



IN THE NEWS

Peretz eyes outposts

Israel's defense minister ordered the evacuation of 12 settler outposts.

Amir Peretz signed the evacuation order Wednesday night, effectively renewing the policy, never fully implemented, of his predecessor, Shaul Mofaz.

Under the "road map" peace plan with the Palestinians, Israel is obligated to remove West Bank outposts erected illegally by settlers since March 2001.

Army Radio quoted Peretz as saying he would move against all 124 outposts within the year.

U.S. opposes unilateral steps

The United States opposes unilateral steps in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The declaration, buried in a joint U.S.-Saudi statement, comes just days before Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert arrives in Washington seeking support for his plan to unilaterally withdraw from parts of the West Bank and consolidate Israeli control over some settlement blocs.

The statement summarizing a strategic dialogue Thursday between Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. secretary of state, and Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, said the two "expressed their opposition to any unilateral steps taken by either side in the dispute that may prejudice final status negotiations or undermine progress toward a two-state solution."

Lesbian ceremony in Russia sparks controversy

The Chabad-led Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia called on the community Thursday to boycott Reform Jews after a Reform rabbi officiated at what is believed to be the country's first Jewish same-sex commitment ceremony.

The ceremony for a lesbian couple in Moscow took place April 2, but was publicized only this week by a Moscow newspaper.

WORLD REPORT

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Pool/BP Images

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert during a meeting with visiting mayors in Jerusalem, May 10.

In initial meeting, Olmert and Bush to look at the big picture, not details

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When the photo-ops are over, Ehud Olmert and George Bush will settle down to discuss the big picture.

In a meeting this week with Jewish leaders a week ahead of the Israeli prime minister's arrival, President Bush's national security adviser, Stephen Hadley, kept stressing that "strategy, not tactics" would define the summit, participants said.

It was a sign that the administration is wary of committing itself to nitty-gritty details until it has a better understanding of where Olmert is heading with his "convergence" plan to unilaterally withdraw from much of the West Bank.

At about the same time as Hadley was briefing some 30 Jewish leaders Monday, U.S. Jewish officials touring Israel were warning Olmert and other Israeli officials not to make specific aid requests.

"I would not anticipate" an aid request at this stage, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told JTA from Israel, where he was leading a delegation meeting Israeli leaders. "The purpose of the meeting is to establish a relationship to gain an idea of what the prime minister has in mind."

Bush and Olmert are meeting Tuesday. The next day, Olmert addresses a rare joint

Continued on page 2

FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ *Olmert and Bush will likely stay away from the nitty-gritty details of withdrawal*

Continued from page 1

meeting of Congress.

The cost of Olmert's projected withdrawal from more than 70 settlements and the resettlement of an estimated 60,000 Israelis will be from \$10 billion to \$25 billion, according to reports.

Olmert is unlikely to come to Bush with hand outstretched, but he needs solid commitments for some quid pro quo from the Americans if he is to sell withdrawal to Israelis. The withdrawal last year from the Gaza Strip so far has been followed by the election of the Hamas terrorist group to power in the Palestinian Authority and an intensification of rocket attacks from Gaza. Israelis are likely to be skeptical of further withdrawals, especially from the West Bank, which is much closer to Israeli population centers.

Beyond cash, the Americans could offer Olmert support for his redrawn borders — a recognition of Israeli sovereignty over some settlements that would go beyond the vague "realities on the ground" that Bush cited in his April 14, 2004, letter to Olmert's predecessor, Ariel Sharon.

Dennis Ross, the Clinton administration's top Middle East negotiator and now an analyst with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said that even if Olmert doesn't ask for concessions upfront, he has to make clear his need for U.S. backing further down the line.

Ross counseled Olmert not to ask

Bush for a commitment, but to warn him, "If I don't get enough from you and the international community, it's going to be hard to pull this off."

In any case, the United States is adamantly opposed to directly funding resettlement because it has warned Israel for nearly four decades that settlement was a mistake. However, it's ready to help Israel cushion the blow indirectly.

Last year, Israel asked the United States for between \$1 billion and \$2 billion to develop the Negev and Galilee regions, where many of the 9,000 evacuated Gaza settlers were likely to move

The Bush administration asked Israel to postpone the request in the wake of the devastating hurricane season in the southern U.S. Israel has yet to resubmit the request, but economic hardships for many Americans have only intensified, and asking for a West Bank assistance package 10 times the Gaza amount is seen as unlikely at a time when gasoline is topping \$3 a gallon in the United States.

