

# Clevelanders get up-close look at FIDF at work

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Lane Schlessel, executive director of the Ohio chapter of Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, proudly talks about the range of support services IDF soldiers receive.

Last year, Schlessel led a group of IDF supporters on a mission to Israel so they could see for themselves the day-to-day impact of these programs on the soldiers. It was so successful, he said, that another mission – Ohio FIDF Guys Mission 2015 – was organized for this year.

“I feel it is my job to bring people to Israel and share with them what our soldiers are doing in Israel,” he said. “The idea is to see what is happening firsthand on the bases with the soldiers, to have these people be one-on-one with the soldiers and to hear from them.

“Our whole mission is we support the education and well-being of the soldiers, so we went on this mission to see how we’re supporting them and to see what they need.”

Dan Geller of Orange coordinated and helped organize this year’s trip of 12 men, including Schlessel, to Israel Oct. 26 through Nov. 5.

“All of us collectively decided we wanted to do something to help the soldiers,” Geller said. “This was important for me (to support the FIDF) because I got to see on a daily basis how the soldiers are so focused on protecting Israel.

“The army bases are not posh or lavish, and to be able to give the soldiers some relaxation or comfort with an outdoor picnic area or an indoor lounge, it’s greatly appreciated, and it goes to their mental and physical well-being.”

Ten of the 12 men had been to Israel before, and all but one are Jewish.

“They weren’t all previous supporters, but my guess is they will be now,” Schlessel said.

## TRIP EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS

Geller and Dan Ungar, another participant, who lives in Solon, said the mission exceeded their expectations.

“We got to see with our own eyes what the soldiers endure on a daily basis and how the military supports and protects our country,” Ungar said. “These young men and women quite literally put their lives on the line for the state of Israel and the Jewish people.”

Geller, making his fourth trip to Israel, said the group had a tour guide who “was like a college professor.”

“He knew every inch of the country,” he said. “It was like being in a college classroom as we rode in our tour bus.

“What left the greatest impression on me was the incredible detail that Israel



Participants in the Ohio FIDF Guys Mission 2015 visit with a soldier from the Israel Defense Forces during a stop at Rosh Hanikra, a geologic formation in northwestern Israel. From left, they are, front row, Dan Ungar, Jan Kriwinsky, Lane Schlessel; back row, Larry Weisman, Mitch Lapin, Vova Chernomoretz, Larry Newman, Chuck Klypchak, unidentified IDF soldier, Brent Garson, Dan Geller, Rick Rzepka and Jeff Nash. | Photo / Dan Geller

does on a daily basis – in time, labor and equipment – to protect our borders. We learned from our training how polite and respectful the soldiers are of the citizens of both Israel and of Gaza and the West Bank.”

Geller said one of the highlights for him came when the group had “real urban combat shooting training” in the Gush Etzion region, near the settlement of Efrat.

“We got trained by the equivalent of an Israeli Rambo soldier on how to shoot,” he said. “We each shot over 30 rounds of live ammunition at targets, firing from M16 Israeli combat rifles.”

Another highlight, Geller said, was stopping at a moshav – a cooperative community of farmers – while driving through the Negev and getting a tour of the greenhouses, where they grow “beautiful green peppers.”

“It was a beautiful example of the cooperation that’s possible between neighbors and the country,” he said.

## ‘WE WERE ALL GIDDY’

A high point for Ungar, who had been to Israel twice before, came when the group saw a tank brigade along the road and stopped for an impromptu visit.

“Because we were wearing FIDF garb, we had near-unfettered access to the men and the machines,” he said. “Like little boys with tanks, we were all giddy and having a great time.”

Another highlight, Ungar said, was visiting the various military bases and seeing what the IDF does, how it operates, and the needs of the soldiers and the bases.

they have received from the FIDF in support of their well-being. For me, that was moving.”

## NEVER FEARED FOR SAFETY

Geller and Ungar both said they never feared for their safety while they were there, despite the violence taking place in Israel at that time.

“I know none of the participants (ever felt unsafe),” Schlessel said. “We went during some questionable times still happening in Israel, but yet we were able to go. Shop owners in many of the places we went to thanked us for coming; they and others let us know it was appreciated.

“We weren’t afraid to come to Israel. I think the great message for all of us is that things are going on, but we’re still in support.”

Schlessel said some men already have expressed interest returning to Israel next year, and the chapter is considering adding a “ladies’ mission since the guys’ was so successful.”

