

Mei-Ami

By Lydia Aisenberg

Situated on a hilltop commanding a position of authority, Moshav Mei-Ami overlooks the Israeli Moslem city of Umm-el-Fahm and the Wadi Ara basin on one side, and peeks over and into a small portion of the West Bank on the other.

Within a five minute drive from the Mei-Ami community of some thirty families living just about inside the Israel side of the Green Line, are a number of large and small Palestinian villages plus a cluster of four Jewish settlements.

In October, Palestinians penetrated the perimeter fence of the moshav and lay an explosive device, attached to a mobile phone to enable detonation from a distance, behind the closest building which just happened to be the office of the moshav's security officer.

The back of the building was badly damaged in the ensuing explosion, but no one was injured. This was the first act of terrorism against the moshav since the outbreak of the intifada thirteen months ago.

Tracks leading from the cut in the non-electronic Mei-Ami fence led to the Palestinian village of Anin, hugging the slopes of a hilly range underneath the 36,000 Israeli Moslem residents of Umm-el-Fahm. A fenceless dirt track used as a patrol road by the IDF and the former 1967 border with Jordan, just about divides the two.

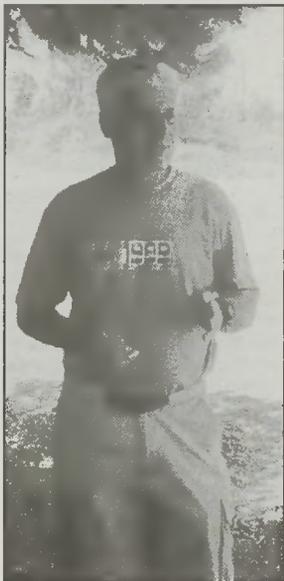
Gideon Eldar is one of four members of Mei-Ami who work in the moshav's enormous turkey farm, the largest in Israel, which produces 3000 tons of kosher meat annually from 32,000 birds.

Gideon and the other members toil daily alongside two Arab employees. One of them has working there since 1976, the other for five years and both hail from Umm-el-Fahm down below.

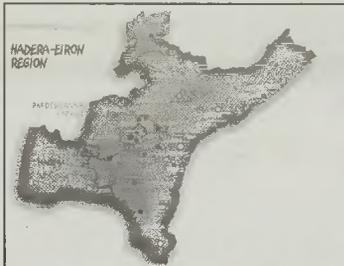
"We share our work, share our breakfasts and share our views," said Gideon, who has been a member of the moshav since the same year that particular Moslem Arab employee began working there.

Known for speaking his mind, Gideon laughed when I asked him if he thought that the Arab employees felt as free to speak theirs.

"Of course they do and they certainly express their views without fear," he said, quickly adding, "I would never fire an employee because of their political views."



Sue Littauer took this photograph of Gideon Eldar during her visit this past summer to Mei Ami, a community in the Hadera Eiron region in Israel. The region, which is located between Tel Aviv and Haifa, is the partnership community for the Southeast Regional Consortium, of which Charlotte is a member. At the time of the photo, Gideon was standing about 20 feet from the green line, which was the pre-1967 border, recognized as the legitimate border. It is also sometimes called the seam line, because it is problematic and can pull apart where the cloth is sewn. As Gideon spoke to the visiting group from the Southeast, he talked about living with a fence around them, and how their children are afraid. In July, Gideon asked, "Is this right that I have to live with a fence around me?"



Mei Ami is in the Hadera Region (left) which is highlighted on the map of Israel. Its eastern border, where Mei Ami is located, is the "Green Line" or "Seam Line."



Gideon's brother, Mike Eldar, is a well-known Israeli journalist, author and former commander of the Israel Navy Seals unit. He has been at loggerheads with Israeli authorities over the publishing of a number of his books dealing with the Navy, one of which was temporarily banned in Israel.

Turkey man Gideon Eldar is also no stranger to controversy. For many years he has hosted at Mei-Ami many overseas missions to Israel under the auspices of the Jewish Agency. He has also traveled to meet such missions in other parts of the country, and four months ago toured the US on a J.A. sponsored speaking tour. The views he expressed were seen as rather controversial by some of the American audiences.

Mei-Ami was originally set up as a Nachal outpost on the former border with Jordan, eventually becoming a civilian agricultural community in the late 1960s.

The Hebrew name translates to 'the waters of my people' but is basically a play on the US city of Miami. The Miami Jewish community provided funds for the founding of what was initially a kibbutz, but relatively quickly

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reverted to a moshav.

"There is only one Jewish state in the world and we are going to keep it whatever the cost, we are not leaving," says Gideon, who since the present intifada broke out has not stepped inside the neighboring city of Umm-el-Fahm.

When demonstrations-turned-riots broke out internally in the Israeli Arab sector at the beginning of October 2000, the Mei-Ami community found themselves cut off when the road down to the main Wadi Ara highway from their hilltop was closed because of the violence.

"Even though I have friends among the people there, I don't visit the city anymore not because of fear but because I simply am not prepared to give them one agoura of my money," he says.

"A few months ago we went to a bakery in Wadi Ara, and while we were shopping my wife got into conversation with a local Israeli Moslem.

"He told us that we are only temporarily here, that we do not

belong on their land and that we shouldn't feel so safe.

"I told him that we will be here forever and if he wants to continue to live here, then he has to abide by the laws of the country," recalled Gideon.

"When we first came to live

here in Mei-Ami, many of the families here were left-wing in their political thinking, but not these days.

"The people have not physically moved but certainly have politically over the years," he added. ☆

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U.S. Director of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres spoke to delegates at the UJC General Assembly in Washington, DC during November. Sue Littauer, Campaign Director, and Marnie Moskowitz, Program Director, from the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte attended the event along with Sara Schreiberman, Federation President. Our delegation met up with new Executive Director Randy Czarlinsky while at the GA.