

- What motivates people to endow?
 - Teens share Cole Essay honors
 - Winning Cole Essays
- pages 8-9

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Holocaust Memorial to be dedicated

page 2

Rabbi Apothaker to retire

page 2



Sterling can't leave bad enough alone

page 5

Unprecedented support for Lifetown

page 12



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MEMORIAL DAY



Giving back to those who gave

page 6



Victory Canteen: better late than never

page 5

ABOUT THE COVER

Chip Kogan and his daughter, Molly, from Cleveland volunteered through Skilled Volunteers for Israel at the Recycling Center at Nitzana Youth Village.

In The Chronicle

At The JCC	17
Bowling	18
Community	10-13
Deaths	23
Dining Guide	14-15
Editor's Mailbox	5
Federation	7
Fifty Years Ago	20-21
Foundation	8-9
Front Page	2
Marketplace	3
New Generation	18
Simchas	21
Synagogues	22-23
Viewpoint	5
World News	4

SKILLED VOLUNTEERS FOR ISRAEL Looking for 'Boomers' with experience to share

By Pam Spence

Columbus-based travel writer and art adventurer, Aaron Leventhal, has been in love with Israel since the early 60s. "It all began when I read Leon Uris' *Exodus*," he says. "I became enchanted with stories of communal life on the *kibbutzim* and for almost 20 years, I kept returning to Israel to live and work on them. I spent the summer of 1962 on Kibbutz K'far Hanasi in the Galilee picking apples and traveled throughout the country. In 1970, I participated in an ulpan and worked in the banana groves on Kibbutz Ma'ayan Tzvi in the Carmel Hills near the Mediterranean Sea. In 1975, my wife, daughters and I lived for a summer in the Negev Desert on Ein Hashlosa near Gaza, where I lugged irrigation pipe through the fields."

He returned again in the late 70s to study Hebrew at a

Shaliach, Lior Abarbanel, who did some research and found a program that proved to be just what Leventhal was looking for, a program conceived and created by Marla Gamoran, called Skilled Volunteers for Israel (SVF). "Marla created this program specifically for the older, active adults," said Abarbanel. "She tailors opportunities for older individuals as a way that they can volunteer and connect with community in Israel." Enthusiastic about the program, Abarbanel was happy to play matchmaker in connecting the seeker to the appropriate program.

"Everyone wants to go to Israel," says Abarbanel. "And it is my goal as Shaliach to work with them to help find a way for them to go, to find a program that will fit them. Once they go to Israel, they come back here totally changed."

Leventhal contacted Gamoran, was invited on an eight-day tour in Jerusalem and fell wildly in love with this whole new way of being in Israel.

"This past February I decided to volunteer during my month in Israel and had the good fortune to work with Marla. Her unique program matches Jewish Baby Boomers (mostly American) with outstanding non-profit Israeli organizations, primarily in Jerusalem. I was impressed with the dedication and motivation of the volunteers and the rich opportunities they were given to share their skills and interests."

He found a kindred soul in Gamoran and was so impressed with the program that he has begun to work with SVF to expand the program to make it more effective and efficient. "I will be volunteering my services for a new, three-week, small group pilot project for SVF for this coming December and will be writing a major feature about the program for the B'nai B'rith magazine winter issue," he says.

Like Leventhal, Gamoran has held a deep attachment to Israel since she was a young adult. She has maintained a small apartment in Jerusalem in recent years and volunteer in various programs. As she began to approach retirement age and was transitioning out of her professional career in workplace development, she too went in search of programs specifically for older, active adults - and came up empty.

She had several high-level contacts in Jerusalem and began talking to them. Although everyone thought it was a good idea - to have a

projects; website development, PR, marketing and social media. I did extensive interviewing of the organizations in Israel to determine



program for older, skilled professionals who wanted to volunteer in Israel, no one had the resources or structure in place for such a thing. "My friend, Alan Hoffman, who was head of the education department and now works for the Israel Agency, thought it was a great idea but told me it was a demographic they were not targeting; they were specifically targeting young adults," she says.

