

JEWISH FEDERATION NEWS

Partnership Program Sends Firefighters to Israel Delegation Meets with Safety Officials, Tours the Country

By Marissa Brooks

It's a "rare opportunity" to go to Israel, said Fire Chief Jon Hannan.

For nine days in early November, Hannan, Deputy Chief Rob Kinniburgh and Capt. Jerry Rodgers represented the Charlotte Fire Department on a professional delegation to Israel.

Corey Riddley, director of safety and security for the Foundation of Shalom Park, accompanied the three firefighters. They were joined by six firefighters from Florida and three firefighters from Tennessee.

"This professional delegation occurred through a joint initiative between the Jewish Federations of North America and the Jewish Agency for Israel called Partnership 2Gether or P2G," said Rachael Levine, Director of Community Relations and Israel Affairs, Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte.

"P2G pairs global Jewish communities with Israeli com-

munities building living bridges through people-to-people connections, sharing of ideas and personal and professional collaborations," said Levine, 26.

This cross-cultural exchange has happened with other disciplines, such as educators and police officers.

This time, P2G sent a delegation from the Charlotte Fire Department.

This was Hannan, Kinniburgh, and Rodgers' first trip to Israel.

Hannan, 55, was looking forward to meeting the Israeli firefighters, especially the ones from Hadera who had visited Charlotte last March for technical rescue training. Hannan also wanted to visit historic holy sites like Jerusalem and Masada.

Rodgers, 46, said that his wife was worried about him going, but then she realized it was no more dangerous than his rescue work.

Going to Israel "was incredible, one of the things on the bucket list," said Rodgers.

The delegation spent the first few days in Israel bonding with the firefighters in Hadera, visiting their station and seeing how they operated.

"The (Israeli) fire service is small with a huge volunteer base," said Kinniburgh, 50. "They have 1,700 employees and 12,000 volunteers."

Hannan and Kinniburgh explained that in Charlotte the minimum staffing for 730,000 people is 255 firefighters on duty.

In Jerusalem, the minimum staffing for 780,000 people is 40.

"Those guys work hard. You can tell," said Kinniburgh.

Hannan explained that in some rural areas, there were fewer resources to fight fire.

The Charlotteans noticed signs on fire trucks that read that they were sponsored by Jewish Federations or individuals from the United States.

"They benefit from generosity of the global Jewish community," said Levine.

The delegation visited Mount Carmel, the site of a huge fire in 2010 that had a large loss of life.

"I believe the Carmel Forest fire woke Israel up to recommitting to firefighting," said Hannan.

Next, the men traveled on the Sea of Galilee and to Jerusalem where they met with the Jerusalem fire department, the police department, the bomb squad and the video surveillance unit.

Hannan noted differences between building construction in Israel and in the U.S. "It's stone or masonry...almost no wood," said Hannan. "Their



From left, Deputy Chief Rob Kinniburgh, Corey Riddley, Capt. Jerry Rodgers, and Fire Chief Jon Hannan, of the Charlotte Fire Department, visited the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Photo courtesy Corey Riddley.

construction has to withstand blasts."

In the evening, eight of the 13 men went on a self-led tour through Jerusalem. As firefighters, they are used to going into all different kinds of neighborhoods.

"We are aware but not really scared of anything," said Kinniburgh.

"(Israel is) a complicated place," said Hannan.

They were briefed to expect cultural differences. Rodgers said they were "received and welcomed so pleasantly" everywhere they went, Jewish and Arab areas alike.

"I felt safer there than in a lot of American cities," said Hannan.

The delegation also went to the Holocaust museum, the Dead Sea, Masada, and Tel Aviv to visit the National Firefighting and Rescuing School.

Visiting Israel helps people understand the dynamics.

"Everyone around you hates you," said Kinniburgh. "The Sea of Galilee feeds four countries. You have to make agreements with enemies to get fresh water."

Hannan would love to train Israeli and Palestinian firefighters together. "They absolutely should support each other as things get better," he said.

Hannan hopes to continue long-term relationships with exchanges and technical rescue trainings.

"Southern hospitality is what we do well," said Kinniburgh.

From the P2G's perspective, the trip was a success.

These exchanges "humanize one's relationship with Israel," said Sue Worrel, Executive Director of Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte. "They are real people, and we have more in common with them than different." ✪

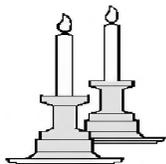
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- Friday, February 3, 5:35 PM
- Friday, February 10, 5:42 PM
- Friday, February 17, 5:49 PM
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