

Ariel Attracts Thousands of Tourists

Thursday, 15 January 2004

Since the start of the Jewish New Year, thousands of friends and supporters from all over the world have come to visit Ariel and show their support for the residents of the city. These visits have a great impact on the residents of Ariel. Tourists stay at the local hotel and shop in community stores. Most important of all, however, they meet and talk to the people, often expressing their concern and support and desire to help.

Just before Succoth, ALL NATIONS' CONVOCATION led by TOM HESS brought hundreds of Christian Zionists from all over the world to Ariel to demonstrate their support. The group had dinner at Eshel HaShomron, a beautiful resort hotel at the entrance to Ariel, and received an update on current affairs from Ariel Mayor, Ron Nachman. MISSION VALLEY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, led by Pastor Leo Giovanetti of San Diego, CA, is a community with special ties to Ariel. A group from Mission Valley visited Ariel in the beginning of October and enjoyed choir performances, a visit to Jubilee Junior High school and vine planting, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah (31:5). They also enjoyed home hospitality by the families of "For Zion's Sake", Ariel's teen entertainment troupe. Mission Valley has helped Ariel to absorb immigrants from the former Soviet Union. During this visit, Pastor Leo made Ariel the beneficiary of Mission Valley's annual gift to Israel.

That same week VICTORIA HEARST came to Ariel with the staff of Ridgway Christian Center. Victoria is a long-time friend and supporter of Ariel. She donated the tennis courts, funded the expansion of the Sheltered Workshop, and annually supports the Victoria Center for Handicapped Children. In addition to visiting these services and facilities, her group enjoyed a performance by "For Zion's Sake", Ariel's teenage singers and dancers. In keeping with her belief in the importance of helping the people of Israel, Victoria Hearst chose to help the city deal with several special social welfare needs.

THE LOS ANGELES JEWISH FEDERATION brought a legislative tour to Israel that included a visit to Ariel. Marty Karp, the Executive Director of the Israel office of the L. A. Federation, led the mission. The Los Angeles Federation has helped Ariel meet numerous emergency needs during these last three years of non-stop terror. L.A. City Council members Jack Weiss and Alex Padilla were among the group received by Ariel Mayor Ron Nachman, who presented his American colleagues with flags of Ariel in appreciation of their visit.

In November, ALEXANDER AND JEANNINE RAAB, long time supporters of Ariel's College of Judea and Samaria, visited with Mayor Ron Nachman. The Raabs donated dormitories and the Raab Building, which houses many of the academic activities of the College and have helped Ariel to provide facilities and services to ease the integration of immigrants. Upon hearing of the impact of the difficult economic times on some of Ariel's residents, Alex and Jeannine responded immediately with a very generous donation for needy families.

Later that week, two groups of Christian Zionists, one American and one British, visited Ariel. The American group was led by JON KLEIN of the FELLOWSHIP CHURCH in Casselberry, Florida and the British was a combined EXOBUS/CHRISTIANS FOR ISRAEL group led by Phil Hunter. Both groups enjoyed performances by the Russian Immigrant Senior Citizens' Choir. This Choir has a special relationship with Phil Hunter for it was Exobus which organized a five city tour of the Ukraine for twenty members of the Choir, to encourage the Jews remaining there to immigrate to Israel.

A delegation from the HOUSTON JEWISH FEDERATION that included Executive Director Lee Wunsch, Federation Chairman Benjamin Warren and Campaign Director Susanne Jacobson visited in November 2003. They toured Ariel, the adjacent army base and Ariel's R & D Center. Mayor Ron Nachman, who lunched with the guests, commended them for taking the initiative of coming to Ariel to see for themselves.

Members of the LIGHTHOUSE CHURCH in Mexico, N.Y. came to Ariel to perform a rock concert for the students of Ariel's Jubilee Junior High School. The music focused on praise for the G-d of Israel and had Ariel teens clapping and stamping their feet to the music. A great time was had by all.

Over 100 members of Hadassah Women visited Ariel. Led by Marlene Post, the group was given a full tour of the city, enjoyed a performance by the Senior Citizens Choir and received a security briefing from Ariel Mayor, Ron Nachman. The visit, Hadassah's second since Israeli Independence Day, was part of a fact-finding tour and expression of solidarity.