Living in Michigan, hardly the hotbed of Jewish organizations, she had never worked professionally in Jewish organizations nor had any experience in starting a non-profit. But Gamoran was determined to do something to follow through on this "good idea." Subsequently, in 2010 she applied for and was accepted into a fellowship program with the Present Tense Global Institute for Social Entrepreneurs - although they too, usually catered to young adults - and upon completing that program, launched Skilled Volunteers. She built her organization from the ground up, placing the first small group of volunteers in 2011 while working on her non-profit status, which she secured in 2012.

"The first year we placed 21 volunteers; last year we placed 37 volunteers and this year 50," she says. "Volunteers have a wide range of skills and have had the opportunity to work in a wide range of positions: as translators, tutors, and in art

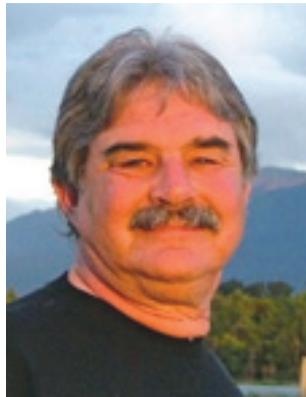
what they needed in terms of professional volunteers. Then I do 'blind posting' on our website so potential volunteers have some idea of the types of things they might contribute."

The organizations are understandably thrilled to have access to a pool of such highly skilled volunteers. "Plus they appreciate that we are the ones who take responsibility for screening those volunteers to ensure it is a good fit," she says. "We work with the volunteers as well to build appropriate expectations in terms of what they will be doing and to make sure that the experience will be engaging and worth their time." She says that SVF works with volunteers who want to serve in an area of their expertise as well as those who want something entirely different.

"We had a gentleman who was a retired patent attorney. What he wanted was to do 'good work' that was not related to his profession. We work to create the opportunity specific to that individual's skills and desires.

When Leventhal came on the scene, he immediately saw the potential to make SVF even better. Drawing on his extensive experience in the travel industry in putting together tour packages, he envisioned creating a social structure to complement the volunteer experience. When he pitched the idea to Gamoran, she enthusiastically

See LEVENTHAL, page 19



Aaron Leventhal

Tel Aviv uplan while on a year's sabbatical from Hillel (he was director from 1970 to 1980). That experience gave him a feel for living the urban life of Israel. Over the years he made many friends and business contacts in Israel, kept in touch and visited them frequently in his travels.

Aaron Leventhal had pretty much "done Israel" and as he has gotten older, he felt a yearning for more, something else that would arise and stimulate him again. He also wanted to give back and contribute in some meaningful way to the homeland he so loves. "I lived and worked and traveled in Israel for five decades. I wanted something different, something suitable for someone of my age and experience. There are lots of programs out there to get young people to go to Israel, but not much for the Boomers - mature people like me."

Leventhal sought the assistance of Columbus

CTA, from page 2
ish educators in the country. He has a sterling reputation and his great accomplishments in Charleston, Cleveland and Boca Raton are well-known. Everyone in the CTA community is very excited that Rabbi Levine will be coming in as the new Head of School. I have no doubt that he will lead the school to new heights," said Rabbi Zvi Kahn, current Headmaster at CTA.

Originally from Worcester, Massachusetts, Rabbi Levine served as the Secular Studies assistant principal for a small yeshiva in Queens. He then moved to Charleston, South Carolina in 1972, to serve, first as assistant principal for one year and subsequently as Head of School for fifteen years, of the Adlestone Hebrew Academy, a co-ed day school affiliated with the orthodox synagogue in that community.

In 1988, Rabbi Levine became Head of School at Mizrahi School in Cleveland. At that time, the school consisted of 50 students in K-5 and rented rooms in a public school building. Twelve years later, the school had an enrollment of approximately 340 students in nursery through Grade 12. In addition, during Rabbi Levine's tenure, the school secured a major grant that helped purchase the campus and the school, which is now known as Fuchs Mizrahi.