David Makovksy, a Washington Institute analyst who recently authored an assessment of Olmert's withdrawal plan, said Olmert could suggest "creative burden sharing" with the international community. European nations, for instance, could offer to pay Israel to evacuate settlements and ready them for Palestinian use.

"Without economic support and political backing, the bottom line is, there is no disengagement," he said.

Yet Hadley and his deputy, Elliott Abrams, made clear in their 40-minute meeting with Jewish leaders that now was not the time for details.

Participants said the meeting was perfunctory and more formal than previous meetings, which were held around a conference table. This time, the Jewish leaders were seated in an auditorium and had time only for a few questions after a short lecture by Hadley.

Jewish leaders were especially eager

to elucidate the nuances between the Israeli, administration and congressional views on how to assist the Palestinians while isolating the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority government.

A bill currently under consideration in the U.S. House of Representatives would cut off all assistance to the Palestinian Authority and severely limit humanitarian assistance through non-governmental organizations. The United States has led efforts to isolate the Palestinian Authority since the January election of Hamas, a terrorist group that rejects Israel's existence.

The Bush administration, which so far has kept the bill from reaching the full House, reportedly favors greater flexibility on humanitarian assistance and wants Israel to consider using P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas, a relative moderate who leads Fatah, as a conduit for assistance.

Some Jewish groups in the room, including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, favor the tough House measures; others, including the Israel Policy Forum and the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, favor greater flexibility.

Hadley and Abrams would not be drawn out on details, except to flatly reject a French proposal to pay Palestinian Authority salaries.

Hadley said that the Abbas option was basically Israel's decision.

Three Fatah officials were in Washington last week lobbying for that option, and said Israel should negotiate with Abbas and the Palestine Liberation Organization, which has no Hamas representation.

Hamas would not obstruct such negotiations, said Nabil Amr, a former P.A. Cabinet minister, because it desperately needs the help of the more experienced Fatah leadership.

"Day by day, we see and receive messages from Hamas that they are not able to run modern institutions and society," he said.

Olmert is unlikely to come to Bush with hand outstretched, but he needs solid commitments for some quid pro quo from the Americans if he is to sell withdrawal to Israelis.

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Warren Buffett's Jewish connection

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Warren Buffett is not a Jew, and in fact describes himself as an agnostic.

Still, the billionaire investment guru, who earlier this month made big news when his Berkshire Hathaway corporation bought an 80 percent share in Israeli metalworks conglomerate Iscar for \$4 billion, for years has been making his mark on the U.S. Jewish community back home — though sometimes in a round-about way.

“Proportionally, if you look at the number of Jews in this country and in the world, I’m associated with a hugely disproportionate number,” Buffett, the second richest man in the world, told JTA in a telephone interview Monday. His life, he added, “has been blessed by friendship with many Jews.”

Among the first companies Buffett acquired after launching Berkshire Hathaway, the Omaha-based investment and insurance giant, was The Sun Newspapers of Omaha, then owned by Stan Lipsey, one-time chairman of The Jewish Press, Omaha’s Jewish newspaper.

“At the time, the Omaha Club did not take Jewish members, and the Highland Country Club, a golf club, didn’t have any gentile members,” Lipsey recalls. “Warren volunteered to join the Highland” — rather than the gentile club — “to set an example of non-discrimination.”

Buffett happily recalls the fallout from his application.

“It created this big rhubarb,” he says. “All of the rabbis appeared on my behalf, the ADL guy appeared on my behalf. Finally they voted to let me in.”

But that wasn’t the end of the story, Buffett tells JTA. The Highland had a rule requiring members to donate a certain amount of money to their synagogues. Buffett, of course, wasn’t a synagogue member, so the club changed its policy: Members now would be expected to give to their synagogues, temples or churches.

But that still didn’t quite work, Buffett recalls with a laugh, because of his agnosticism.

In the end, the rule was amended to ask simply that members make some sort of charitable donation, and the path to Buffett’s membership was clear.

“He’s an incredible guy,” says Lipsey, today the publisher of the Buffalo News. In 1973, The Sun won a Pulitzer prize in Local Investigative Specialized Reporting for an expose on financial impropriety at Boys Town, Nebraska, a center founded in 1917 to aid abused, abandoned, neglected, handicapped or otherwise troubled children.

“Warren came up with the key source for us knowing what was going on out there,” Lipsey says.