“Many organizations do trips and tours of Israel, but to be able to do a mission with the FIDF and soldiers is really a special opportunity that I want to open up to everybody in the Ohio chapter,” he said.

“One of the next missions we’re doing nationally is a trip to Poland and Israel in May. We travel directly with the IDF for the entire mission. What a way to experience the past and the present with the IDF soldiers.”

Anyone interested in taking part in a future FIDF mission to Israel should call Schlessel at 216-586-5641.

“What was really cool was seeing FIDF plaques on some of the facilities where the FIDF has generously donated,” he said. “We got to see our philanthropic dollars at work.”

Schlessel spotlighted a private dinner the group had at its hotel with five Israeli soldiers, including several Lone Soldiers – servicemen or women without any immediate family in Israel.

“They came to share with us how much they appreciated the support from North America,” he said. “Specifically, they were able to share some of the gifts

## South Russell man goes extra miles for FIDF

Robert Myers of South Russell was one of 40 American supporters of Friends of the Israel Defense Forces who took part in the FIDF’s Israel on Two Wheels Cycling Tour in late October.

The group biked the length of Israel – 400 miles from the Galilee hills in the north to the Red Sea in the south – visiting IDF bases along the route to show support for Israel’s soldiers.

Also joining the tour were eight wounded Israeli veterans, all of whom are participants in FIDF’s Strides Program, which provides advanced athletic prosthetics to wounded IDF veterans so they can participate in and enjoy sports.

“If it had been only a cycling experience, that would have been amazing by itself,” Myers said in a press release. “Being introduced to Israel – on my bike and accompanied by those who had given so much to defend the land – was a whole other level of amazing.

“Cresting the Eilat Mountains with the recent memory of Mount Hermon in my mind and the Red Sea lying before me is something I’ll never forget.”

The riders began in the northwest corner of Israel near the Mediterranean Sea and climbed the Galilee foothills heading to Mount Hermon, the tallest peak in Israel. They crossed the volcanic Golan Heights near Syria and then descended into the Jordan Valley before reaching the lowest point on Earth, the Dead Sea.

From there, the participants rode south through Israel’s Negev Desert to the Red Sea.

– Ed Wittenberg

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## Blatt to appear at FIDF screening Dec. 9

Jerusalem U and Friends of the Israel Defense Forces will host a screening of "Beneath the Helmet: From High School to the Home Front" at 8 p.m. Dec. 9 at Cinemark Valley View, 6001 Canal Road in Valle View.

The screening will be followed by remarks from Cleveland Cavaliers head coach David Blatt. Doors open at 7:15.

Tickets are \$10 for general admission and \$54 for admission and a VIP reception.

For more information or to register, call 818-427-5844 or email [sperlin@jerusalemu.org](mailto:sperlin@jerusalemu.org). The Cleveland Jewish News is a sponsor.

## Fuchs Mizrachi's Chanukah Chidon Dec. 6

Fuchs Mizrachi School in Beachwood will hold its Chanukah Chidon Finale Dec. 6 at the school. It's the culminating event for the chidon, a six-week process in which all students in grades one through five are involved. Malkie Ginsburg, Fuchs' lower school principal, said teachers in those grades teach about various Jewish laws related to Chanukah.

Fifteen students have been selected as finalists, and the winners will be announced at the finale. Each class will also make a presentation.

The first-place winner will receive a bicycle. The event is sponsored by Judy Kirchick of Beachwood in memory of her husband, Cal Kirchick, who was an avid bike rider. The program is open only to parents and the school community. More than 300 people are expected to attend, Ginsburg said.

## WEST SIDE | 23

Temple B'nai Abraham, at 530 Gulf Road in Elyria, will have a Chanukah luncheon at 11:30 a.m. Dec. 13 – the seventh day of Chanukah – at the temple.

The menu includes latkes, hot dogs, a deli tray, side dishes and dessert. The event is open to the public. Cost is \$13. Children are admitted free. RSVP by Dec. 7 to Marcia Demby at 440-458-4548 or [mardemby@icloud.com](mailto:mardemby@icloud.com).

Temple B'nai Abraham, led by Rabbi Lauren Werber, is also having a Chanukah pot luck party and service at 6 p.m. Dec. 4 at a congregant's home. If interested, call 440-366-1171. The temple is also having a Chanukah family service and consecration for Shabbat at 7 p.m. Dec. 11 and is doing a Coats for Kids collection. New or gently used coats of any size may be brought to the temple through the end of Chanukah.

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