In 2000, he was invited to serve as Head of School at Hillel Day School of Boca Raton, a modern orthodox, Zionist day school. Fourteen years later, enrollment stands at a record 480 students. The budget is balanced, fundraising is up, tuition is stable with no tuition increase for the coming school year, and 98% of students are already enrolled for next year.

Rabbi Levine has made several visits to Columbus and has already met with administrators, staff, board members, and lay leaders to work on the transition. Beginning in late summer, the community will be invited to meet Rabbi Levine and his wife Breindel, and welcome them to Columbus.

HOLOCAUST, from page 2

ultimate goal of the Holocaust perpetrators and went on to live productive and purposeful lives.

"The memorial represents the embodiment of our national anthem's refrain '... the land of the free and the home of the brave.'"

"The 42nd Rainbow Division liberated my father from Allach, a Dachau sub-camp, in April, 1945," says Jackie Jacobs, Executive Director of the Columbus Jewish Foundation. "The US troops were advancing down a road toward Munich when, by chance, they heard about the Dachau concentration camp. As the Americans approached the camp, they came across open box cars loaded with 1500 dead pris-

oners, mostly naked, all skin and bone, many with bullet holes in the back of their heads. The first US soldier who arrived at Allach was George Thomann from Akron, Ohio, who announced to the prisoners "You are free! He and the other American soldiers then liberated Achau's 6000 non-Jewish and 3000 Jewish prisoners, including my father.

"We are obliged to teach of the evil consequences of state-sponsored hatred, and equally important, must honor those who risked their lives to protect our moral and ethical codes of justice. The Ohio Statehouse Memorial serves both purposes on the very grounds of our state government. It is a stark reminder of the depths to which humanity can sink, and is a glorious tribute to all Ohio veterans who fought the devil and won."

The memorial project is a public-private partnership that originated in 2011 at the Annual Governor's Holocaust Commemoration, where Governor Kasich tasked Ohio Jewish Communities to work with him to create a Holocaust Memorial at the Statehouse in remembrance of all the victims, and those Ohioans who participated in the liberation of the death camps during World War II.

In March 2012, Governor Kasich signed the legislation authorizing the creation of the memorial with oversight of the project being given to the Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board and the Ohio Arts Council.

"We are blessed in our state to have a Governor who cares about the history and lessons that Jews and Judaism offer the world," says Brad Kastan, Past President of Columbus Jewish Foundation. "Through his passionate efforts around the construction of the Ohio Holocaust Memorial, Governor Kasich pays the ultimate respect to those who were murdered by insuring that they did not die in vain. Our community owes a debt of gratitude to him, and we will reap the rewards of this gift for generations to come.

"We can also take great pride in the leadership of the Columbus Jewish Foundation for providing the initial funding for this project, ensuring its success," he says.

Studio Daniel Libeskind won the international competition for the memorial in 2013. Libeskind established his architectural studio in Berlin, Germany, in 1989 after winning the competition to build the Jewish Museum in Berlin. In February 2003, Studio Daniel Libeskind moved from Berlin to New York City when he was selected as the master planner for the World Trade Center redevelopment.

ADL, from page 4

Semitism was well above the regional average of 22 percent. Baker explained that South Koreans have an intense curiosity about Jews,

and that they make up the largest number of visitors to Europe's Holocaust museums and sites of former concentration camps. In that way, canards the survey considers signs of anti-Semitism can be considered cultural aspirations outside of the Western world, according to Baker.

Yet despite the criticisms, experts agree that ADL's survey should serve as a baseline for understanding world anti-Semitism. In Gerstenfeld's estimation, the study "confirms what we have known, [what] is being hushed up by all kinds of whitewashers of [the anti-Semitism of] Muslims."

"We are being told, and the administration in the U.S. is part of [it], that you have radical Muslims and then you have perfectly moderate Muslims, and [the moderates] are the majority and they are two distinct groups," he said. "That is nonsense! I have been saying that for years and this study proves it."