Buffett himself researched Boys Town’s stocks to bolster the story, Lipsey adds.

In the 1960s, Omaha Rabbi Myer Kripke decided to invest in his friend Buffett’s new business venture. Their wives had become friendly, he says, and the four-some enjoyed playing the occasional game of bridge together.

“My wife had no card sense and I was certainly no competition to Warren, who is a very good bridge player and a lover of the game,” Kripke, rabbi emeritus of Omaha’s Conservative Beth El Synagogue, told JTA. “He’s very bright and very personable and very decent. He is a rich man who is as clean as can be.”

Kripke bought a few shares in Berkshire Hathaway and quickly sold them, doubling his money, he says.

Recognizing a good thing when he saw it, he bought a bunch more shares in his friend’s company, shares that by the 1990s had made Kripke — who says he never earned more than \$30,000 a year as a rabbi — a millionaire.

In 1996, flush from their prescient investment with Buffett’s company, Kripke and his wife, Dorothy decided to make a major gift to JTS — \$7 million in cash to restore the building’s damaged tower, and a deferred gift of some \$8 million, which the seminary will receive after Kripke passes away.

Asked if Kripke credits Buffett with his financial success, he doesn’t hesitate.

“Entirely, yes,” he says. “I never had much of an income.”

The Israeli government stands to reap

about \$1 billion in taxes on Buffett’s purchase of Iscar. Shortly after announcing the deal, Buffett says he was surprised to learn that a Berkshire subsidiary, CTB International, was purchasing a controlling interest in another Israeli company, AgroLogic.

In Israel — which Buffett plans to visit in the fall — the hope is that the deals will have longer legs: Buffett himself has not ruled out future purchases there and, considering his status as a leading investor, observers say others may take a look at Israeli companies now that Buffett has done so.

“You won’t find in the world a better-run operation than Iscar,” Buffett says. “I don’t think it’s an accident that it’s run by Israelis.”

The Sun newspaper group was not Buffett’s only early purchase of a Jewish-owned company. In 1983, sealing the deal with a handshake, Buffett bought 90 percent of the Nebraska Furniture Mart from Rose Blumkin, a Russian-born Jew who moved to the United States in 1917.

“He has many friends in the Jewish community,” says Forrest Krutter, secretary of Berkshire Hathaway and a former president of the Jewish Federation of Omaha.

Buffett’s former son-in-law, Allen Greenberg, is a Jew, and now runs the Buffett Foundation, much of whose work has dealt with reproductive rights and family-planning issues.

Buffett himself counts the late Nebraska businessman Howard “Micky” Newman and philanthropist Jack Skirball as among his “very closest friends.”

Further, Buffett says his “hero and the man who made me an investment success” was Ben Graham. Graham, along with Newman’s father, Jerry, ran a New York fund called Graham-Newman Corp.

“After besieging Ben for the three years after I received my degree from Columbia, Ben and Jerry finally hired me,” Buffett says. “I was the first gentile ever employed by the firm — including secretaries — in its 18 years of existence. My first son bears the middle name Graham after Ben.”

Buffett “is very much honored in the Jewish community,” Kripke says.

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

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Warren Buffett

Communal Polish restitution drags on

By DINAH SPRITZER

WARSAW (JTA) — Monika Krawczyk has been haggling for several years with the municipal government of Brzeziny in central Poland. The town council, she says, includes several members who grew up next to a synagogue that they now pretend never existed.

"They tell me to show them more papers that the synagogue was there, even though as children they played right next to it," said Krawczyk, a lawyer and CEO of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. She has been trying to wrest the synagogue plot from Brzeziny on the foundation's behalf.

The case of Brzeziny illustrates how difficult it is to reclaim properties that belonged to the communal organizations in Poland before World War II.

More than half the population of the nearly 12,000-person town was Jewish in 1939. Brzeziny's Jews were nearly all exterminated by the Nazis, but — as in other Polish cities and towns — there is land there, if not actual buildings, that once belonged to the Jewish community.

"It's a complex matter of ownership rights. The disputed plot is owned by someone else now," Iwona Urban, a lawyer for the municipality, told JTA. "We tried to agree on a compensation package with the foundation but it didn't work, so the court will decide."

Years could pass before a decision is handed down.

Krawczyk's struggle — fruitless meetings with municipal officials, bottomless paperwork and even encounters with anti-Semitic graffiti — is part of a wider attempt to deal with some 5,000 claims that have been filed since 1997, when the Polish government agreed to a process that would allow for the restitution of Jewish communal property.

