Ramat Negev Newsletter #19

April 2008

Shalom to all our friends.

In Newsletter #19, you'll read all about:

- Special events | Ecological Purim Parade (Adloyada)
- Ramat Negev's website | now in English
- A new campaign to promote tourism to Ramat Negev attractions
- The German Chancellor at Sde Boker
- Youth Mission to Poland
- Students from Colorado are committed to Israel's environment
- Ramat Negev acts for the benefit of children from Otef Aza (the Gaza outskirts communities)
- Preparing ourselves for security emergencies and hoping for the best
- Guests from Denver and Boulder

Ecological Purim Parade

Thousands of visitors from all around Israel took part in the traditional Purim Parade, which took place at Midreshet Ben-Gurion.

Like they do every year, the students of the High School for Environmental Education at Midreshet Ben-Gurion prepared a spectacular, multicolored parade displaying floats and costumes composed completely of recycled materials (scrap metal, bottles, newspapers, etc.).

Ramat Negev's Website | now in an English version too

Congratulations! Mazal Tov! The Ramat Negev Regional Council has launched its website in English!
You are cordially invited to surf to your hearts' delight and, of course, to contact us with any question or query: http://ramat-negev.org.il/en/

An Internet campaign has been launched to promote Ramat Negev tourism. The tourism department of the Ramat Negev Regional Council, together with tourism-promoting websites throughout the region, is launching a marketing campaign to increase the demand and awareness of tourism in Ramat Negev. The public campaign, which will be advertised on leading websites in Israel all year long, is expected to contribute significantly to attracting larger numbers of visitors to our region:
http://62.90.118.131/Content/clients/negev/minisite/790x500_2.html

A Special Visitor in Ramat Negev

German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Kibbutz Sde Boker, escorted by Israel's president, Shimon Peres. She was warmly received by Mayor Shmulik Rifman and the members of the kibbutz, who were surprised by the chancellor's desire to know more and more facts about kibbutz life and gladly answered all her questions. "It was a very exciting moment and the interest she showed was remarkable," said Mayor Rifman.
During the meeting Mrs. Merkel explained, "The relations between Israel and Germany are not to be taken for granted; yet due to the warm sentiments between the people of both nations a strong friendship exists. We know of the threats against Israel during her 60 years of existence and we want to contribute to bringing a solution to the conflict and establishing two states for two peoples."

In the photograph:
The German chancellor, the President of Israel, Shmulik Rifman and Michael, a member of Sde Boker on a path in the kibbutz

Ramat Negev Youth Mission to Poland

Last month a Ramat Negev youth delegation departed for a "roots journey" to Poland. 34 teens from the region took part in the trip, during which they visited extermination camps in the cities and small towns where Jews had lived before the Holocaust and from which they were deported to the camps.

This year, as in years past, the teens devoted half a day to an encounter with Polish youth from the city of Plonsk, where David Ben-Gurion was born. Due to this common denominator, Ramat Negev and Plonsk decided to sign a "twin towns" agreement several years ago.

During the visit the Ramat Negev teens, together with their Polish peers, heard the testimony of a resident of Plonsk who, as a young boy during WWII, vividly remembers living alongside the town's Jews and, of course, recalls their fateful deportation from Plonsk to Treblinka.

Both groups conducted ceremonies in Plonsk, one in the yard of the house where Ben-Gurion was born. There they read some of his writings about Zionism and settlement in the Negev. The second ceremony was held in the Jewish cemetery, which had been destroyed. Today a new tombstone is standing, built by the present mayor in memory of the Jews of Plonsk who were murdered during the Holocaust.

Birthright Mission from Colorado cleaned up Hamachtesh Hagadol (the Big Crater)

On January 2nd, 2008 a Hillel delegation from universities in Colorado traveled to Hamachtesh Hagadol and helped clean it up. The Big Crater was recently declared a nature reserve as part of the "Crater Lands" project, the majority of which falls in the jurisdiction of the Ramat Negev Regional Council. The declaration marked the end of a long process in which the regional council, together with the Nature & Parks Authority, pushed the relevant authorities to turn the Big Crater into a nature reserve, adding it to the 1.5 million acres already defined as such.

Ramat Negev Aids the Children of "Otef Aza" (the Gaza outskirts settlements)

Due to the untenable security situation in the outskirts of Gaza, the youth department of the Ramat Negev Regional Council decided to "adopt" the children of the Eshkol Regional Council and to host them in our region.

"Thank you very much, once again. You have no idea how overjoyed the kids and their parents were about the visit." These words were written by the Eshkol region's education coordinators to Eyal Mor-Yosef, youth coordinator of Ramat Negev. After weeks of suffering daily bombardments of kassam rockets, the Eshkol kids were invited for a day of fun and relaxation in Ramat Negev.

Following severe aggravation of the security threats to the Otef Aza settlements, with the Eshkol region's elementary school coming within range of the missiles (one fell near the school library), the Ramat Negev Community Center's children and youth department volunteered to help them. Eyal Mor-Yosef contacted his counterparts at the Eshkol Regional Council, and within a very short time, communities from the two regions were paired up, with Ramat Negev residents offering to help in any and every way possible. The visiting children, who are not allowed to play outdoors any time they feel like it, were able to do so freely and happily in Ramat Hanegev. Wonderful ties were forged between people of the two regions.

At first, contacts were mediated by the Council's youth department, but today the relationships take place directly between the community pairs, and home hospitality in Ramat Negev is initiated independently by each one. For example, the children of Kfar Aza have already been hosted twice by Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh, and the youngsters of Re'im have ongoing ties with Kibbutz Revivim. The hospitality costs are covered by the hosting community, while the youth department lends support by providing ideas for many varied and enjoyable activities.

Preparing Ourselves for Emergency Security Situations

In recent days the government of Israel operated a nationwide exercise simulating a home front emergency involving civilians. The Ramat Negev Regional Council, which mobilized for this exercise, operated all its emergency teams, departments and services. The exercise was a success and earned the Council high marks from the newly established National Emergency Authority, which is responsible for coordinating all aspects of home front security.

From Denver and Boulder with Love

A group of families from Boulder, headed by Bruce Shaffer, visited in Ramat Negev and stayed with us for five days which featured tours of the region, bicycle trail riding, a visit to a Bedouin tent, a spa, a winery, a trip to Nitzana, Sderot and the Otef Aza (Gaza outskirts) communities.

The group included: *Bruce and Julie Shaffer & Maya, Deborah and Jeffrey, Kate, Leo, Skovro Chery, David, Lauren, Ethan Fellows Lewis Elitise Homer, Iopa Wolman Bruc , Ruth Timothy, Chad Henderson, Bruce Rhonda Aaron, Michele Wildman, Marco Better & Martin, Ellen Taxman & Hannah.*

We also enjoyed the visit of *Mark & Laurie Van Grack* and their daughter *Austin*. Adam Sela from Midreshet Ben-Gurion prepared their visit which included jeep trips and visits at various attractions and ended with a dinner prepared by gourmet chef (and sometimes mayor) Shmulik Rifman at Adam Sela's home

Jane & Stantin Rosenbaum held a brief visit in Ramat Negev, where they visited the Carmei Ovdat family farm, the Desert Agricultural Research & Development Center, the Ayalim student village, Ben-Gurion's tomb and finished off their visit with dinner at the home of Shmulik Rifman, who prepared all the fine cuisine, of course…

Mayor Shmuel Rifman and the entire Ramat Negev community wish you and your loved ones a happy and kosher Passover.

For any comment feel free to contact Adva Lloyd, regional council spokesperson, at: adva@rng.org.il