



WORLD PEACE ADVOCATES—Tony Dimitroff, trustee of the Hansen Foundation and his wife Gail, active in the international women's movement, look over the program of the Peres Center for Peace in Tel Aviv.

THE JEWISH CITIZEN

Peace project funder pleased with where Fred J. Hansen's money goes in Mideast

By Donald H. Harrison



TEL AVIV—After attending an intensive three-day Peres Peace Center conference this week that attracted approximately 600 Israelis, 300 international visitors and 100 Palestinians, Tony Dimitroff, trustee of the Hansen Foundation, says he is quite pleased about the foundation's support for the Hansen Institute for World Peace.

The San Diego State University-based Hansen Institute for World Peace has been partnering for the last 10 years with the Peres Peace Center in a program that has led to Israeli and Arab farmers trading agricultural methodologies and technologies. Prior to the formation of the Peres Peace Center, the Hansen Institute carried out the program with Shimon Peres' encouragement but under its own auspices.

At the conference which was based at the Dan Tel Aviv Hotel, Dimitroff saw not only how well this program has been received by Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians and Moroccans, but also how it fits into the overall campaign of the Peres Peace Center to provide Israelis and Arabs with positive people-to-people experiences.

Besides the agricultural program, which now plans to bring to market an oil blended from Israeli and Palestinian olives, the Peres Peace Center showcased people-to-people programs that brings together Israelis and Palestinians in such fields as sports, journalism, photography, entertainment, internet technology, youth politics, and economic development.

Dimitroff, with his wife Gail, attended panel sessions and two special evening events: the inauguration of the yet-unfinished Peres Peace House in Jaffa, and a special peace concert bringing together such well known international entertainers as Andrea Bocelli, Mercedes Sosa, Gustavo Santaolalla and the Canadian Tenors, with Israeli singers Achinoam Nini and Liel Kolet.

In between events, Dimitroff caucused with representatives of San Diego State University in attendance at the convention, including SDSU President Stephen Weber; Bonnie Stewart, executive director of the Hansen Institute for World Peace; Sandy Ehrlich, Qualcomm executive director of SDSU's Entrepreneurial Management Center, and Marvin Spira, a food marketing consultant.

Long an attorney with the San Diego law firm of Jennings, Engrand and Henrikson, Dimitroff succeeded to the position of trustee of the Hansen Foundation upon the death in 2000 of his friend and law firm partner Rick Henrikson. At that time the joint project with the Peres Peace Center was the only project of the Hansen Foundation, which was created by the will left by Hansen in 1974.

Dimitroff did not know Hansen personally but was quite familiar with the philanthropist's biography. Hansen immigrated to the United States from Denmark in the late 19th century and served as an executive of the Cyclone Fence Company. Retiring with what was in the 1920s a fortune of \$500,000, he moved to Southern California where he became active in real estate investment, laying out numerous neighborhoods in East County including those around Mount Helix. He came up with the idea of selling large lots already planted with avocado groves, with prospective buyers having the option of having the trees cared for by an avocado cooperative and being paid for the trees' yield. Such payments could help amortize the cost of the land.

Some streets in Hansen-developed neighborhoods were named after avocado varieties such as Fuerte and Queen, as well as after the California Avocado marketing cooperative, Calavo, said Dimitroff, who as a resident of La Mesa is quite familiar with these streets.

After taking over the trust in 2000, Dimitroff decided to expand the Foundation's investments to three other projects, one at the University of San Diego, and two others at San Diego State University. The USD project backs the "Women Peacemakers" program of the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice. It brings to the campus for stays of two months four women from areas in conflict, providing them with apartments to live in and professional

writers to help them write their autobiographies. The women interact with each other, well as with scholars at the Institute.

This program has special meaning to Gail Dimitroff, an alumna of USD and daughter of fundraiser Alfred Henderson who was tapped by Bishop Charles Buddy to raise funds to match a grant from a French order of nuns known as the Society of the Sacred Heart for construction of what originally was called the San Diego College for Women. The college that became USD opened in 1952.

Another Hansen Foundation program provides funds for the Fred J. Hansen professorship in world peace activities at San Diego State University, a position held by political scientist Dipak Gupta. The other program at San Diego State brings approximately 20 students from conflict areas together for three weeks during the summer. Along with 10 American students, they live in an SDSU dormitory, attend workshops in conflict resolution, mediation, and identity formation; go on field trips to such venues as the U.S.-Mexico border and to a "boot camp" for delinquent youngsters, and participate in guided discussions about the conflicts in their areas.

Gail Dimitroff said such people to people programs can have their successes and their failures. One success she recalled at USD was the friendship that developed between a woman from Serbia and another from Croatia, a friendship transcending the political and ethnic troubles between their two nations. On the other hand, said Tony Dimtroff, a Russian student and a student from Chechnya were very unhappy with each other after being assigned as roommates.

Dimitroff declined to disclose how much money the Hansen Foundation invests each year in peace activities, explaining that the amount by the standards of large foundations is quite small. He said that the strategy of the Hansen Foundation is to provide seed money which can be used to draw funds that sometimes are in very high multiples of the original amount.

Although Gail Dimitroff had traveled once before to Israel with an inter-religious group led by filmmaker and singer James Twyman, this was Tony Dimitroff's first visit to the Holy Land. On her trip, Gail was part of a choir that sang along with Twyman at various Holy Places in Israel. On their trip together, they visited Masada, Qumram, the Dead Sea, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem on a two-day excursion prior to the conference. Following the conference they went to Petra, Jordan, and planned to continue their travels in India.

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