Most claims are for former synagogue plots, hospitals and even orphanages that are now parking lots, police stations and parks in small towns across Poland.

Only 16 percent of the 5,000 claims have been reviewed by the government panel on Jewish communal restitution. Of those, 456 were judged to have merit, in which case restitution must be made or compensation must be paid based on the value of the property right after World War II.



Dinah A. Spritzer/JTA

Monika Krawczyk, a lawyer and CEO of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage, points to a wall of former synagogues and Jewish cemeteries that the foundation is trying to reclaim, March 2006 in her Warsaw offices.

"At the rate things are going, the claims will not be solved for 30 years," Krawczyk said.

The slow pace could have a devastating effect on restoration of the country's monuments and 1,300 cemeteries, she added, since that is how the foundation, which has jurisdiction over restitution on 60 percent of Polish territory, uses the restitution money.

The Union of Religious Jewish Communities and its local branches oversee restituted property in the other 40 percent of the country.

Rough estimates have put the current value of communal Jewish property at \$30 million to \$50 million, according to Andrzej Zozula, the union's executive director.

At an April meeting with the Interior Ministry, government officials agreed that the pace of return was unacceptable. They decided to replace the six-member commission responsible for judging restitution claims and said the easiest cases should be given priority.

Krawczyk said both changes should greatly increase the speed at which cases are decided.

But she said municipal authorities re-

main reluctant to return Jewish property.

"It's really hard to understand the mentality of a place like this," she said of Brzeziny, where the synagogue was destroyed by the Communist regime in 1957.

"There were no Jews left, so the Communists also took the sand from the Jewish cemetery and made a sand mine, and then used the sand, mixed in with bones, to build pre-fabricated housing for the town's residents," she claimed.

In the wake of this history, Krawczyk said she found it depressing that town authorities keep asking her for additional documents for the synagogue — which is

mentioned in the town's Web site — even though she says she has found evidence of its registration in the relevant property office.

Last October, a plaque commemorating the rabbi's house, across from

the former synagogue, was destroyed. Anti-Semitic graffiti, which the city still hasn't cleaned up, was scrawled in its place.

Krawczyk said she's running out of patience.

"I worry that when we finally do get properties back and can make money off of them, it will be too late, because the buildings or headstones are falling apart in front of our eyes," she said.

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

'At the rate things are going, the claims will not be solved for 30 years.'

Monika Krawczyk

Lawyer and CEO, Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage

European Jews work on urban renewal

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

WARSAW (JTA) — A dilapidated building that once formed part of Warsaw's Jewish hospital. A tree-shaded playground next to a former Jewish orphanage. A prewar Jewish community center, used for decades as a chemistry lab in the central Polish city of Lodz. A derelict villa in downtown Bucharest. Dozens of abandoned synagogues and Jewish cemeteries.

For more than a decade, Jewish communities in Eastern and Central Europe have fought hard to win restitution of Jewish communal property that was seized by the Nazis and then by postwar Communist regimes.

Most post-Communist states have implemented some sort of legislation governing the return of such property.

Though the battle for restitution is far from over, the headaches of fighting to win back property increasingly are compounded by the headaches of what to do with it once it's returned.

"Property management is not a continuation of the reclamation process, it's a different skill," said Jerry Spitzer, a board member of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. "The moment you get a property back, it's a liability. The question is how to take that liability and turn it into an asset."

Many, if not most, restituted properties are rundown. Some have tenants paying minuscule rents. Others are open plots of land that can be developed only with high-end investment. Some, particularly synagogues, are on monument preservation lists that impose limits on how they can be altered.

"Real-estate operators would never want the portfolio that we have," said Spitzer, who chairs the JDC's property reclamation committee and co-chaired a JDC board mission last month to Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. One of the mission's aims was to tour properties and assess potential.

"We have apartments, raw land, synagogues, cemeteries," Spitzer said. "If we took all the cemeteries and synagogues that have been returned and just tried to maintain them, all the income from all the properties couldn't do it."

Finding money to renovate and develop, or even just to pay property taxes, is a major challenge. So is making strategy decisions:

Does it make more sense to sell off property for a quick cash infusion, to renovate, or tear down and rebuild?

Other questions concern who will benefit from the income. In Poland, for example, the official Jewish community, which is Orthodox, is the only legal beneficiary of restituted communal property, yet it's just one of a number of sometimes fractious Jewish organizations in the country.

