

## Ramat Negev Newsletter #24

**March 2009**

Dear Friends of Ramat Negev,

**H**ere is some of the latest news from Ramat Negev.

### **New Cycling Trails in Pitchat Nitzana**

In the framework of the Tourism Department's multi-annual plan for promoting and developing bicycle-tourism, marking has begun of some amazing trails in the vicinity of Pitchat Nitzana and Ezuz. This is part of roughly 160 miles of trail marking that will turn Ramat Hanegev into a cyclists' paradise.

This year's trail-marking is a continuation of last year's activity in the Halukim mountain range area. The bicycle trail-marking and sign-posting in this area will make Pitchat Nitzana more familiar to visitors and will help to promote other local service providers, as well.



The public is cordially invited to come to form your own impressions of the finished trails.

At this stage, please coordinate your visit with Tiyulei Be'erotayim or the Geofun Company. At a later date, a map will be published for the benefit of local residents and visitors alike.



## **"Green" house, built on ecological principles and technologies, at Ashalim in Ramat Hanegev**

The environmentally friendly "green" house, of approximately 1245 square feet, includes a kitchen, living room and 4 bedrooms on a lot of roughly 1/8<sup>th</sup> of an acre. During planning and construction, emphasis was placed on ecologically sound principles and utilizing advanced technologies. The house was built from locally produced earthen bricks and thermal plaster, creating optimal

insulation; apertures in the ceiling and high windows facilitate maximal natural lighting; a water recycling system allows for economical re-use and conservation; a photo-voltage installation at a cost of 95,000 NIS, will be installed courtesy of the "Sunday for Solar Energy Co.", facilitating independent electricity production by means of solar energy at a volume of KPS5 and the possibility of selling any surplus.

The cost of the "green" house, including constructing and equipping it, comes to approximately 800,000 NIS (roughly \$200,000).

The "green" house in the community of Ashalim was built by the regional council with donations from "Exodus Nord" a non-profit organization from Norway which supports development in Ramat Hanegev.

Exodus Nord has allocated grants so far that have financed the construction of eight homes in Ashalim. These have been sold to new immigrants and families, in order to augment and strengthen the Ashalim community.

The house, which was built by Zohar and Oren Epstein from "Ayalei Hanegev Co.", will serve as a model home to be shown to prospective donors and new immigrants.



---

### **Vice-Governor of the Bank of Israel, Professor Zvi Eckstein, Visits Ramat Negev**

Prof. Zvi Eckstein, the vice-governor of the Bank of Israel, came to visit Ramat Hanegev in order to examine the issue of foreign laborers from up close.

The Bank of Israel has set up a committee headed by Prof. Eckstein for a broader examination of the matter. Partners in the committee include representatives from the Ministries of Justice, Agriculture and the Treasury.

The committee has been discussing the foreign labor report for several months. On behalf of the Ramat Negev Regional Council, the matter is being overseen by Mayor Shmuel Rifman and Yankele Moskovitch, Chairman of the Agricultural Committee.

Prof. Eckstein conveyed their intention of allowing the Pitchat Nitzana area to deviate from the obligation of hiring only Israeli laborers. On the issue of increased automation, the committee recommends financing the development of means of automation in agriculture.

Furthermore, the committee will recommend granting incentives for hiring Israeli workers and signing the IOM agreement between Israel, the United Nations and countries sending workers to Israel.

## **Ramat Negev Local Commission Approves Plan to Build Route 10 (along the Egyptian Border)**



The Local Planning and Building Commission of Ramat Hanegev has approved the plan for building Route 10 linking Kerem Shalom and Pitchat Nitzana.

Route 10, spanning the length of the Egyptian border, starts from Kerem Shalom and extends to the Eilat mountains.

The regional council, in coordination with the defense establishment and the Eshkol R.C., has been working in recent years to turn Route 10 into a national road linking Kerem Shalom with Pitchat Nitzana. The council has raised 3 million

NIS to prepare a conceptual program surveying the effect on the environment and has set in place an outline which has been agreed on by the various parties involved.



