

"Coffee Shop" Helps Israel's Youth at Risk

By Shai Tsur

UJA Federations Press Service - Tel Aviv's Central Bus Station bustles with activity as thousands of people pass through on their way to other parts of Israel. Tucked away in one corner of the busy station is a small storefront with a simple sign that reads "The Coffee Shop."

Despite its name, the shop does not sell coffee. Rather, the little space is a safe haven for youth at risk, a counseling and information center where young people with problems can come and talk to someone and get help. The Coffee Shop is a project of Elem, an Israeli organization for helping youth at risk, sponsored by the Jewish Agency for Israel with funds from the UJA Federation Annual Campaign.

"There are teenagers out there with some serious questions and no one to turn to," says Ayala Sheinfeld, director of The Coffee Shop. "In a lot of places in Israel, it's hard to find suitable social services to help these kids. Many of the services out there are seen by teens as establishment, and they can't find someone who understands them."

Sheinfeld says The Coffee Shop provides information and counseling services on everything from school matters to drug abuse. "In more extreme cases, we will actually intervene with the parents or the authorities," she says.

Most of the youths who seek help range in ages from 12 to 18 and represent many different cultures — *olim* from Russia and Ethiopia, religious and secular. The problems also vary widely, from fairly normal adolescent concerns to the most serious problems.

According to Sheinfeld, most come in once or twice for advice and information. On the other end of the spectrum are youths with extremely complex problems. In these instances, staff members usually turn the cases over to a government agency. Then there are kids who come in without a specif-



Troubled Israeli teens find help with everything from school problems to drugs.

ic problem, adds Sheinfeld. "They are looking for companionship. We give them warmth, listen to them and try to provide them with motivation."

Sheinfeld, a social worker, says that she first became interested in working with problem youths while studying for her masters degree at Columbia University. "I worked with a number of kids in Harlem and was drawn to them," she says. "I really wanted to help them as much as I could."

Back in Israel, she began working for Elem and in 1997 decided to open The Coffee Shop. "We started this really from nothing,"

she says. "Elem gave us everything from the organization to the decor. The idea was that we would create a space which would look different — younger and more dynamic."

The idea of putting the facility in the Tel Aviv Bus Station reflected the station's central geographic, location and its sociological role with Israeli youth, Sheinfeld says. Its accessibility made it a logical meeting place for many troubled youth. For instance, she says, "A young girl from the south who runs away from home will almost always pass through this station. Our hope is that she will stop in here so we might give her help."

The staff at The Coffee Shop consists of three full-time social workers backed by volunteers, both professional and non-professional. Many are young, and that helps them connect better to the youngsters. The shop also works closely with various government bodies and advisors to help with such problems as dealing with the judicial system and the army.

"In the beginning we did a lot of reaching out," Sheinfeld says. "We would walk around the station and approach groups of kids trying to find those who were at risk. We invited them in and would try to find out how we could help." This intervention soon paid off. Slowly, the kids began to feel more comfortable with the counselors and would pass the message along to others. "It's turned into a friend-bringing-a-friend system," she says.

Sheinfeld says she hopes to expand the scope of the program to reach more troubled youths. "My hope is that every young person will know that we are here to listen and to help." ☆

DR. JOSEPH STEINER

general and cosmetic dentistry Drs. Treat, Steiner & Pappert

"creating naturally beautiful smiles"

Cosmetic Dentistry ~ Whitening ~ Implants
TMJ Therapy ~ Restorative Dentistry
Halitosis Treatment ~ Mouth Guards

We Welcome
New Patients

704/523-4515

4525 Park Rd.
Park/Montford Dr.

ILLUSTRATION
DESIGN
DARLING

- Logo Design
- Brochures
- Creative Design for Bar/Bat Mitzvahs & Weddings
- Computer Graphics
- Original Artwork



(704)553-8798

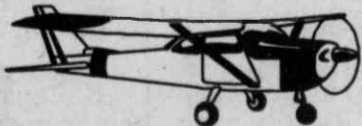
Located in the Southpark Area



Joe Klein (left), anonymous author of *Primary Colors*, honored by Israel Bonds new leadership at Sabra Society dinner. On right is Gideon Patt, president and CEO of State of Israel Bonds.

Concord Aviation Flight Training

Learn To Fly



SPECIAL:

\$35 Introductory Fun Flight

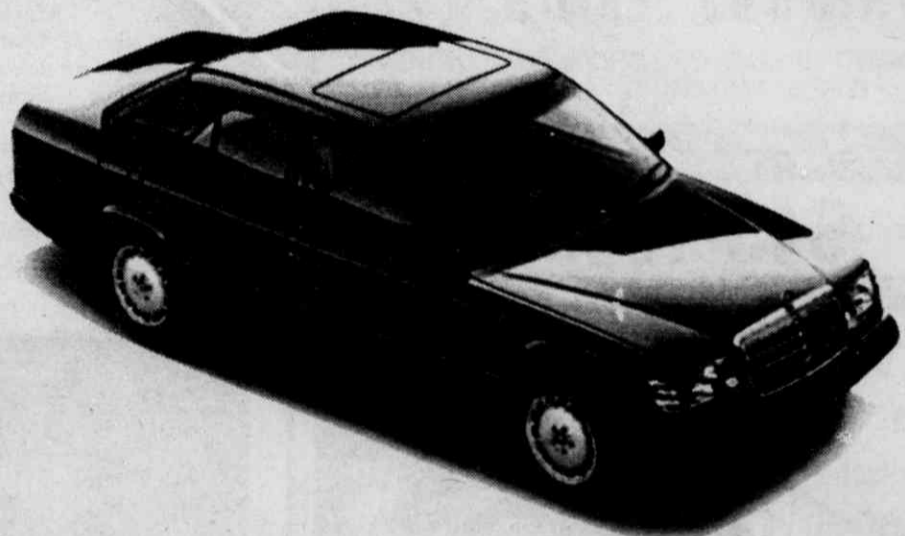
- Scenic Flights • Gift Certificates Available
- Aircraft Rentals, Equipped with GPS
- Professionally Maintained IFR & VFR Aircraft

Call (704) 784-3892

Only 15 minutes from Uptown Charlotte off I-85

Flying: An adventure that lasts a lifetime!

More to offer.



StarMark Pre-Owned Mercedes-Benz vehicles offer a great deal of performance, a great deal of luxury

and a great deal of style. With a 130+ point inspection, StarMark Limited Warranty and 7-day/500 mile Exchange Privilege,* they also offer a great deal of assurance and peace-of-mind.

StarMark Pre-Owned Mercedes-Benz vehicles, they're simply ... a great deal.



5141 EAST INDEPENDENCE BLVD.
CHARLOTTE, NC 28212 • 704/535-6400



AIR BAGS ARE A SUPPLEMENTAL RESTRAINT SYSTEM, SO REMEMBER AIR BAG SAFETY: BUCKLE EVERYONE AND CHILDREN IN BACK! *Visit your StarMark Pre-Owned Mercedes-Benz Center for details and copies of the StarMark Limited Warranty and 7-day/500 mile Exchange Privilege. Exchange for another StarMark Pre-Owned Mercedes-Benz of equal or greater value available in your retailer's inventory as of date of exchange.