The Jewish population is notoriously hard to estimate in Poland. In Warsaw, the Orthodox community has about 500 members, whereas some 2,000 people with some sort of connection to Jewish life are believed to live in the area.

Discrepancies like this have led to criticism that property income is not benefitting the broader Jewish population. Critics also have questioned the management policy for restituted synagogues and other heritage sites.

Spitzer said that restitution entailed responsibility to all Jews.

"I believe that we're in a historical moment in Jewish history in this area," he said. "The properties are being returned to the remnant Jewish population; they are the guardians, the trustees of our Jewish history. We'll be judged by what we do with them. Squandering them would be taking property that is an asset and not using it to help Jewish community life."

To help Jewish communities hone their skills, JDC has run a half-dozen property management seminars in several countries and recently appointed a region-wide property management coordinator, based in Budapest. Jewish communities in several countries have hired their own property managers.

JDC also set up a Strategic European Loan Fund to provide interest-free loans to Jewish communities to enable them to develop restituted property and channel funds back into the community. To date, JDC has approved a dozen SELF loans, totaling more than \$700,000.

One \$40,000 loan, to be repaid in 2009, enabled renovation of the heating system of a century-old brick building in Warsaw that before World War II had housed a Jewish school and other community institutions,

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD



Carolyn Slutsky

A former Jewish home in Krakow, Poland, that was finally reclaimed by the family after a lengthy court battle.

including a mikvah, or ritual bath. The building was restituted after a four-year legal battle, but remains encumbered with three apartments occupied by sitting tenants.

Thanks to the new heating system, Jewish community property manager Piotr Rytko-Zandberg said, the community was able to rent the main part of the building to a private school, which will renovate the facility. "The agreement with the school may not be the best financial solution, but the school is a

good and solid partner and is also willing to provide six full scholarships a year for students from the Jewish community," he said.

In Sofia, Bulgaria, the community used a \$128,000 SELF loan, to be repaid by May 2011, to help turn a former Jewish orphanage located across from the city's grand domed synagogue into a site that will be shared by a new Jewish community center, income-earning shops and office rental space.

The community hosted the JDC mission at a party last month to dedicate the new JCC, which still had not been furnished.

"We have finished the easiest job, building the walls of this building," said Emil Kalo, president of Sofia's Jewish community. "Before us is something more difficult: implicating the Jewish soul in these walls." ■

Can restituted properties be turned into assets?

American victim of terror attack buried



Avi Frier/Florida Jewish News

Students at the David Posnack Hebrew Day School in Plantation, Fla., tearfully remember schoolmate Daniel Wultz on May 15, 2006, who died in a Tel Aviv hospital May 14 from wounds suffered in the April 17 Tel Aviv Palestinian suicide attack.

By **DAVID MORRIS**
Florida Jewish News

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. (JTA) — More than 700 people gathered in Florida this week to remember Daniel Wultz, a teenager who died Sunday in an Israeli hospital as a result of wounds suffered in the April 17 suicide bombing attack in Tel Aviv.

After a memorial service in Jerusalem on Monday, his family accompanied his body to Florida for the funeral.

At the funeral, Rabbi Yisroel Spalter called upon Daniel's family and friends to celebrate his life, and to remember him and his ideals.

"Those who sow with sorrow will reap with joy," the rabbi quoted from the book of Psalms. "I'm not looking for joy, there's no silver lining. But the lesson here is that Daniel's was a life worth celebrating."

One of Daniel's closest friends, Solomon Braun, spoke of his depth of character, sensitivity and special kind of stubbornness.

"Daniel's stubbornness came out of his demand for righteousness," Braun said. "Rabbi Spalter told me that the way he was always asking questions, always desiring to do the right thing, it was Daniel who made him really feel like a rabbi. On Shabbos, Daniel didn't think it was enough to wish

people a 'Good Shabbos,' so he changed it to, 'Great Shabbos.'"

Daniel's grandmother, Margie Cantor, asked, "How can one moment in time change an entire family and a community, and in one second raise awareness all over the world? How can one crazy moment in time exist in a place like Israel where they live to celebrate life and their demented neighbors live to celebrate terror and death? Go now, Daniel, and help God to right the wrongs on this earth."

Daniel's burial coincided with the Jewish observance of Lag B'Omer, and Spalter compared Daniel to the second-century kabbalist Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who died on Lag B'Omer, and to the students of Rabbi Akiva, a first-century scholar.

