



TASK FORCE NEWS

Alabama-Israel Task Force - *Remembering Our Past, Shaping Our Future*

Volume One Issue 2

September 2015

From Alabama to Israel with Love!

By Laura King



Kim Brown of Huntsville and members of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), on the Israeli side of the Gaza border.

Kim Brown often finds herself disappointed with the locations her husband usually travels to for his work. But recently she got a great surprise! Her husband was going to Israel and she was going with him.

Kim, like so many Christians, longed to see the biblical sites she was so familiar with all her life. But Kim Brown, unlike other visitors, wanted to visit with the natives too. Specifically she wanted to see the work that North Alabama Christians had done in Israel.

During her visit Kim travelled with Amigour (the Jewish Agency for Israel's housing authority). Amigour houses many survivors of the Holocaust in Israel. The Rock Family Worship Center in particular, where Kim Brown attends, has been a constant and consistent supporter of Amigour and its residents. Kim was able to visit the home in Ashkelon and meet with the survivors who live there and see firsthand the bomb shelter that was completed with the help of Christians from North Alabama. The plaque outside the bomb shelter proudly acknowledges this help.

From Ashkelon, Kim travelled further south to the city of Beersheba and visited the latest Amigour housing to undergo the building of bomb shelters onto the existing structures there. Kim said she learned that the reason the bomb shelters were being built on each floor was because the residents could not make it downstairs in time due to the close proximity to Gaza and that they had less than a minute to take cover. Sadly, this particular bomb shelter

has seen a lot of duty. Ashkelon is frequently targeted by HAMAS, and in the lot next door to the home, remains of Katyushas have been found.

Residents of Amigour's home in Ashkelon

During last year's conflict, "Operation Protective Edge", the HAMAS extended the range and the cities they could strike in Israel. Beersheba is now easily within range from Gaza and now there is a need to also protect the precious survivors there who reside in Amigour's housing located in the city. Currently Amigour is trying to raise \$30 thousand more, to complete the last shelter on a home there, where father Abraham dug his wells and lived.

Sderot and The Israel Leadership Institute

Kim travelled by train down to Sderot to meet her friend, and frequent visitor to Alabama, Eeki Elner, the founder of the Israel Leadership Institute (ILI). Sderot was quiet that day for our friend and we were glad she didn't have to experience the 15 second rush to take shelter from incoming rounds from the Gaza strip.

Incidentally, Sderot has the special title of the Bomb Shelter Capital of the World. A title I am sure they would gladly relinquish. Kim received a tour of the ILI's current training facility and a briefing on the current conditions with Gaza. She was also able to visit with soldiers who are protecting Israel's border with Gaza.

During last year's "Operation Protective Edge", Sderot was frequently the site of incoming rounds from Gaza. It sustained much damage and the citizenry required a lot of help to simply survive through the long summer. The ILI led by Eeki Elner, was there to assist. During the entire conflict Mr. Elner, busied himself with addressing the ever growing needs of the community. He raised money for elderly shut in people who could not go out due to the danger and inability to make it to a shelter in 15 seconds, organized volunteers to pack food boxes and deliver them to residents. He raised money for, and delivered head lights, to the soldiers on the border to keep them from being detected by militants coming through tunnels and also small generators that were quiet enough to not be detected. He took his turn in the civil authority command center in Sderot. He organized Kosher Shabbat meals to be delivered to the soldiers who were Orthodox.



Kim Brown with ILI Founder, Eeki Elner in front of the ILI classrooms in Sderot.

Buses and trips up north took Sderot's youth for a day or two away from the conflict to the Wingate Center. These and so many other things helped keep this small community going. His leadership within the ILI and in his community is an outstanding example of the kind of people we would all like to have in our community.

And we can have more people like him in our community by training them to respond in times of emergency through the ILI's Emergency Preparedness Disaster Relief (EPDR) program which trains future leaders for just such occasions. Recently EPDR was given a large boost by the addition to the Board of Directors of **Retired Colonel Gideon Bar-On**, previously the commander of the Home Front Command Search and Rescue Unit (SAR). The SAR is comprised of volunteer IDF reservists designated for search and rescue operations in Israel and around the world. The unit was established to fill the need for implementing a force for search and rescue in times of national disasters in Israel and beyond its borders during emergencies.

