

Ramat Negev Newsletter #20

June 2008

Shalom to all our friends.

In Newsletter 20, you'll read about:

- * Who came to Ramat Hanegev
- * Main events of the last two months
- * A new jazz ensemble
- * Volunteering
- * Ramat Negev youth showing solidarity
- * Absorbing Aliya

Visitors

During the Passover vacation we were delighted to host some wonderful friends of Ramat Negev. The entire **Gardenswartz** family came to present Ramat Negev to David and the rest of the family. Despite the extreme heat that prevailed in the region, the family didn't pass up a visit to the Desert Agri-business Research & Development Center; they went out on a jeep-tour, visited the Carmey Ovdatt family farm and more... The crowning event of their stay was the modest and very moving dedication of "Marsha's Garden". The garden, at the entrance to the Ayalim student village in Ashalim, is the fruit of the initiative of Julia Sherry and her sister Dena Korda as a birthday gift to **Marsha**.



Alan Brandt, who supports the Fund for the Arts, visited us during the time of the IDF Soldiers' Memorial Day and Israel's 60th Independence Day. Alan attended the regional council's central ceremony at Kibbutz Revivim and Independence Day events at the Ma'ayan Ne'urim family farm. In addition, Alan met with local artists who are being supported by the Fund for the Arts in the fields of photography, painting, cinematography and documentary films.

After Independence Day, we enjoyed the arrival of **Hazel & Herzl Melmed**. They joined Alan Brandt on his visit to the Otef Aza (Gaza outskirts) towns and communities to get acquainted with what life under rocket attacks is like. The tour was intended to witness first-hand the ties that have been formed between the Colorado Jewish community and the bicycle project in Sha'ar Hanegev. The Ramat Negev Regional Council was instrumental in creating these ties with the Otef Aza area and is closely following events by supporting and assisting the children of Otef Aza.

*** **Howard Greinetz** and his wife **Hyla** visited several projects in the Ramat Negev region and learned about the impressive development that has been taking place here in the past few years. Howard expressed his appreciation of the projects and the determined efforts made by the council and its mayor.

**** 100 students from Colorado University visited in Ramat Negev on the Birthright program. They were deeply impressed by the pioneering enterprise of family farms and ranches. Afterwards, they were guests of the Desert Research Institutes of Ben-Gurion University where they were introduced to the special projects involving solar energy, water desalination, desert agriculture, ecological architecture and others. Their tour continued on the bicycle paths cleared by Herzl/RHMA high school students. The visit concluded with a ceremony at the Ben-Gurion tomb at Sde Boker.

Also gracing us with visits were the **Kleinstein, Rosenbaum** and **Brownstein** families.

In June we're looking forward to welcoming 150 visitors from Denver – and may there be many more!!!

Events of the last two months:

Singing in Honor of Israel's Sixtieth Birthday



On the eve of Independence Day, after all the other celebrations had ended in the Ramat Negev communities (each one marked the day in its own special way), 300 council residents gathered at the Ma'ayan Ne'urim family farm for a special night of community singing called "Singing Sixty". From song to nostalgic song, a delicious late-night meal was served, and the singing flowed like wine till the wee hours of the night.

Israel Mountain Biking Marathon Championship

Last month the Israel Mountain Biking Marathon Championship took place in Ramat Negev. About 300 participants from all over Israel rode 50 miles competing for first place. In next year's marathon we hope to see cyclists from Colorado, too.



Marking a Decade of Pioneering Family Farms on the Negev Wine Route



Ten years ago the Cornmell family built their farm on a bare hill in the Negev. It was the very first farm established in the Negev since the Byzantine Era. Since that time 10 years ago, another 25 family farms have joined them in becoming enterprises displaying advanced agriculture as well as attractions that have changed the face of tourism in the Negev.

Nevertheless, alongside the hard work, deep satisfaction and impressive accomplishments, the farms are still facing numerous challenges, which are hard to overcome. On the occasion of celebrating the farms' first decade, we decided to honor this pioneering enterprise at Shavuot – "festival of the first fruits" – to enable the public in Israel to see one of the most unique and successful projects in the Negev that inspire a sense of pride in every Israeli's heart.

Many travelers from all over the country came to the event, featuring free visits at all of the farms, which offered tasting the fine wines and wonderful cheeses prepared by the farm owners, getting familiar with a unique and totally different way of settlement, and of course the breath-taking scenery of Ramat Negev. The celebration ended with a performance by the beloved Israeli female vocalist Nurit Galron, which took place at the open amphitheater of Midreshet Ben-Gurion overlooking the amazing Genesis landscape of Nahal Zin.



Scholarship Awards Ceremony

A well-attended scholarship awards ceremony took place at the Ramat Negev Community Center on Lag Ba'omer, May 22nd, 2008.

This year, a joint ceremony was held for three funds that grant scholarships to citizens of the region:

Fund for Excellence in the fields of sports, dance and music – in collaboration with the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado.

Fund for Support of the Arts – in collaboration with Mr. Alan Brandt of Denver, Colorado.

Student Scholarship Fund – in collaboration with Mrs. Frances Kleinman of Cleveland, Ohio.

The ceremony was attended by the (40!) scholarship recipients and their families.

