around the world, and there are those who are not so friendly. It will reflect that understanding and will again make clear the president's accomplishments."

Wolfe said the platform likely would reflect Bush's historic recognition in April of some Israeli claims to the West Bank and rejection of any "right of return" for Palestinian refugees to Israel. The Democratic platform echoed those assurances.

Also likely to make an appearance, Wolfe said, is Bush's goal of a Palestinian state, the first such explicit call by a U.S. president.

Such detail is likely to work for Bush in areas where his administration is in accord with Jewish voters: For instance, the length of the 2000 platform allowed Republicans to slam not only Iranian extremism but the persecution of Iranian Jews. That

document also repeated three times the party's commitment to maintaining Israel's military edge over its Arab neighbors.

On the other hand, where Bush's record is less popular in the Jewish community, there's likely to be some concern. For instance, the 2004 Democratic platform mentions abortion only once, saying that "abortion should be safe, legal and rare."

By contrast, the Republicans' 2000 platform mentions the topic eight times, using words like "infanticide" and "shocking."

Wolfe complained that the Democratic platform tries to be all things to all people.

"Lay them side by side, you'll see a huge difference," she said. ■

Jewish groups welcome GOP to N.Y.

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Republicans are coming to New York, and Jewish groups that call the city home are rolling out the red carpet.

"Our objective is to provide a warm welcome," said Michael Miller, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

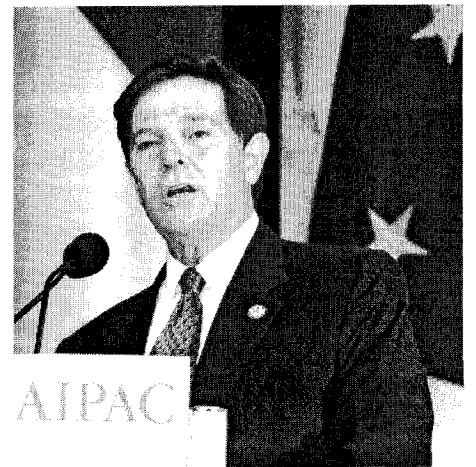
At least one Jewish group that didn't participate in the Democratic convention in Boston last month, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, will host an event for GOP delegates.

At the same time, some Jews are expected to participate in a protest against the Bush administration and its policies on Sunday, a day before the four-day convention opens.

Jewish officials say it's in their interest to back both the Republicans and the Democrats: That would force both parties to work to garner Jewish support, ensuring that Jewish issues remain on the radar screen no matter which party is in power.

Many of the events Jewish groups will orchestrate in New York will closely mirror the festivities in Boston. For example, The Israel Project again will hold a rally to highlight Israeli victims of terrorism.

There will be a community-wide celebration Sunday night featuring Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), Bush/Cheney campaign manager Ken Mehlman and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani.



Richard Lobell

Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas) will be honored at a Republican Jewish Coalition event.

The American Jewish Committee will host events exploring ties between U.S. Jews and other ethnic groups.

The Republican Jewish Coalition will honor Republican lawmakers for their support of Israel in an event Sunday featuring the three Republican Jews in Congress — Sens. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) and Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), and Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.) — as well as non-Jewish congressional leaders like Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) and Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas).

Several Jewish groups, including Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, will join a large-scale protest Sunday outside of Madison Square Garden, the site of the convention. Many other Jews are expected to protest at other events with regional or non-religious groups. ■

Bush's take on Jewish community's issues

By JUSTIN BOSCH

WASHINGTON (JTA) — These are some of President Bush's stated positions on issues of concern to U.S. Jews, compiled from speeches, his letters and statements as president, and a new pamphlet presenting Bush's record as "a friend of the American Jewish community."

ISRAEL

• *West Bank security barrier*

"The barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than political barrier, should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities" (Bush letter to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, April 14, 2004.)

• *Gaza Strip withdrawal*

"We welcome the disengagement plan you have prepared, under which Israel would withdraw certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza, and withdraw certain military installations and settlements in the West Bank. These steps described in the plan will mark real progress toward realizing my June 24, 2002 vision, and make a real contribution towards peace" (April 14 letter).

• *Israel's borders and Palestinian refugees*

"The United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state. It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair, and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities" (April 14 letter).

• *Yasser Arafat*

"Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership, so that a Palestinian state can be born. I call on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror" (Bush speech, June 24, 2002).

THE U.S. ROLE

• *Jerusalem*

Like many presidents before him, Bush pledged during his 2000 campaign to move the U.S. embassy to Israel's capital — and, like each of those presidents, he failed to do so. Republican officials say the commitment to moving the embassy will make another appearance in this year's party platform.