A delegation of young people from ROCK CHURCH in San Diego enjoyed an exciting visit to Ariel that included a rescue exercise at the Samaria Rescue and Intervention Station and rappelling from the roof of the Raab Building of the College of Judea and Samaria. GEORGE AND SUSAN ETTINGER, dear friends from Bournemouth, England joined the group for a tour of the city. The Ettingers, long time supporters of Ariel, were delighted not only to see how beautiful the city looks but also how the city continues to grow and provide for the needs of its citizens.

AMERICANS FOR A SAFE ISRAEL spent their first night in Israel at the Eshel HaShomron Hotel where they enjoyed an exhilarating performance by our teenage entertainment troupe "For Zion's Sake". AFSI groups always include Ariel in their tours as a sign of solidarity with the residents of Judea and Samaria.

The next day a group sponsored by CHRISTIANS FOR ISRAEL from HOLLAND visited Ariel. As they do every year, this group donated tulip bulbs to beautify the city and bring joy to the residents of Ariel.

At a time when there is so little tourism to Israel, over 100 Christian Zionists joined the BRIDGES FOR PEACE delegation on a visit to Ariel. The night before their visit, strong rains -- a blessing for Israel -- made vine planting impossible but with the spirit of support so characteristic of Bridges For Peace, a virtual vine planting ceremony was held in the Sports Center. Later the vines were planted in the names of the participants. During their visit, Bridges For Peace International President, Clarence Wagner presented Mayor Nachman with a gift to fund a Mobile Situation Room for Ariel's Security Department.

That same afternoon, a mission sponsored by the JEWISH NATIONAL FUND of Germany toured Ariel and met with Ariel Mayor Ron Nachman in order to gain a better understanding of the realities of everyday life in Samaria.

THE WOMEN'S PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, an international group of women dedicated to improving international relations, chose to visit with two communities when they came together in Israel. The group, led by well-known Israeli feminist, Professor Alice Shalvi, met with women in both Ramallah and in Ariel. Ariel women shared their views, their reasons for living in Ariel and their hopes for peace with their guests from around the world. Included in the group was Member of Knesset Yuli Tamir.

In December, dear friend of Ariel, Ray Mallel and Rabbi Daniel Bouskila of the SEPHARDIC TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL in Los Angeles visited Ariel with a specific purpose in mind. They came to convey their community's desire to help needy families during this difficult economic time. They visited Ariel's Rescue and Intervention Station. These firefighters have voluntarily formed a charitable organization to help the needy with weekly food parcels. Ray Mallel and Rabbi Bouskila presented them with a very generous contribution to help the organization help others.

PAT ROBERTSON, the well-known American Evangelist, came to Ariel to interview Mayor Ron Nachman regarding the ramifications of the separation fence and to see for himself the realities of life in the largest city in Samaria. Robertson was extremely impressed by the size of Ariel, the amount of industry in and around the city and by the College of Judea and Samaria. As familiar as he is with Israel, Robertson reported in a live broadcast to the States, he was not aware of how much Ariel had developed in recent years.

During Chanukah, a group of members of CONGREGATION BETH TIKVAH of Montreal, Canada led by Rabbi Mordechai Zeitz visited with Ariel Mayor Ron Nachman in Ariel's Caf? Internet. The mayor led the group on a tour of the city that included the regional industrial area in Barkan.

In December, WALTER SCHECHINGER, a Christian Zionist from Germany, who is a great supporter of the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria, visited with us once again. Walter and his wife bring groups to the Eshel Hashomron Hotel and to visit Ariel almost monthly. He plans on bringing his largest group ever at the end of January.

BILL COWAN and CHUCK NASH, military analysts for FOX NEWS visited Ariel to learn more about the security situation, the separation fence and its ramifications on the prospects for peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

Bruce and Heather Johnston, longtime friends of Ariel and owners of the JH Ranch in northern California, have hosted teens from Ariel several times in their Second Wind program. In January, Bruce and Heather came to Ariel with the staff of the JH Ranch. They were hosted by Ariel families and enjoyed numerous activities with Ariel's youth groups. Some highlights of their visit included an evening of song and dance by "For Zion's Sake" and Ariel soldiers now serving in the IDF entertainment troupes; they also welcomed in the Sabbath with the soldiers on Antenna Hill adjacent to Ariel and participated in a "Café Dilemma" program?group discussions of problems relevant to young people everywhere, such as the fight against terror, rising anti-Semitism, hate sites on the Internet and ways for Christians and Jews to work together.