

Israel at 52: Look Back with Pride, Look Forward with Hope

By: Arye Mekel

Recently we celebrated Israel's fifty-second anniversary. The young Jewish State has become middle aged and we cannot use our tender years as an excuse for our actions any longer. In fact, just like a middle age person, we are expected to come to terms with who we are and what we are.

It is quite obvious that we have many reasons to look back with satisfaction and look forward with hope. In its 52 years, Israel has achieved tremendous goals and we hope to achieve more in the coming years.

Let us not forget that Israel was established in 1948, thanks to our long struggle, but also because the Western world had a bad conscience over what they did, or mostly did not do during the Holocaust that ended only three years earlier. The idea then was to create a safe haven for Jews who want or have to leave their countries because of persecution or simply because they want to live in our historic Jewish homeland.

This goal was achieved. By the latest count, 4.9 million Jews now live in Israel. The country also includes 1.1 million Arab citizens. Almost 3 million Jews came as *olim* over the years and about 1 million came in the last decade, mostly from the former Soviet Union.

More than one-third of the Jewish people now live in Israel and all indications are that before long the Jewish community in Israel will be the world's largest.

Nothing was given to us on a



silver platter. We had to fight for our existence over and over again and we always prevailed, reviving our ancient biblical military capabilities, which were mostly lost during 2000 years of Diaspora life.

Today, Israel is the strongest military power in the Middle East and we use this strength as a means to achieve peace with our neighbors. Fortunately, we have had peace with Egypt, our neighbor to the south and the largest and strongest Arab country, for about 20 years. This peace is often described as cold, but the fact is that not one Israeli or Egyptian soldier has been killed on that border since peace was signed.

Since 1994, we have peace with Jordan, our neighbor to the East. This peace has withstood a serious challenge with the death of King Hussein. His son, King Abdullah, follows the agreement just as his father did.

The Palestinian problem is often considered the core issue in the Middle East. Since 1993 we have made much progress in this area as well. While the agreements with the Palestinians are not final, everybody agrees that the situation, now for both sides is better than it was seven years ago. Last summer a new government was elected in Israel, led by Prime Minister Ehud Barak. This government is trying to achieve peace with our remaining immediate neighbors, Syria and Lebanon. While this was not easy, we removed our army from Lebanon.

While we continue to work on achieving peace, we are fortunate to have bipartisan support from the United States of America, the world's only superpower. This support is demonstrated in many ways, including foreign aid for Israel, strategic cooperation and widespread support in the public opinion.

The American support could not exist without the love and support we get from the American Jewish Community. It is highly important that this well proven devotion continues and that the American Jewish Community continues to support policies set by the democratically elected government of Israel.

In addition to the central issues of peace and security, we are busy in many other spheres as well. *Olim* continue to arrive, homes are built, the economy is strong and in some areas, such as high-tech, Israel has become a world power.

We continue to educate our children according to Jewish tradition and we strive to make the Jewish State even better and its people a true *Or La'Goyim* (a light to the nations).

This is the background on which we celebrated Israel's 52nd anniversary. As indicated, we can be proud of what has already been achieved and look forward to an even better future for Israel as a strong, prosperous country, living in peace with its neighbors, while being a spiritual center for the Jewish people, regardless of where they may live. ✪

Arye Mekel will be leaving his post as Israeli Consul General to the Southeastern United States and based in Atlanta.

Israel Bonds Selects Roman Kent and Dr. Romana Strochlitz Primus for 2000 Elie Wiesel Holocaust Remembrance Award

New York — Roman Kent of New York City and Dr. Romana Strochlitz Primus of New London, CT, have been chosen by State of Israel Bonds to receive the 2000 Elie Wiesel Holocaust Remembrance Award for their leadership in preserving the memory of the Holocaust and strengthening Israel's economy through the Israel Bonds program.

Wiesel, the world-renowned author and Nobel laureate, will present the award at the 16th Annual International Elie Wiesel Holocaust Remembrance Award Dinner on Sunday, November 12 at the Grand Hyatt New York.

In announcing the honorees, David Halpern of Livingston, N.J., chairman of the Elie Wiesel Holocaust Remembrance Award Committee, said: "Today, in a world of Holocaust denial, and over 50 years after the horrors of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, we are especially grateful for the leadership of Mr. Kent and Dr. Strochlitz Primus in perpetuating the memory of the victims of the death camps."

Halpern also announced that Wayne Zuckerman of Livingston, N.J., a member of the second generation, will serve as chairman of the dinner. Zuckerman has been involved with the Elie Wiesel dinner for more than five years and is an active supporter of the U.S. Holocaust Museum. His father Abraham, who was honored at the 1997 dinner, was on Oskar Schindler's list of Jews saved from the Nazis.

Born in Lodz, Poland, Kent is a survivor of the Lodz Ghetto and the Auschwitz, Mertzbachtal, Dornau and Flossenburg concentration camps.

Vice president and member of the Board of the Conference of Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Kent is a leader in the campaign to reclaim the assets of the victims of the Nazis. He is a member of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims and a presidential appointee on the Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States.

