

State&Local

# Tel Aviv mayor celebrates famed Israeli school

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Special to NJ Jewish News

Tel Aviv mayor Ron Huldai was the guest speaker at a local screening of a film celebrating an Israeli school that caters to the underprivileged children of immigrants and foreign workers.

“Education was always my most favorite vocation and is currently one of the most important issues for Jewish people and the State of Israel,” said Huldai, a former high school principal, speaking at the Leon & Toby Cooperman JCC, Ross Family Campus, in West Orange on June 26.

A large crowd attended his address and a screening of *Strangers No More*, a 40-minute film that won the 2010 Academy Award for Best Short Documentary in February.

The event was sponsored by the Legow Family Israel Program Center of United Jewish Communities of MetroWest NJ in celebration of Israel’s 63rd birthday.

The film chronicles several months in the lives of students at Tel Aviv’s Bialik-Rogozin School, which caters to children from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. The film focuses on the progress of three students in particular — Mohammed, who escaped to Tel Aviv on his own from Sudan following his father’s murder; Esther, who came to Tel Aviv with her father after her mother was killed in South Africa; and Johannes, an Ethiopian refugee and one of several children his hard-working father struggled to support on an expiring work visa.

Conceived as part of Tel Aviv’s centennial celebration in 2009, *Strangers No More* was the brain-child of the Tel Aviv Foundation in conjunction with HBO and other supporters.

At the screening, Dr. Meggie



Hosting a screening of the award-winning Israeli documentary *Strangers No More* at the Cooperman JCC in West Orange on June 26 are, from left, Noga Maliniak, executive *shliha* for the Legow Family Israel Program Center of MetroWest; Dr. Meggie Navon, U.S. operating director for the Tel Aviv Foundation; Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai; Max Kleinman, executive vice president of United Jewish Communities of MetroWest NJ; and Josh Weston, chair of the Tel Aviv Foundation of North America.

Photo by Susan Bloom

Navon, the foundation’s United States operating director for special projects, explained how the organization felt it was imperative to “tell the story” of the school’s existence and success.

“The film shows how Tel Aviv is not only focusing on its own issues but also practicing Jewish values in caring for others,” Navon said.

Josh Weston of Montclair, chair of the Tel Aviv Foundation of North America, agreed.

“Anyone in this country who cares about Israel should want to know more than just the basic headlines, and this is one of those important stories,” he told the gathering. “It’s not every day that an Israeli documentary wins an Oscar.”

South Orange resident Ilisia Kissner was particularly interested in the movie: Her son Amriel volunteered at the Bialik-Rogozin

### About ‘Strangers’

*STRANGERS NO MORE* is currently being screened in film festivals nationwide and internationally and is scheduled to appear on HBO in 2012. For more information on the Bialik-Rogozin School contact the New York City branch of the Tel Aviv Foundation at 212-447-6070.

School from 2005 to 2006.

“This film really portrays the Jewish heart and soul and the close relationship between children, teachers, the school, and the entire community in Israel,” Kissner told NJN. “There is so much care put into education at the school and the teachers are so dedicated. They help the students, no questions asked, just because they want them to have a better life.”

Huldai, who retired as a brigadier general after 26 years with the Israeli Air Force, was principal of the historic Herzliya Gymnasia. He is serving his third term as Tel Aviv’s mayor.

He acknowledged that the recent large influx of both documented and illegal foreigners to Tel Aviv has created some economic concerns for the vibrant city of three million. But he staunchly defended the right of all residents of his city to be treated like Israelis and receive a free education.

“The city of Tel Aviv is a tool that represents good values and exchanges ideas with the world,” he said. “These people in my city are not invisible. A human being is a human being, and it is our obligation to provide them with the services they need for a better way of life.”



Students at Tel Aviv’s Bialik-Rogozin School, from *Strangers No More*.

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