Thousands of Rabbi Akiva's students died in a plague that ended on Lag B'Omer. "Like them," said Spalter, "Daniel stood before God and died sanctifying his great name."

At one moment in her eulogy the boy's older sister, Amanda, asked those gathered to recite "Shema Yisrael" with her.

"My brother's favorite question was, 'Why?' Now we are left to ask, 'Why?' My only answer is that God always wants his angels back. It would be so easy for me to pity myself and my parents because of the way Daniel died, but I must find a way to be satisfied for the time he was with us. I will always be with you, Daniel, and love you with all my broken heart."

Sheryl Wultz, Daniel's mother, told of how he became more observant in his Judaism during the last year and a half and of his deep love for Israel.

"My son had a smile to match his heart. There's nothing he wouldn't do for his family and friends and he acted regardless of personal consequences for himself. In his short life he taught me so much and I was blessed to have him," she said.

Tuly Wultz, the boy's father, was born in Israel. He was eating with Daniel at a falafel stand in Tel Aviv when the bomber struck and immediately saw the severity of his son's injuries, which eventually made him the 11th victim of the Palestinian suicide bomber.

"Of the many talks we had about Judaism, I remember the most interesting being about the coming of Moshiach. Daniel truly believed and would ask me, 'Will I see Moshiach before I die?' Daniel, you can't imagine how much I was hoping you were right about Moshiach and that he would appear and rescue you. It is so hard to say goodbye."

A moment of silence was held in Daniel's memory before Game 5 of the Miami-New Jersey NBA playoff game Tuesday night.

At a memorial service at Daniel's school on Monday, classmates who have been wearing handmade blue and white beaded bracelets as a reminder to keep Daniel in their prayers, ended the assembly by cutting off their bracelets and placing them in a box to

present to Daniel's family.

"We said we would not take these off until Daniel comes home again," said the 10th-grade class president, Sarah Azizi, "but now we must and everyone is crying."

Holding back her tears, Azizi addressed the several

hundred students and teachers, describing Daniel as someone who wanted to get his message of making a better world to everyone he met.

"We all knew Daniel — his permanent smile, his love of basketball and above all his love and devotion to Torah studies and God. He has connected to each and every one of us with his faith, his hope and his acts of loving kindness," Azizi said. "He wanted to be heard and share his passion for Judaism and Israel. How ironic that Daniel's tragic ending will have been heard worldwide and that he has touched the hearts and souls of so many. Please, in Daniel's memory don't ever have regrets."

One fellow student, Frima Enghelberg, who recalled how she often asked Daniel for help in math class, shared part of a letter she wrote to him before placing it under a yearzeit candle.

"Now everyone in heaven is more happy cause you're there. You're illuminating the sky now and I hope you can illuminate my brain with math. I will miss you until we meet again one day."

'My brother's favorite question was, 'Why?' Now we are left to ask, 'Why?'
Amanda Wultz

ARTS & CULTURE

Montreal honors Jewish sportsmen

By BRAM EISENTHAL

MONTREAL (JTA) — The guest list at this year's induction ceremony for the Montreal Jewish Sports Hall of Fame read like a who's who of greats from the National Hockey League's Montreal Canadiens.

Jean Beliveau, the team's legendary former captain; Guy Lafleur, who brought fans around the NHL to their feet as he scored for the Canadiens' Stanley Cup-winning teams of the 1970s; and Elmer Lach, who teamed with the famed Maurice "Rocket" Richard in the 1950s, were on hand as recipients of the Hart Trophy, awarded to the NHL's most valuable player.

So was Rejean Houle, a one-time player who was the Canadiens' general manager in the 1990s, and Ronald Corey, a former team president who was honorary chairman of the event.

They all turned out last week as the Montreal's YM-YWHA inducted the late Cecil Hart, who coached the Canadiens in the early 1930s, into the Alex Dworkin Montreal Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.

In addition to Hart, whose name is on the MVP trophy, several others were inducted into the hall. They were Joe and Ben Weider, brothers who founded a bodybuilding dynasty; David Kaplan, who earned a national reputation as a goalkeeper with the Montreal Hakoah soccer team from 1948-1955; and the 1949-1950 Y Blues basketball team, which won a Canadian title.

The actual Hart Trophy was on display, loaned by the Toronto-based Hockey Hall of Fame for the evening. A crowd was on hand to mingle with the celebrities, get autographs and take pictures.

Afterward, the celebrants moved to the auditorium for the induction ceremonies.

