

State & Local

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a second home. I can't imagine my life without the Tennis Center."

Henri Doukhan, 14, who made aliya from France by himself six years ago to join his sister in Israel, both lives and trains at ITC in Ramat Hasharon. He described the tremendous improvement in his athletic abilities, grades, language skills, and outlook since enrolling in the center a year ago.

The youngest visitor was Oshri Ayalo, nine, who made aliya from Ethiopia with his family within the past year and trains at the ITC in Ashkelon. He is learning both Hebrew and English and experiencing modern society for the first time. He said, in a bio provided by ITC, that he dreams of one day becoming "the first Ethiopian to represent Israel in the Davis Cup."

Alan Goldner of Mountain Lakes, president of the ITC Foundation, has long championed the centers and their mission, including a recent effort to expand its programs for Bedouin children.

"The kids benefit through the elite sport of tennis," said Goldner. "Tennis is an individual sport that each child plays on his or her own, but it requires discipline, has a dress code, and the kids must shake hands at the end, all activities that build character."

"From their diverse backgrounds, these kids acquire so many important life skills through the ITC and truly become champi-



During their visit to Short Hills are young Israel Tennis Center players, from left, Oshri Ayalo, Rachel Pashaev, Dana Kamyshev, and Henri Doukhan, along with ITC alumna Nadine Fahoum and coach Rakefet Benyamini.

ons of their families, schools, communities, and Israel."

The youngsters were accompanied on their Short Hills visit by Yoni Yair, development director at the ITC Foundation's Florida-based office; Rakefet Benyamini, manager of the Jaffa ITC; and ITC alum and star athlete Nadine Fahoum.

"We love Israel, kids, and tennis, so this has been a natural event for us to host," said Randi Sellinger, who with her husband, Eric, and Anna Fisch and Terri and Mark Friedman, chaired the event.

Benyamini came up through the

ITC herself, winning both an Israeli Junior and National Tennis Championship in 1981 at age 16; that background, she said, made her return to ITC as a manager in 2007 that much sweeter.

"We work with a lot of underprivileged children at our center and a smile or a hug from a kid means so much — it's the best feeling you can have," said Benyamini, 46. "We use the tool of tennis to upgrade their lives. If I can make

ITC alum joins staff to support its growth

THIS YEAR'S team of visiting ITC representatives included 22-year-old alumna Nadine Fahoum. A recent graduate of Duke University in North Carolina, she was a scholarship athlete who played first singles for the prestigious school for the last two years.

Fahoum, an Israeli Arab Muslim, started playing at the ITC in Haifa at age nine. She was also a participant in the center's Coexistence Program, which, she said, "brings Arab and Jewish children together at a time in their development when they're shaping their thoughts and opinions."

The program "helps reduce our fear of one another and teaches us how to work and live together and get along," she said.

Fahoum said that as a child she could "come to the ITC and be a kid, play tennis, and make friends. It keeps things natural and simple for kids, and I hope to bring this experience to other children in Israel."

She can anticipate fulfilling that hope as she was recently appointed to the position of ITC development associate at the organization's New York City office. "I love the game of tennis, and now I want to take my degree and give something back," Fahoum shared.

"I hope to raise awareness and funds to help bring more kids to the Tennis Centers in Israel to improve their quality of life. This program is very powerful and targets everyone, not just Jews, so it's something everyone should care about," said Fahoum. "It's impacted me and provided me with skills, experiences, and opportunities that have shaped my life in so many ways."

— SUSAN BLOOM

one child smile, I've had a good day. My dream is to bring as many children as possible to the Tennis Centers so we can help them build a better future. These children are the face and future of Israel."

When asked what he likes best

about the Israel Tennis Centers, Oshri did not hesitate to provide his answer in perfect English: "Everything," he exclaimed.

For more information on the ITC, visit www.israeltenniscenters.org.

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