

# Shul honors IDF on day dedicated to Jerusalem



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On a day dedicated to celebrating the 1967 reunification of Jerusalem by the IDF, young and old gathered at Young Israel of East Brunswick to learn about the lives and difficulties of Israeli soldiers.

At its Yom Yerushalayim program on May 20, Avi Baldesare, a 25-year-old deputy commander in the Israel Defense Forces, spoke about his own military service.

Also at the event, children drew pictures and wrote greetings for soldiers. “Jerusalem is important because the Temple was there,” wrote five-year-old Eliezer Weinstein of East Brunswick.

While some participants — mostly the younger set — tested out an obstacle course typical of those used by IDF trainees, under the watchful eye of shul member Bernie Weinberger, others gathered around his wife, Leah, to learn more about the Volunteers for Israel program.

The Weinbergers of East Brunswick, dressed in the green fatigues of the IDF, said they have spent several weeks annually since 2000 volunteering at Israel military bases through the VFI program.

“We’ve been to many different bases, mostly supply bases,” said Leah. “We do whatever they need done. We’ve put together medical kits and gun maintenance kits. We were on a naval base in Haifa doing inventory. We’ve done so many, many things. It’s just a wonderful program that lets you meet people from all over the world — Jews and non-Jews — who come to help Israel.”

Both children and adults lined up in the “mess tent” to get pizza and falafel, or participated in an Israel information quiz.

A short film featured grainy newsreels of Jews praying at the Kotel in 1936, Israeli fighters engaged in battle for the Old City, and lines of triumphant soldiers waving Israeli flags marching to the Western Wall.

“We really wanted to make this a day of tribute to the IDF,” said Judy Goldrich, who cochaired the program with Cheryl Shmulevitz.

Goldrich said the shul has participated for several years in Yashar LaChayal, or Straight to the Soldier, an Israel-based organization that raises money to assist wounded soldiers and help needy soldiers or those without immediate family in the country.

Two years ago, the synagogue provided hydration backpacks for IDF troops. On Yom Ha’atzmaut, Goldrich said, a new campaign was begun to raise money for fleece jackets. When the coats are presented in the fall, during a Sukkot trip sponsored by the shul, each garment will have one of the children’s drawings or letters tucked into a pocket “so they will know someone in East Brunswick cares about them and is thinking of them from afar.”



Leah and Bernie Weinberger of East Brunswick — wearing Israel Defense Forces uniforms — have volunteered at IDF bases since 2000.

Baldesare, whose American parents made aliya — his father is a Westfield native — 30 years ago, is in the United States visiting his grandparents in New York City.

A resident of Maale Adumim, Baldesare speaks across the country on behalf of Yashar LaChayal. Donations sent from overseas always come as a pleasant surprise to the soldiers in the field, said the former platoon commander.

He told the gathering of the sense of responsibility he and his fellow soldiers feel to protect their country from harm and of their pride in being part of a long line of defenders of the Holy Land stretching back to King David, the Maccabees, and those who fought for Israel in the 1948 War of Independence.

*Deputy IDF Commander Avi Baldesare will speak at Shabbat services at East Brunswick Jewish Center on Friday and Saturday, June 8 and 9. Call 732-257-7070 for more information.*

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