The Weider brothers were honored first, and it was noted that they started lifting weights as boys when they needed to bulk up to protect themselves from bullies in their poor Montreal neighborhood. A 10-minute clip was shown from the documentary "Men of Iron," detailing the brothers' meteoric rise as innovators in the bodybuilding field. ■

Brandeis sticks by Kushner award

By NICOLA BRODIE

BOSTON (JTA) — Despite mixed feelings in and outside the college community, Brandeis University is standing by a decision to give Tony Kushner, a Jewish playwright who is fiercely critical of Israel, an honorary doctorate at its upcoming commencement.

The decision to honor Kushner, a Pulitzer Prize winner known most recently for his screenplay for Steven Spielberg's "Munich," has been blasted by groups like the Zionist Organization of America.

Kushner, who is Jewish, has called the founding of the State of Israel a "mistake," has accused Israel of carrying out ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and told reporters "it would have been better if Israel never happened."

Some in the Jewish community found Kushner's script for "Munich" subtly hostile to Israel and overly sympathetic to Palestinian terrorists, and accused him of drawing moral equivalence between the terrorists who killed Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games and the Israeli hit squad that tracked down and assassinated the killers.

Morton Klein, president of the ZOA, has implored Brandeis' president and board of trustees to reconsider the award to Kushner, to be given at the Sunday's graduation.

"Would Justice Louis Brandeis be anything but revolted by your honoring Tony Kushner?" Klein asked in a letter to university officials. Louis Brandeis, for whom the heavily Jewish university is named, was a giant of early American Zionism.

University spokesman Dennis Nealon said Kushner is being honored "based on the fact that he is a leading playwright of this generation and a giant in his field."

The board was unaware of Kushner's anti-Israel statements during the decision-making process, Nealon said, but added that "politics was never on the table in this discussion."

Kushner defended his stance in a letter to Brandeis President Jehuda Reinharz.

"I am a proud Jew, a Jewish-American

man, and my opinions about Israel are characterized by a serious ambivalence," he wrote. "But ambivalence, doubt, confession of uncertainty, confusion even are all things that thoughtful people experience when confronting terribly tangled political situations."

Responses to the Kushner award have been mixed on campus.

Jonathan Sarna, a professor of Near Eastern and Judaic studies, said he felt it "strange for a university named for Louis

Brandeis to honor someone so opposed to his life work."

However, once the invitation was extended, it shouldn't be rescinded, Sarna said.

"Taking away the degree is a more serious step than most in the university would like to take," he said.

A May 2 editorial in *The Justice*, the school's independent student newspaper, applauded the decision to honor Kushner, saying it showed the university leading the American Jewish community in "reaching out to those with different points of view."

Kushner is not the only name fomenting controversy at this

year's commencement. Brandeis also has been criticized for inviting Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan to give the keynote address and receive an honorary doctorate.

A university news release calls the prince "a leading international advocate of interfaith dialogue and understanding," but the decision has been controversial on campus, despite the fact that Jordan made peace with Israel in 1994.

A May 2 column described the prince as "inextricably involved in the Jordanian government's questionable human rights record and suppression of political opponents."

"Brandeis would be well-advised to reverse its decision to welcome Prince Hassan as a commencement speaker. For a university founded upon the principles of justice and tolerance, this choice is odd at best and offensive at worst," Justice columnist Joe Farbeann wrote. ■

JTA Staff Writer Rachel Silverman in New York contributed to this report.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

'Would Justice Louis Brandeis be anything but revolted by your honoring Tony Kushner?'

Morton Klein
President, ZOA

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Senate committee approves marriage amendment

Jewish groups are split on a constitutional marriage amendment approved by the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee.

The amendment would define marriage as "the union of a man and a woman." A number of Jewish groups, including the National Council of Jewish Women and the Reform movement, have mobilized against the amendment, which is likely to reach the full Senate next month but is unlikely to get the required two-thirds majority. Orthodox groups, including the Orthodox Union and Agudath Israel of America, back it.

Senators on the committee approved the measure Thursday along party lines, 10-8. Jewish Democrats voting against include Dianne Feinstein of California; Herb Kohl of Wisconsin; Russell Feingold of Wisconsin; and Charles Schumer of New York.

Committee chairman Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), who also is Jewish, opposes the amendment but is committed to allowing Republican initiatives to reach the floor. He and Feingold exchanged tense words during the session, and Feingold stormed out early.