The Wiesenthal Center's Cooper believes that at the very least "it's important that the ADL did the report," and that the results should be a call to the Jewish community to unite against anti-Semitism. In a Jewish world often divided along denominational, political, and ideological lines, the survey might be "an important building block" in getting Jews to understand that "we have a lot of enemies out there," he told *JNS.org*.

AJC's Baker compared the ADL survey to an "enormous panorama photo with so many countries."

"Thinking back to when my kids were in high school, there was always a class photo," he said. "They'd have all these kids on a set of risers, maybe there's 300 of them, and this special panoramic camera that could capture all of them. It's a great picture, but if you're really looking for your own kid, you'll do much better if you have your own photos."

According to ADL's Salberg, studies with narrower focuses may indeed be in the cards.

"We might survey a few countries each year or every few years," he said. "We are discussing it."

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LEVENTHAL, from page 1

cally agreed. "The three-week, small group pilot project for SVF I am helping organize is planned for this coming December. Our small group of 12-14 persons will be residing at the lovely Hotel Eden, a small inn in the Talpiot neighborhood. Volunteers will be involved in their work from Sunday through Wednesday, spend Thursdays touring Jerusalem and experience quality dining and cultural programs during their stay," he says.

"We are thrilled to be partnering with Aaron," says Gamoran. "In our past programs, housing and after hours activities were 'on

your own.' He is helping us add that important social aspect to the project so I don't have to worry about our participants becoming unhappy because they feel lonely," she said. "It will give those volunteers social enrichment and a better context for the work they are doing. Many people go to Israel multiple times in multiple ways, We are helping them, as they get older, find ways to add 'capital' by their volunteer contribution. And we expect that those mature volunteers will continue advocacy and support for Israel when they return home."

Leventhal is planning to use his extensive travel experience over the years to develop a comprehensive list of potential residence, dining and touring options for volunteers. The program in December is a pilot program which if successful will be used as a model for future group volunteer projects.

When retired English teacher, Chip Kogan of Cleveland signed on for the program this past year, he says his reason for going was partially selfish. "I hate winters in Cleveland," he says. "The program takes place in February; my wife is an accountant so I hardly see her during that time of year, so off I went. The climate was awesome: 76 degrees and picture perfect scenery. It was stunningly beautiful. I think we had 1-1/2 days of rain at the most."

Although his career had been in teaching, Kogan was looking for something else. He ended up working in a project near the Egyptian border, creating a mosaic wall on a recycling center at Nitzana Youth Village. As an added bonus, his daughter accompanied him and worked with him on the project.

"In my life I have done a lot of community service projects; was a youth counselor - but with those things you just come and go. You feel good for the moment, but you move on - you pass through. But we were there, living in the community 24/7 for three weeks. And the people couldn't have been nicer. In this project, I felt like we were able to leave a permanent imprint on the community. It felt good to be appreciated for giving of yourself for doing something altruistically and at the same time, feeling you were appreciated and valued for what you did.

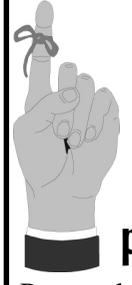
"I love meeting new people and traveling. When I am at home and retired, I find I often lapse into autopilot; watch TV, whatever is on. But over there I found I wrote more, read more. It was just a great way to recharge."

For more information about the upcoming volunteer residency in Jerusalem Dec. 3-23, contact Aaron Leventhal www.leventhaltravel.com; 614-506-9666, or Marla

Gamoran at mgamoran@skilledvolunteersisrael.org.

(ed. note: This is the beginning of a three part series of Columbus based travel journalist, Aaron Leventhal, and his experiences in Jerusalem this past February.)

Pam Spence is editor of the OJC.



Don't forget free publicity

Press releases for the Ohio Jewish Chronicle should be e-mailed by Noon on Friday for the following week's publication.

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- Bus passes for commuting to volunteer placement
- Basic medical travel insurance

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