THE MIDDLE EAST

• *Iran*

Bush called Iran part of an "axis of evil," along with Iraq and North Korea (State of the Union address, 2002).

"We are paying very close attention to Iran. We have ever since I've been in office here. We are working with our friends to keep the pressure on the mullahs to listen to the demands of the free world." The United States also is working with the International Atomic Energy Agency "to keep the pressure on Iran" for "full disclosure, full transparency of their nuclear weapons programs" (Rose Garden address, Aug. 2, 2004).

• *Syria*

Bush at first resisted Congress' Syria Accountability Act, which imposes sanctions on Syria for supporting terrorists, failing to dismantle programs to develop weapons of mass destruction, continuing to occupy Lebanon and failing to secure its border with Iraq. Bush relented in December and signed the bill into law. Sanctions went into effect in May.

"The Syrian government must understand that its conduct alone will determine the duration of the sanctions, and the extent to which additional sanctions

may be imposed should the Syrian government fail to adopt a more constructive approach to relations with its neighbors, weapons of mass destruction and terrorism" (Bush statement upon imposing sanctions, May 11, 2004).

ANTI-SEMITISM

"Perhaps the deepest obstacle to peace is found in the hearts of men and women. The Jewish people have seen, over the years and over the centuries, that hate prepares the way for violence. The refusal to expose and confront intolerance can lead to crimes beyond imagining. So we have a duty to expose and confront anti-Semitism, wherever it is found" (AIPAC speech, May 18, 2004).

DOMESTIC ISSUES

• *Abortion*

Bush signed the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act in 2003.

• *Judicial nominees*

Bush says he chooses judges based on their qualifications, not by their position on specific issues. He criticizes what he calls "activist judges" and says that judges should not seek to legislate from the bench (Remarks to reporters, July 7, 2004).

• *Religious freedom*

"It is not an accident that freedom of religion is one of the central freedoms in our Bill of Rights. It is the first freedom of the human soul — the right to speak the words that God places in our mouths. We must stand for that freedom in our country. We must speak for that freedom in the

world" (Speech to the American Jewish Committee, May 4, 2001).

• *Faith-based initiatives*

"I will continue our efforts to defend the liberty of religious organizations. Faith-based charities have a right to

provide publicly-funded social services, just like any other group. You see, our government should welcome faith. So I have signed an executive order allowing religious charities who seek government support to compete for funding on a level playing field" (Speech to Southern Baptist Convention, June 15, 2004).

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'It is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949.'

President Bush

Students clean up cemeteries in Belarus

By SUE FISHKOFF

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (JTA) — Four neglected Jewish cemeteries in Belarus, abandoned since the Holocaust, have been cleaned up, their gravestones righted and shiny new fences erected around them, thanks to some American college students and the orthodontist who led them.

Between the summer of 2002 and this past June, three groups of students from Dartmouth College and one from the State University of New York-Binghamton repaired historic Jewish cemeteries in Belarussian cities, including Sapockin, Indura, Svir and Kamenka, working together with the non-Jewish villagers in those towns.

The trips were sponsored by their respective Hillels but were organized and led by Dr. Michael Lozman, an orthodontist from Latham, N.Y. In the summer of 2001, Lozman and his cousins first visited Belarus on a pilgrimage to his father's native village of Sapockin.

Population 2,500, Sapockin once had a thriving Jewish community, an historic wooden synagogue and two Jewish cemeteries. No Jews are left there today and the synagogue was burned down by the Nazis in 1941, but during his visit Lozman asked to see the 19th-century cemetery where his grandparents were buried.

A teacher from the local school escorted the Americans, taking them outside the village and down a lane where the abandoned cemetery lay, hidden from sight.

"When we saw it, we were appalled," Lozman says. "We hadn't expected this barrenness and neglect, to see this piece of land where our grandparents were buried covered in 60 years of undergrowth, with cows grazing on it, and only a few headstones left. We were told the Nazis used them to build roads."

Overwhelmed by emotion, Lozman and his relatives recited Kaddish in the empty field.

Many people would have left things there, as a sad memory to tell their own children. But Lozman was fired up: He went to see the village mayor and asked for permission to come back and erect a marker so people would know this was a Jewish cemetery.

The mayor agreed.

"He thought I'd never come back," Lozman guesses.

Back in Latham, Lozman bought a weed whacker and special ordered 100 aluminum Stars of David from a local metal shop.

