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Group to rebuild bombed playground in Israel

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A team of congregants from the Orangetown Jewish Center will travel to northern Israel on Sunday to repair a playground that was destroyed by Hezbollah bombs earlier this year.

The 21 members - two of whom are teens - will travel to Kiryat Shemona in the Galilee to repair the playground.

They will stay at a kibbutz while there, said Rabbi Craig Scheff, spiritual leader of Orangetown Jewish Center and head of the mission.

Some of the participants will take time off from work to go on the trip, Scheff said. All are paying their own way.

"It's not a vacation week, obviously," he said. "People are sacrificing their time to partake in this mission."

The idea grew out of a Yom Kippur sermon Scheff gave this year, in which he spoke about what he felt was integral to American Jewish identity.

"I talked about the fact that there are many different ways to support Israel," he said, mentioning financial support and the purchase of Israel Bonds. "Ultimately, visiting Israel, going there, showing our solidarity, is the most important way."

After the sermon, he asked the congregation if anyone wanted to accompany him on a visit to Israel.

"And suddenly I had 20 responses to the invitation," he said. "We found a tour group that is actually running restoration projects in the Galilee and we signed up for one of these projects."

They initially were told they would be painting the interior of bomb shelters, or replanting forest damaged by the bombing.

The Lebanese-Israeli border was the focus of Hezbollah attacks in late August.

"I think everyone is very excited, because it connects us in a very real way with the people of Israel," said Scheff, whose 14-year-old son, Scott, is going with him.

Sharon Sanders of New City is among the participants, and is looking forward to her first visit to Israel. When she heard the rabbi speak about the opportunity, she said, "I knew right away it was just something I wanted to do."
