

Community news

Canada-Israel Committee's Judy Zelikovitz 'a one-woman team'

She provides 'resources' to Canadian groups interested in 'pro-Israel advocacy'

By MATT BELLAN

The Canada-Israel Committee is the "pro-Israel advocacy voice" of Canada's organized Jewish community.

Its mandate, as Judy Zelikovitz puts it, is to "positively affect the...relationship" between Canada and Israel.

And it's Zelikovitz's job to help Canada's pro-Israel Jews and non-Jews accomplish as much as possible, in that area.

"I'm a one-woman team," Zelikovitz said during a visit to Winnipeg last week from her home base in Toronto. She was contrasting herself with the CIC's "government relations team in Ottawa", and "communications team in Toronto".

Zelikovitz, the CIC's national manager of community services, provides "resources" to Jewish and other organizations in Canada that want to get involved in "pro-Israel advocacy".

"I travel around the country, giving workshops to



JUDY ZELIKOVITZ: She presents "resources" to Jewish and other organizations in Canada that want to get involved in "pro-Israel advocacy".

interested people," Zelikovitz said. "Anybody in the pro-Israel advocacy milieu - not necessarily Jewish audiences."

In Winnipeg, among others, she met with members of Bridges for Peace, a Christian organization that supports the Jewish state, members of Congregation Shaarey Zedek, and the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg's Community Relations Committee.

"It's a real pleasure to come to Winnipeg," Zelikovitz said. That's partly because her father, Dr. Jack Olin, was born and raised here, and partly because this city's Jewish community is so pro-Zionist.

In her presentations, she often points out Israel's "phenomenal achievements," as it celebrates its 60th anniversary.

Zelikovitz emphasizes that Israel has "managed to integrate" immigrants from the around the world. It's also a democracy, and at the forefront in science, technology, education and other fields.

She tailors her messages to different groups. Younger audiences, for example, may not be as impressed with Israel's history of survival as older adults, despite the "ongoing existential threat" the Jewish state faces. For those younger groups, she often mentions Israeli accomplishments in areas they're interested in.

"ICQ - instant (text) messaging - was created in Israel. It's the main way for kids to communicate with each other. How many kids know that?"

Zelikovitz also emphasizes that "Israel is a leader in environmental issues and strategies."

Israeli researchers have found ways, for example, of distilling salt water using solar energy, harnessing some of the heat that results for other uses, and using the purified water to "raise freshwater fish."

Asked how the CIC addresses another challenge - increasingly assertive younger Canadian Muslims championing Palestinian rights, and sometimes stridently critical of Israel - Zelikovitz emphasizes that Israel's "first and foremost goal" is to "have peace with its neighbors."

"We support a two-state solution. We believe Israel was founded to be a Jewish state. We also believe there will be a time when there will be a viable state for the Palestinians that will require a lot of support from Canadians."

In offering support to the Palestinians or "any other group around the world," Zelikovitz added, the Canadian government must also ensure there are "checks and balances" in place, to ensure the money is "being spent responsibly."

Asked how she responded to the federal New Democratic Party's decision several weeks ago to retreat on its support for the Canadian government plan to boycott Durban II, Zelikovitz expressed dissatisfaction with that.

"Our view has been from the get-go that...Durban II was turning into a very similar process as Durban I," she said, referring to an international United Nations conference against racism in South Africa seven years ago that became a forum for Israel-bashing and anti-Semitism.

"We're very proud...three parties in our (federal) government and leaders of the opposition said Canada would not be participating. We're disappointed the NDP would consider changing their position."

She hoped NDP leader Jack Layton would get "more information" about how planning for Durban II so far suggests it will repeat the Israel-bashing of Durban I, "will see things the way (other) Canadians do, and will also support the position of our government."

New girls' group off and running

Rosh Hodesh group builds self-esteem, leadership skills, Jewish identity

By REBECA KUROPATWA

"Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl's Thing!" is a new program available to young women this fall.

And, according to Sherry Wolfe-Elazar, group facilitator (and Judaic studies teacher at Gray Academy of Jewish Education), what the girls discuss in the group is "just what you want your daughter to be talking about."

Feeling that Winnipeg really needed more programs geared toward teens, Wolfe-Elazar did some searching, and found the Girl's Thing group online.

The group meets once a month, as part of a Rosh Hodesh program created by "Moving Traditions," an organization with over 300 groups in North America.

Winnipeg is the second Canadian city to start it up, after Vancouver.

The six-year-old program is based on the Jewish tradition of women's New Moon celebrations that build the self-esteem, leadership skills, Jewish identity, and friendship networks of adolescent girls.

"Each month, the girls talk about a different subject," said Wolfe-Elazar. "The focus is always on strong Jewish women, and about topics like body image, stress, popularity, relationships, and intolerance."

The group is designed as a celebratory, empowering experience, where girls can support each other and also have a good time.

"For the month of Kislev, we talked about Chanukah and the Temple rededication," said Wolfe-Elazar. "From this, we got into the idea of how 'your body is your temple,' through things like yoga, body habits, art, drama, writing, and reading."

The Winnipeg group meets in members' homes for about two hours, usually on the Sunday evening closest to the beginning of the month (for the duration of the school year). Each girl hosts one program a year, providing the meeting space for private discussion, arts and crafts, and refreshments. Host moms are invited to sit in on the discussion.



Girls at a Rosh Hodesh group gathering. Back row, from left: Adi Farage, Baillie Shuster, Meital Kraut and Jessica Meyers. Front row, from left: Yona Lazar, Ava Garfinkel and Jana Elazar. Missing: Rebecca Chess, Dena Stitz and Alexis Daien.

different perspectives, and that gives you a new way of looking at things."

Stitz, who likes learning about women's roles in the Torah and Jewish history, said it was interesting to learn about Queen Esther, and how "because she was a woman and married to the king, she was able to save the Jewish people."

Grade 7 student Jana Elazar said she gets a lot out of the group. "It's really supportive, and it's nice to be able to talk about whatever we need to talk about."

At one meeting, Elazar said the group discussed cliques. "It was really interesting to hear how the other girls felt. We also read an article about how popular girls feel about their popularity. It gives you a new way of seeing things."

Grade 7 student Adi Farage said she likes that there are girls from all different schools in the group. "You can talk about all kinds of issues, but it feels anonymous. We don't have to say who we're talking about, but we can still solve our problems."

Around Purim, Farage said the group got into a discussion about anti-Semitism and racism. "The group is a safe place to talk about things," she said.

Farage said "it's really important for girls my age to talk about what's going on in their lives, to get a better understanding of things."

To find out more about this program, e-mail tshalom@mts.net or visit www.roshhodesh.org

The writer is a Jewish Winnipeg freelancer.