"Two weeks later, armed with my weed whacker and my Jewish stars, I was back in Belarus knocking at the mayor's door," Lozman says. "Within 20 minutes I had two soldiers with shovels at my disposal."

Lozman and his helpers rustled up some pipe, got in a van and set out for the cemetery to start laying fence. Soon three more men with shovels showed up, and an hour later a tractor arrived bearing sand and cement.

Lozman got to work with his weed whacker, and as he cleared away the brush and saw where mounds of earth indicated graves, he set a Jewish star atop each one.

By day's end he'd placed 60 stars, righted 25 gravestones and erected a 15-foot entry gate.

"It was a tremendous feeling of accomplishment," he says. "But I told the mayor I wanted to come back and put up a fence, so the cemetery would be protected."

Lozman made good on his promise. Through his nephew, a recent Dartmouth graduate, he contacted officials at the college who thought it would be a wonderful project for students.

"It allows students to explore the Holocaust in an experiential way and answers the question, 'Is there a meaningful response we can make to the Holocaust a generation or two afterwards?'" says Dartmouth Hillel Rabbi Ed Boraz.

In June 2002, Lozman, Boraz and two helpers returned to Sapockin with 12 Dartmouth students. Half were Jewish, half weren't. That was part of the plan, Boraz says, pointing out that they spent a week in Poland visiting Auschwitz on the way to Belarus.

The group spent five days repairing the cemetery, staying an hour away in Grodno and driving every day to Sapockin to mix cement, clear land, right headstones and put up fences. Villagers stopped by to help, and the local school hosted the Americans for a family homestay and banquet.

Friendships sprang up between the young people, despite the language and cultural barriers. "I felt it was important to integrate into the village," Lozman says.

Beyond demonstrating the strength of Jewish memory, Lozman says the project showed the villagers that not all Americans are lazy and spoiled.

"We were ambassadors for our country. One man told me he couldn't believe Americans would be there

in his village, working," he says.

Dartmouth grad student Ethan Levine, 23, took part in the Sapockin trip, and then led the next two groups from Dartmouth in 2003 and 2004.

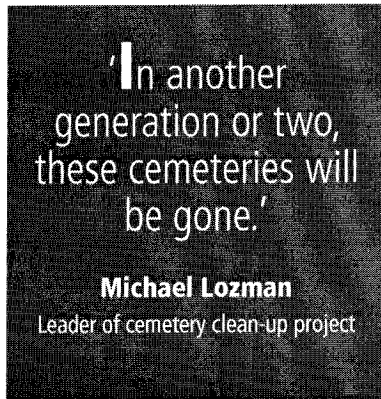
"I studied a lot about the Holocaust, and my family comes from the area," he explains. "Many of the students have similar backgrounds, but there was also the Christian girl from Texas who wanted to learn more about Jews, and the boy with the Ukrainian mother and Palestinian father who was able to speak Russian and helped decipher the gravestones."

This past March, Levine and Lozman spent a week in Belarus scouting out cemeteries for restoration. They have a list of six more they'd like to work on, but as news spread of the American students, both through word of mouth and a spot on Belarussian state TV, villages from as far away as Lithuania and Ukraine have proposed their own Jewish cemeteries for future cleanup projects.

There's only so much he can do, Lozman says. Hillel helps subsidize travel expenses, but the cemetery fences cost \$8,000 apiece, and a fair amount has come from Lozman's own pocket.

He has set up a foundation, the Restoration of Eastern European Jewish Cemeteries Project, to help defray future costs, and he would welcome an angel to keep the momentum going.

"In another generation or two, these cemeteries will be gone," he says. "Four cemeteries is a small number, but if you think of the 6,000 to 8,000 graves they contain, graves we've helped preserve, you can see how meaningful it is."



ARTS & CULTURE

Jewish pop duo to stump for Israel before convention

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Touring the country as pop stars doesn't leave Evan and Jaron much time for hobbies, but when the two find down time, they try to advocate for Israel.

The Lowenstein twins, who had a top-10 hit in 2001 with "Crazy for This Girl," have found time to speak out for Israel a lot lately, and have even crafted a song to honor the Jewish state.

They will perform the song Sunday, joining others at New York City's Baruch College to remember victims of terrorism in Israel. The Israel Project event comes a day before the Republican National Convention opens at Madison Square Garden.

Evan Lowenstein, 30, said he and his brother receive 30 to 40 requests each week for personal appearances. This event matched the right timing with an issue they care about.

"I can sit here and say the Israel Project has been dear to my heart for months," Evan told JTA in a phone interview. "But really, it just seemed like something that was good and worked out time-wise."

