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Jerusalem Foundation dedicates 'Canada Club'

By JENNY HAZAN, CJNI Israel Bureau

Thursday, 13 May 2010

JERUSALEM — The Morasha neighbourhood of Jerusalem was abuzz on the evening of May 3, when Jerusalem Foundation donors and board members from around the world and passersby gathered to check out the newly opened Canada Club.

The club is at the Morasha Community Center, just outside the Old City. The new multi-faceted social, games, and sports facility was dedicated as part of the Jerusalem Foundation's annual international meeting. "It was a real highlight of our program," says director of the foundation's Canada desk, Steve Solomon.

The gathering brought together more than 70 board leaders and donors from Canada, the United States, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, South Africa, France and the United Kingdom in Jerusalem for three days. They discussed strategy issues and dedicated projects developed over the past year.

Canada Club is the brainchild of Torontonion Lewis Mitz, who co-founded it along with his wife, Wendy Posluns, Senator Arthur Eggleton, Camille Bacchus and Julia Koschitzky, president of the Jerusalem Foundation of Canada. Koschitzky will soon celebrate the opening of the Koschitzky Young Adult Centre at the Morasha Community Center, which also houses the Musrara School of Photography, Media and New Music and the Machol Shalem Dance Studio.

Mitz says he came up with the idea for Canada Club after the mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, delivered a talk about the current challenges facing the city in Toronto last November.

"Two things that he said astounded me – first, how many young people are leaving Jerusalem after they finish university, and second, the great number of Israeli youth who have never been to Jerusalem," Mitz said. "I wanted to create a fun place for youth and young adults to come and hang out – a social club, a sports facility, a meeting place."

In addition to hitting the foundation's three "C's": culture, coexistence, and community, Mitz wants the Canada Club to hit five "E's": excitement, enjoyment, entertainment, encouragement and

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economy. "These are all part of the thought process that went into the idea," he said.

Mitz, who has served as a mentor in kids' programs for the last 30 years, understands the importance of a fun and safe place for them to go. "If kids have a spark in life outside of their parents, in any kind of mentorship form, it can be a life-changing thing," he said. "And this could be a life-changing thing."

Very quickly, Mitz was able to gather \$36,000 (US) from the founding donors, enough to commence the first part of the Canada Club project: a coffee shop/snack bar in the community centre lobby.

The next project on the roster is a games room, which will include air hockey, foosball and table hockey games, imported from Canada. "Of course, hockey is the focus," Mitz said.

"This is one of the funkier, more exciting projects we have currently underway," Solomon said. He added that it's unusual for a donor to come to the foundation with an idea like the Canada Club. Usually the foundation determines projects and then seeks funding for them.

"This is the first time I'm aware that an idea was completely initiated by a donor that was then incorporated into our organizational plan," he said

The Jerusalem Foundation intends to raise funds to sponsor programs and activities at the new club. Meanwhile, Mitz has already determined upcoming club projects, for which he intends to elicit partnership with the Jerusalem Foundation of Canada. The first priority will be furniture for the centre, two beach volleyball courts, a tennis court and a floor ball court.

The club has already created a momentum of its own. Solomon said that he recently got a call from a local cinema school that wants to screen movies at the club. The centre will also host bands and a temporary gallery, featuring different artists on a monthly rotation.

"Our hope is that the Canada Club will be a spark for a fire that will catch wind and go," Mitz said. "This site is the beginning of something special in Jerusalem."

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