

February 3, 2008

Orangetown Jewish Center plans big birthday celebration for Israel

Hema Easley

The Journal News

After months of planning, the Orangetown Jewish Center has announced it will host a 60-day celebration ahead of the 60th anniversary of Israel's independence.

Called "60-60: 60 Days and 60 Ways to Celebrate Israel," the extravaganza will include music, food, movies, lectures, dances, concerts and language classes, among other things. The celebration will begin March 8 with a concert by Israeli-style rock group, Soulfarm, and will end with the simultaneous worldwide singing of the Israeli national anthem, "Hativka," and lighting of torches on May 7, the eve of Israel's Independence Day. A party is planned for the following day.

"Every single day at our synagogue there will be an activity to immerse our community in Israel," said Miriam Suchoff of New City, chairwoman of the celebration.

The Orangetown Jewish Center has 500 member families. Approximately 50 congregants are involved in organizing the 60-day celebration, which is open to the public. Many events are free.

"It is one of the largest undertakings that the synagogue has taken on because of the sheer number of people involved in the planning and execution," said Rabbi Craig Scheff. "We wanted to touch the people emotionally, spiritually and intellectually because people connect to Israel in many different ways."

Each day of the week will offer different kinds of events.

On Sundays, Israeli movies will be screened at the Orangetown Jewish Center. Special events are also planned, including an Israel Bonds Breakfast, a dinner honoring women, with a special tribute to Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, and the center's annual cantorial concert.

Ulpan, or Hebrew lessons for beginners, will be held on Mondays.

On Tuesdays, Israeli dancing lessons will be offered.

Wednesdays will bring different authors and speakers to the center, as well as programs exploring the holy sites of Israel. Some of the speakers include women from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a lecture from a former cultural attache of the Israeli embassy. There will be a field trip to Yeshiva University to view a photo exhibit on Jerusalem.

Thursdays will focus on food from Israel. Jamie Geller, author of "Quick and Kosher" will talk about her book one Thursday. A talk on the benefits of a Mediterranean diet, and visits to Israeli restaurants are planned.

On Virtual Fridays, all e-mail subscribers will be sent links to Israeli Web sites.

Saturdays will include concerts, cafe nights, cabaret-style entertainment and tastings of wines from Israel. Also, a visit from a master sommelier who will lead a discussion on wines is planned.

There will be simultaneous programs for children throughout the 60 days.

People who attend 36 or more programs will be entered into a drawing for a four-day free trip to Israel, Suchoff said.

Israel was carved out of Palestine and became an independent nation on May 8, 1948. It followed a long struggle for statehood and the Holocaust, which left 6 million Jews dead and millions more stranded in Europe.

The lure of Israel remains strong for many Jewish people, said Scheff, explaining the enthusiasm behind the activities.

"For many people, the very existence of Israel is a romantic ideal," said Scheff. "It's the realization of a dream that has lasted for centuries, even millennia, and a dream borne out of both hope and tragedy."