Evan, speaking on his brother's behalf, said they are coming to New York to get more people to understand the issues Israel faces, and not to promote their new album.

"I think that my brother and I bring a certain measure of coolness and that's why people get people like my brother and I in the first place," said Evan, who was, along with Jaron, one of People Magazine's "Most Beautiful People in the World" in 2001. "We're accepting that call."

Observant Jews from the Atlanta area, the duo was wary of performing for Jewish organizations when they first became known nationwide.

But as they have matured, they have become more interested in the topics of religious pluralism and Israel. Both brothers have studied at yeshivas in Israel, and their sister now lives there.

"It's far more important to make sure Israel stays around than to make sure I stay around," Evan said. ■

Sprucing up a Jewish cemetery

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — A historic Serbian Jewish cemetery that for decades has been home to hundreds of Gypsies is getting a face lift.

After an agreement negotiated by the head of the tiny Jewish community in the town of Nis, Jasna Ciric, 30 soldiers from the Serbian Army will clean up the cemetery for six hours each Saturday and Sunday in the coming weeks.

The soldiers will join the Gypsies, or Roma, and others who, as part of a project organized earlier this summer by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, had already begun cleaning the section of the cemetery not occupied by the estimated 800 Roma.

In addition, the Nis municipality, which is the formal owner of the cemetery, agreed to install a drainage system to alleviate sanitation problems surrounding the Roma settlement of 120 homes, some of which used tombstones in their construction.

Earlier this summer, tensions between Jews and Roma grew heated over whether the Gypsy village should be approved by the municipality or whether the Roma ought to be removed from the cemetery site.

The new moves appear to be major steps toward resolving a dispute that has made headlines in recent weeks in Serbia and abroad.

"The project is increasingly becoming a truly civic endeavor, involving Serbian citizens of different ethnicities and backgrounds in a common effort to reclaim an important part of their patrimony," Yechiel Bar Chaim, the JDC's country director for Serbia, told JTA.

Roma families have lived for decades in part of the cemetery they call the "Jewish Village."

They have built homes among the tombstones and used the rest of the cemetery as a dump.

Their presence, without proper plumbing or garbage disposal, long was ignored by the Nis municipality and other authorities. Over the years, industry encroached on the area, and the site also was used as dump for garbage and human waste. In

addition, vandals have broken open tombs, scattering bones.

Earlier this summer, the JDC helped organize the clean-up program for the section of the cemetery not occupied by the estimated 800 Roma.

Bar Chaim said visits by Belgrade Rabbi Yitzhak Asiel and others had "confirmed for all of us that it would be completely fanciful to think that the Roma settlement was going to be moved out of its part of the cemetery anytime soon."

The JDC channeled \$18,000 from a private donor, Alfred Bader of Milwaukee, for the project.

Roma rights activist Paul Polansky, of the Kosova Roma Refugee Foundation, was enlisted to oversee the project, employing workers from the Roma community living on the site.

Bar Chaim called the clean-up efforts "Herculean."

"Working up to 10 hours a day in the sweltering heat for the past three weeks,

carting out 60 tons of indescribable refuse by wheelbarrow, is no mean task," he said.

The project will continue for another four weeks, during which an additional 60 tons of refuse will be removed, he said.

Last week, Polansky estimated that there are 500 to 600 tombs in the open area now being cleaned. Asiel visited the cemetery last Friday and said the area was the oldest part of the cemetery, with some tombstones now visible dating back 400 years.

All but one of the Jews who lived in Nis before World War II were killed in the Holocaust, and only a few dozen Jews now live in town. Burials were performed at the sprawling cemetery until the beginning of World War II. The cemetery was expropriated by the communist authorities in 1948, and burials were barred in 1965. Many survivors exhumed their dead and re-interred them in Belgrade.

After the tiny Jewish community was revived during the 1990s, however, Ciric made it a mission to press the municipality for action on the cemetery.

She and Davor Salom, of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, met repeatedly with local and government officials. ■

Tensions between Serbian Jews and Gypsies over a cemetery are easing.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Kerry promotes energy independence

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) said he believes energy independence from Middle East oil can aid U.S.-Israel relations. In an Op-Ed piece in Thursday's *Forward* newspaper, the Democratic presidential nominee endorsed Israel's right to build its West Bank security barrier and its plans to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

He also said energy independence is necessary to allow the United States to confront Saudi Arabia and its support for Islamic fundamentalists.