## **Expanded Solar Energy Station at Ashalim**

The National Planning and Building Council has approved expansion of the area designated for building the thermo-solar power station at Ashalim, in Ramat Hanegev.

The decision will make it possible to publish a tender for erecting the power station for production of electricity from solar energy.

In the first stage, up to roughly 1300 acres will be added.

The station is expected to produce approximately 110 megawatts. The plan is awaiting final approval by the government.

The NPBC seeks to examine the possibility of enlarging even further the area designated for planning, so as to facilitate building additional solar power stations with an overall capacity of 250 megawatts, in accordance with the government resolution in this matter.

The February 3<sup>rd</sup> decision of the NPBC will make it possible to publish a tender for building the stations, parallel to the progress achieved in the planning process.

In response, Shmuel Rifman, mayor of the Ramat Negev Regional Council, stated, "The decision of the National Planning and Building Council is an extremely important step. I truly hope that now we will be able to advance, at a more accelerated pace, all the bureaucratic procedures necessary for building this vital installation, which is important not only for producing clean energy but also for providing badly needed employment opportunities in the Negev."



## **Visit of EU Representatives – Agricultural Aid**



In March 2009, representatives of the European Union's Division for Agricultural Support visited Ramat Hanegev.

Among the delegation participants, all of whom are members of parliament in their respective countries, was Mr. Neal Parrish, who is in charge of agricultural support in the European Union, together with the commission's treasurer, Mr. Richard Jim Ashword and representatives from Poland, Belgium and Italy.

The delegation visited the Agricultural Experimental Station and heard an overview of the R & D activities, in general. Afterwards, a tour was held of the station and of the fish farm at Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh. During the dinner served at Shivta, the group was addressed by Mr. Shmuel Rifman, mayor of the regional council, and Mr. Neal Parrish, head of the EU delegation. The latter expressed the delegation members' admiration for the way agriculture is being developed in the region and the use of brackish water for irrigation. He also expressed the hope of increased information sharing between Ramat Hanegev and the EU, and between the region and third world countries. Mr. Parrish also expressed his wish that the relations formed, via Mr. Ofer Shach, between the region and the EU's Division for Agricultural Support become stronger through joint projects that will be beneficial to both sides.

We hope this visit will open up a new channel and an opportunity for establishing close cooperation with the EU, a huge and important organization that supports agriculture in its constituent countries at a scope of 50 billion dollars a year.



## **Ecological "Adloyada" Purim Parade**



**Students of the High School for Environmental Education at Midreshet Ben-Gurion turned household waste and junk into giant floats and multicolored works of art for the "Ecological Adloyada" which took place on Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 at Midreshet Ben-Gurion in Ramat Hanegev.**

Around 4,500 spectators came from all over Israel to take part in the traditional Purim parade in Ramat Hanegev. The ecological "Adloyada" is a tradition that has developed over the years. The parade features giant floats and costumes, all planned, created and produced by the high school kids. The planning stage includes choosing four topics, one for each grade; engineering-design for building the structures; collecting the materials; and designing and sewing the original costumes.



The floats are all made out of junk and recycled materials like plastic bottles, newspapers, cartons, irrigation hoses and pipes, discarded baby carriages and iron frames and any old thing you can think of. All this JUNK is then compiled, designed and made into exquisite masterpieces of art and spectacular, gigantic floats. All you need to add for a perfect event are some garish group costumes, songs, dances and street theater acts.



The work on creating the floats and costumes starts a month and a half before the parade date, and as the event draws nearer, the high school students work 'round the clock in the heat, the cold and sometimes even in the rain (!)

The Environmental High School at Midreshet Ben-Gurion is a 4-year boarding school (grades 9-12) with a very special "environmental studies" curriculum. In this framework, students go out on frequent fieldtrips, hikes, learning workshops, and so on. The students and staff regard environmental protection as an extremely important value that needs to be strengthened in every way. The school is attended by 220 students from Ramat Hanegev and all over Israel.



**For any comment feel free to contact Adva Lloyd, regional council spokesperson, at: [adva@rng.org.il](mailto:adva@rng.org.il)**