Hecht, Nevada senator, dies

Chic Hecht, a Jewish Republican senator from Nevada in the 1980s, died Monday in Las Vegas at age 77.

Hecht, who was born Mayer Jacob Hecht, won an upset victory in 1982 against Sen. Howard Cannon and served one term before losing a close re-election race in 1988.

He subsequently served as ambassador to the Bahamas. A clothing store owner, Hecht was a strong backer of Israel and was well-regarded among Republicans for successfully taking on Democrats in their strongholds.

He also was known for his malapropisms, once referring to the nuclear waste repository in Nevada as a "nuclear suppository."

Group opposes anti-Olmert protests

The Orthodox Union objected to any pro-settler protest against Ehud Olmert during the Israeli prime minister's visit to Washington.

A group called Manhigut Yehudit is planning a rally Tuesday outside the Capitol Building to protest Olmert's plans for additional withdrawals from the West Bank.

The Orthodox Union defended settler protesters in Israel during last year's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, but said the Washington protest would be inappropriate.

"This visit is a critical opportunity to obtain for Israel the support she needs from the United States in an otherwise unsympathetic world," the organization said in a statement released Thursday.

Peaceniks pray outside White House

Several hundred people offered a prayer for peace Thursday outside the White House under the leadership of Rabbi Michael Lerner.

Lerner's Tikkun movement is leading a multifaith "Spiritual Activism Conference" in Washington. The activists prayed for an end to the Iraq war.

Holocaust museum starts genocide blog

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum launched a blog on preventing genocide. The museum has taken the lead in activism against massacres taking place in Darfur, Sudan.

Jerry Fowler, staff director for the museum's Committee on Conscience, will direct the online journal launched this week.

The "Voices on Genocide Prevention" blog, at www.ushmm.org/ conscience, will feature interviews with human rights experts, journalists, advocates and government officials.

Jewish 'Idol' no more

Jewish contestant Elliott Yamin was voted off "American Idol." Yamin, one of three finalists on the televised talent show, lost by two-tenths of a percentage point Wednesday night.

The Jewish community of Richmond, Va., had rallied around Yamin, its hometown star.

Yamin is 90 percent deaf in one ear and has diabetes.

MIDDLE EAST

Rabbi dogged by sex scandal

A U.S.-born rabbi was forced to resign from an Israeli synagogue following allegations of sexual misconduct.

Rabbi Mordechai Gafni had stepped down from the Bayit Hadash center in Jaffa after several female congregants filed police complaints against him, alleging that he had abused his position by seducing them.

According to the report, Gafni, who is back in the United States, admitted his guilt and apologized.

In his apology, he said he would seek treatment for his "sickness."

Gafni, whose original name was Marc Winiarz, is a charismatic leader of the Jewish renewal movement.

He had been dogged by sexual abuse allegations in previous posts as well.

Olmert talks tough on crime

Ehud Olmert declared war on organized crime and political corruption in Israel.

"Organized crime has reached an unprecedented scale, and my government will not accept it," the Israeli prime minister said in a policy speech Wednesday.

"We will fight crime with the same determination with which we fight terror."

Olmert, who was implicated but cleared in a funding scandal that dogged his predecessor Ariel Sharon, also said law-enforcement agencies would not spare politicians suspected of wrongdoing.

"We will take on all criminals, whether close to those in power or not, whether Jews or gentiles, whether rich or poor." Israelis increasingly cite crime, rather than Palestinian terrorism, as their top fear.

Abbas-Livni meeting seen

An aide to Mahmoud Abbas said the Palestinian Authority president would meet Israel's foreign minister this weekend.

Saeb Erekat said Thursday that Abbas and Tzipi Livni would hold talks on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Sharm el-Sheik. Israel's Foreign Ministry said there was no firm commitment yet on the meeting, expected Sunday.

Israel largely has shunned Abbas since Hamas took over the P.A. government, saying there is no point in bilateral talks.

But Israeli sources have reported growing pressure on the Olmert government to see Abbas, a relative moderate, as a means of circumventing the Islamist terrorist group and reviving peace efforts.

Former Israeli envoy to Germany dies

Yochanan Meroz, Israel's second ambassador to West Germany, died recently at 86.

Meroz died in late April, the European Jewish Press reported. Born in Berlin, Meroz was appointed to Bonn in 1974, less than a decade after Israel and West Germany forged diplomatic relations and two years after the Munich Olympics massacre.

During his tenure, he fought to change Germany's statute of limitations on murder, a law he felt benefited aging Nazis.