Mayor Shmulik Rifman congratulated the scholarship recipients and noted in his speech the importance of scholarships in developing education and promoting studies among the region's citizens, and that a great effort is being devoted to encouraging the creative artists living among us. "To our great delight, all three scholarship funds involve a genuine partnership with friends of Ramat Negev from abroad who donate substantial sums of money every year," said Mayor Rifman. "Congratulations and best of luck to the recipients of this year's scholarships!"



Solidarity with the Youth of Otef Aza (the Gaza outskirts communities)

An unforgettable evening of good will and TLC for the young people living in the communities closest to the Gaza border was organized by the Youth Council of Ramat Negev. The event was held at Golda Park and featured rock bands and dancing till dawn. At that all-night party the guests from Otef Aza could enjoy a respite from all the difficult hours of rocket and sniper attacks on their homes and the anxiety and fear that accompany them. The guests thanked the Ramat Negev youngsters for their wonderful hospitality saying, "It's good to know that, through all this pain and distress, there's someone who cares about us."

"Ramat Negev Idol"

Five young people from Ramat Negev, together with a musical manager, have started a new jazz ensemble. Coming soon... a concert tour throughout the country.

It started as a learning group of 17-18 year olds who used to meet at the community center and hold jam sessions. They would get together once a week to rehearse for performances and found they were sounding better from week to week.

What started as a study session is already paying off: the ensemble played for 90 minutes at the Jazz Club at Mitzpeh Ramon, a performance that won them great praise. So in the very near future they'll be touring and performing on stages throughout Israel.

Recruits for a Day

A group of 10 retired people from Ramat Negev volunteer every week at the IDF army base at Ze'elim, aiding in the folding and packing of uniforms.

Every Wednesday, the group departs from Kibbutz Revivim for their volunteer assignment at the Ze'elim base. From 8:00 a.m. until noon they fold uniforms, repair holes, sew on buttons and pack the uniforms to be used by IDF soldiers. This is the small way in which they are helping the IDF. They've been doing this volunteer work faithfully for a year. The army provides them with transportation and a real mess-hall lunch.

Once in a while the group goes out on a patrol of the base, observes military exercises, meets with senior officers and is given a training overview.

"It doesn't matter what age you are; everybody should contribute something to our country," says Hanna Rotem from Kibbutz Revivim. "We do whatever we can and that's definitely a satisfying feeling. I meet with officers and career soldiers and see what marvelous people we have, and it's very inspiring to me."



Absorbing Aliya

First Home in the Homeland

In recent days, 5 families and 17 individual immigrants arrived in Ramat Negev through the "First Home in the Homeland" project. They will be absorbed (taken in) at Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh and Kibbutz Revivim.

During the intake period the newcomers will learn Hebrew and get better acquainted with Israel through fieldtrips, lectures and cultural activities held in the kibbutzim.

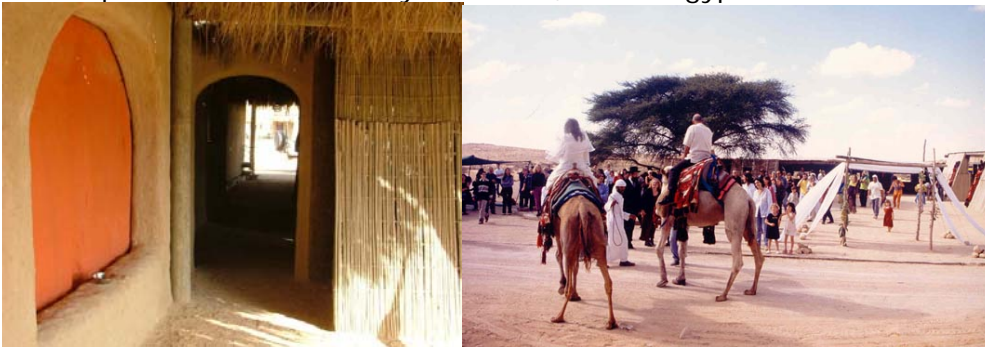
"First Home in the Homeland" is a project that absorbs immigrants by opening to them the kibbutz way of life, offering the very first home in Israel to many families and individuals. What's unique about this project is that the newcomers are welcomed as equals from the first moment they enter the kibbutz community and enjoy all of the services the kibbutz offers to its members.

Basking in a Bit of Pride

The Best Camping Site in Israel – Khan Be'erotayim in Ramat Negev

Findings of a recent survey conducted on Israel's best camping sites are unequivocal: out of 90 camping areas in Israel, 10 of the finest ones are located in Ramat Negev!

In first place is Khan Be'erotayim in Ezuz, on the Egyptian border not far from Nitzana.



Khan Be'erotayim

In third place is the "Hai Negev" zoological park at Kibbutz Revivim.

The website for tourism and leisure time in Israel "Mapa" (meaning: map) examined all camping sites in Israel in terms of their professional level, attitude and service, giving you your money's worth and long term stability. Determining recommended sites was done on the basis of a professional assessment by the website staff and the ratings and recommendations given by the website's hundreds of thousands of subscribers.

So, on your next trip to Israel you're more than welcome to try out our camping sites for yourselves. It'll definitely be worth your while.

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