"I want an America that relies on its own ingenuity and innovation and not the Saudi royal family," Kerry wrote. Kerry said he would combat the rise of international anti-Semitism by creating a State Department office to deal with the issue and by increasing U.S. monitoring efforts. Kerry also wrote about stepping up efforts to deal with Iran and Syria, and he said he would work with the United Nations to rebuild Iraq.

Self-heating meals for kosher troops

Self-heating kosher meals now are available for Jewish members of the U.S. armed forces in Iraq.

The meals, shipped by the Jewish Soldier Foundation and New Jersey-based La Briute Meals, come equipped with a salt water-activated, flameless food heater made of magnesium and iron. To contact La Briute Meals, go to www.labriutemeals.com, or www.jewishsoldier.org.

Wake me up when it's over

High Holiday services are boring and not relevant, most respondents to a survey said.

Nearly 70 percent of the 500 people surveyed by the National Jewish Outreach Program also said the cost of High Holiday tickets is too high. Seventy-eight percent of respondents said they usually attend High Holiday services, and 74 percent said they fast and attend synagogue on Yom Kippur.

A special Bar Mitzvah

Chabad is holding what it says is the first group Bar Mitzvah for special-needs children.

On Sept. 2, the Friendship Circle, a Chabad program in which teenage volunteers help physically and mentally retarded children, will hold a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony for five special-needs kids in West Bloomfield, Mich.

Parents of such children often are so overburdened with caring for their children that they are reluctant to undertake the laborious preparation required for a Bar Mitzvah ceremony, Chabad said.

N.Y. synagogue playground defaced

Playground equipment at a Long Island synagogue was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti.

Swastikas and other obscenities were scrawled on the equipment at the playground belonging to Congregation Etz Chaim in Commack, N.Y., the *New York Jewish Week* reported.

MIDDLE EAST

Young Gandhi preaches to Arafat

Gandhi's grandson preached the doctrine of peaceful resistance to Yasser Arafat.

After Thursday's meeting in the Palestinian Authority president's headquarters in Ramallah, Arun Gandhi told reporters that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might be over if the Palestinians had

adopted his grandfather's strategy. "If the Palestinian people rise up and start a nonviolent movement, it will boost world sympathy," Gandhi said. "The nations of the world will rise up and put more pressure on Israel."

Arafat did not speak at the news conference.

Islamic Jihad leader injured

A top Islamic Jihad official was wounded along with three other Palestinians in an explosion at his house in the Gaza Strip. Israeli army officials said they were investigating the cause of the explosion that injured Mohamed Sheik Al-Halili.

Smiling in Zion

Most Israelis are optimistic and happy with their lives, a government poll found.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics survey, 81 percent of Israeli adults are generally happy, a slight dip from last year's finding of 83 percent. In addition, 52 percent of the 7,200 people polled said they expected their lives to improve.

Asked to give reasons for their satisfaction, 95 percent of respondents cited family life; 48 percent cited their income.

Ancient cities found in Israel

Israeli archaeologists uncovered a 5,000-year-old Canaanite city and a 2,000-year-old Jewish village from the Second Temple period. The two sites were unearthed alongside each other near the city of Modi'in in central Israel.

The sites lie on a barren hilltop. The area of the sites was to be converted into an industrial zone, but the finds now will be displayed in an exhibition.

WORLD

Rome mayor vows to fight anti-Semitism

Rome's mayor assured Israel's ambassador in Italy of his commitment to fighting anti-Semitism.

In a letter this week, Walter Veltroni's office assured Ehud Gol that the mayor's determination to confront any expression of anti-Semitism, racism or xenophobia "goes without saying."

Gol had written a personal letter to Veltroni expressing his dismay at anti-Semitic and anti-Israel slogans found scrawled in a Rome park last Friday.

Israeli sports official: Can't punish Iranian

An Israeli Olympic official said sanctions should not be imposed against an Iranian athlete who most believe refused to fight against his Israeli competitor.

Alex Gilady, an International Olympic Committee member from Israel, said it was impossible to punish Arash Miresmaeili because he was officially disqualified last week after he failed a weigh-in before his match with Ehud Vaks.

"We cannot say anything because it didn't happen," Gilady told *The New York Times*.

Most observers believe Iranian officials forced Miresmaeili to fail the weigh-in because the Islamic republic does not accept the existence of the Jewish state.

Gold medalist to carry flag

Israeli gold medalist Gal Fridman will carry the Israeli flag in the closing ceremonies at the Olympic Games.

Fridman's selection for Tuesday's ceremonies came after he became Israel's first-ever gold medalist with his victory in a windsurfing competition.