

This time, help for IDF soldiers is personal



by [Debra Rubin](#)
NJJN Bureau Chief

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For the last five years, the Mitzvah Corps of the East Brunswick Jewish Center has partnered with the nonprofit Yashar LaChayal to provide members of the Israel Defense Forces with everything from water backpacks to socks.

Kosher wine and liquor sales have brought in more than \$40,000, much of it going to help poor and “lone” soldiers (those without family in Israel). However, its latest drive has taken on a personal meaning.

Profits from the current Passover wine sale — generally its largest moneymaker of the year — will be used to assist the 125 members of the Combat Engineering Corps unit, in which a 22-year-old soldier who grew up at EBJC is now serving.

Hirsch Alter, who made aliya in August shortly after earning a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Maryland, was inducted into the IDF in November. A graduate of East Brunswick High School, he is the son of Sara and Scott Alter.

“He felt it was the right Jewish thing to do,” said his father, a former EBJC president. “Sara and I have mixed feelings, but we are lifelong supporters of Israel and have for years supported the soldiers who are defending the State of Israel. But, it is a little different when it’s your son getting shot at so,



Hirsch Alter, left, who grew up at EBJC, became a member of the IDF in November. Through Yashar LaChayal, the synagogue plans to donate rain gear and water backpacks to all 125 soldiers in his unit.

Photo courtesy Scott Alter

You can help

To order wine through The Mitzvah Corps, go to ebjcmitzvahcorps@comcast.net or call Jack Silverman at 908-331-0812. To donate, go to yasharlachayal.org or mail checks to Friends of Yashar LaChayal, 20 Chalmers Rd., East Brunswick, NJ 08816.

of course, we are worried.”

While Hirsch is “the old man in the unit,” said Scott Alter, his son “has come to have a tremendous amount of respect” for his younger commanders who fought in the recent war in Gaza.

Alter said Hirsch asked for two things for his unit: rain gear and hydration backpacks.

“He’s been there in winter and even in the desert it’s cold and it rains,” said Alter. “When they go out on field exercises for a week sleeping and working outside, it’s very cold and depressing. The army-issue rain gear in Israel is not top quality, and even in winter, the backpacks are great because it’s hard to hold a canteen, a gun, and other gear and shoot in the rain.”

While the IDF insists its soldiers are well-equipped, it does allow donations of items through approved charities. Yashar LaChayal, based in Maale Adumim near Jerusalem, says it works with IDF commanders to pinpoint needy soldiers, like those from impoverished families who often need help to pay for extras.

Alter said just days before his phone conversation with *NJJN* he and his wife attended a meeting for the Michael Levin Lone Soldier Center, an Israel-based NGO, where they heard about the needs of soldiers from disadvantaged families.

The wine sale kicked off with a wine tasting at the tri-synagogue Purim carnival, held on March 8 with Temple B’nai Shalom and Young Israel of East Brunswick. The sale, which is continuing, brought in \$6,500.

“We had five wine vendors and a lot of new orders from the other synagogues,” said Jack Silverman, who cochairs the Mitzvah Corps with Marty Genee and recently became national president of Yashar LaChayal (see sidebar).

Silverman said the group is able to offer “fairly competitive” prices thanks to an agreement with a Clifton distributor and many repeat customers place orders throughout the year.

Additionally, Jesse Reitner, owner of Lox Stock & Deli in Milltown, donated the food and staff for a January wine pairing that raised \$4,500 to provide a Purim *seuda* for an IDF unit.

“It turned out we were so successful we were able to provide for not just one unit, but for three,” said Silverman. “Jesse and his wife, Janet, have really played an active role in raising *tzedaka*.”

Besides the wine pairing, Reitner buys wine through EBJC for select bar or bat mitzva celebrations or weddings through its 18 Carat Catering.

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Richard Ortega

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