He is the chairman and a member of the Board of Directors of American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, and serves on the executive bodies of several Polish survivors' organizations, including the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization and



Roman Kent

World Gathering of Lodzer Holocaust Survivors.

Kent is the producer of the documentary, "Children in the Holocaust," which won the New York International Film Festival award.

A veteran entrepreneur in the field of international trade, he is president of Namor International Corporation in New York City.

Strochlitz Primus, who was born in Bergen-Belsen, Germany after her parents were liberated from the concentration camp, is a leader of the second generation — the children of the Holocaust survivors.

A founding member of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, Strochlitz Primus has served as organizer, speaker and advisor for numerous Holocaust events and is a board member of a number of organizations devoted to Holocaust remembrance and education.

She was a second-generation advisor for President Carter's Commission on the Holocaust and serves on the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. In her capacity as chair of the Council's multifaceted project, "Life Reborn, Jewish Displaced Persons, 1945-1951," she led an international conference on the subject in Washington in January.

Strochlitz Primus, a pediatrician and allergist, retired in 1996 after 21 years in private practice to volunteer her services to the community.

Since the Elie Wiesel Holocaust Remembrance Award Dinner was inaugurated in 1985, it has produced hundreds of millions of dollars in Israel Bonds investments to strengthen Israel's economy. Wiesel was the first recipient of the award in 1985. Others have included Henry Kissinger, Steven Spielberg, Ambassador Meir Rosenne, Abraham Foxman, and Simon Wojnowich of Charlotte.

State of Israel Bonds is an international organization offering securities issued by the government of Israel. Since its inception in 1951, Israel Bonds has secured more than \$22 billion in investment capital to develop Israel's economy and has maintained a perfect record on the payment of principal and interest on the securities it has issued. ✪



Romana Strochlitz Primus

By Foot, Camel or Car - It's A Long Trek to the Desert

By Galia Walsh

Israel's main cities have experienced a population explosion while the Negev, which is two thirds of Israel's territory, remains lightly populated. The power and mystical beauty of the desert sands is having difficulty overcoming the stigma of being too far from the center of the country. Those who balk at setting up housekeeping in the Negev have a point. It is too far.

But this is going to change ... and change dramatically. With the help of Israel Bonds, a high-speed railway from Tel Aviv to Beersheba is being built. Ben-Gurion's dream of populating the Negev is finally on the verge of becoming a reality.

Israel Bonds was initiated in 1951 when Ben-Gurion was attempting to find a means to sustain Israel's fledgling economy. Through the sale of bonds for Israel, he found the means. Since 1951, Israel Bonds has been an integral part of almost every major development in the country. Israel Bonds helps fuel Israel's economy through the sale of bonds to individuals, corporations and labor unions. Purchasers connect personally with Israel and simultaneously make an investment.

Investing in the Tel Aviv-Beersheba high-speed railway, is a sure investment in Israel's economic growth.

The Beersheba line would create a new urban center — a high-tech center with impressive brainpower. Thus the south would be opened up for employment, spelling a jump in the country's economic strength.



Right now, economic strength is crucial to improving Israel's political clout. In order to negotiate from a position of power, Israel must come to the negotiating table backed by a strong defense and a strong economy. And the political processes that are underway now, will determine the future for all Israelis ... indeed, for Jews throughout the world.

Gideon Patt, a former Israeli government minister and current President and CEO of Israel Bonds, is also a noted economist. He explains, "Development of the Negev equals a better quality of life, for all Israelis." He adds, "We were granted neither oil nor enough water. But we were granted, this great expanse of land and a creative people to bring this region to economic life."

Israel has all the ingredients to make this expansion a success. What she needs is investment, capital. Since 1951 Israel Bonds has raised more than \$21 billion in investment capital. Now is the time to increase that amount.



The current state of Israel's rail system is in vital need of modernization. Israel Bonds investment dollars are helping to build a new system of high-speed railways connecting Tel Aviv to Beersheba, linking the heart of Israel's urban centers. Photo by John Wagner.

There's an entire region of the country begging to be utilized and a skilled population to utilize it. All we have to do is get them there — the purchase of Israel Bonds may help to create the means of transporting people to an area of the country which awaits them with open arms. ✪

"If [Israel] is to be restored... it must be by settling Jews on its soil. The condition to which the land has been reduced... is such that restoration is only possible by a race that is prepared for sentimental reasons to make and endure sacrifices for that purpose."

— Lloyd George, Hearst Newspapers, July 1923

UJC Opposes Cuts

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last year of United Jewish Appeal, the United Israel Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations, is the dominant fundraising arm for American Jewry, representing 189 Jewish Federations and 400 independent communities across the continent. It reflects the values and traditions of education, leadership, advocacy and social justice, and continuity of community

that define the Jewish people.

The Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies is the membership organization of over 145 Jewish Family and Children's Agencies and specialized human service agencies located through the United States and Canada. Association members serve families experiencing divorce and remarriage, intermarriage, adoption, and a variety of other family-impacting circumstances, including responsibility for aged parents, Holocaust survivors, and the second generation. ✪