Kim said the trip was too short and she hopes to one day again visit Israel and her new friends. She invites all of you to do the same. For Kim seeing was believing. She was touched immeasurably by being able to meet those that do the work, and those who receive the help, from our friends in Israel.

BDS—What is it?

By Laura King

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions or as it best known BDS, is a controversial movement which attempts to influence the Israel/Palestine debate. Its stated goal is to increase economic and political pressure on Israel to end Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestinian land, full equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and respect for the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Critics of the BDS movement say it is anti-Semitic and

promotes the de-legitimization of the state of Israel.

The BDS campaign began on 9 July 2005 by Palestinian non-governmental organizations. The basis for the campaign were United Nations resolutions and anti-apartheid campaigns in South Africa. Although Israel does not resemble the previous Apartheid State of South Africa, BDS activists attempt to give it the same moral equivalency, referencing the wall which separates communities across the green line. The wall was not built until after the Palestinian Intifada which resulted in the murder of Israeli citizens in a series of suicide attacks. The wall was built for protection of the citizenry not because of the desire to separate from the Arab Palestinians themselves.

Does it really help anyone? There is also evidence that indicates boycotting Israel, does more harm than good to the people it is supposed to be trying to help. The Palestinian economy is dependent on Israel. As yet, BDS has had little effect on the economy in Israel, but when it does, it hits the Palestinians harder than anyone else. Palestinians working in Judea and Samaria make three to five times more in wages than in areas controlled by the Palestinian authority. Over 100 thousand people work in these jobs and they have lost work due to BDS.

Federal Anti BDS Legislation: While the battle continues over the nature of BDS, in the United States there has recently been a consistent move towards fighting it, in particular, in the divestment portion of BDS. IN February of 2015, the "U.S.-Israel Trade and Commercial Enhancement Act" was introduced to Congress, with the stated goal of "leveraging ongoing trade negotiations to discourage prospective U.S. trade partners from engaging in economic discrimination against Israel". In effect the Act monitors pro-BDS actions of foreign companies that trade on the U.S. stock exchange. It also goes further by prohibiting U.S. courts from "enforcing rulings made by foreign courts against U.S. companies solely for conducting business in Israel". Another Bill was introduced in March 2015, the "boycott Our Enemies, Not Israel Act". This act requires that contractors doing business with the U.S. government certify they do not participate in boycotts against Israel.

State Level Anti BDS Legislation: At the state level, Illinois was the first state to pass a bill that requires state pension funds to divest from companies that support BDS. In April 2015, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a resolution condemning BDS. It declared that BDS is "one of the main vehicles for spreading anti-Semitism and advocating the elimination of the Jewish state" and "underlines the Jewish people's right to self-determination, which they are fulfilling the state of Israel". Also in April 20-15, the Indiana General Assembly passed a resolution that "condemns" the BDS movement for "seeking to undermine the Jewish people's right to self-determination", "activities that contribute directly or indirectly to the denial, violation, or de-legitimization of any people's academic freedom", "agenda inherently antithetical and deeply damaging to the cause of peace, justice, equality, democracy, and human rights:" and "promoting a climate of hatred, intimi-

dation, intolerance and violence against Jews”.

In Alabama the main thrust of the BDS movement is the tool of “Divestment”. It aims to control how pension funds and investment portfolios are used. The intention is to prevent these funds being used to finance companies they claim are complicit in violating Palestinian rights.

We at the Alabama Israel Task Force are seeking advocacy amongst our own state representatives for a similar resolution that will ensure that Alabama also does not cooperate with the BDS movement’s drive to attack the Jewish people’s rights and to delegitimize the State of Israel. We have had discussions with a number of our legislators and have found support for Israel and hope that Alabama will be the next state to also lead in the continuous march to disable the work of the BDS movement.

ILI and EPDR Need your support!

By Laura King, Southeast Director, ILI



Having just recently returned from Israel, I wanted to update and also thank all of you for your previous support of the Israel Leadership Institute (ILI) - Emergency Preparedness & Disaster Response (EPDR) initiative.

Prior to my leaving Israel, rockets again fell on Israeli cities in the south. This has continued to be the case, though seldom reported in the news media here in the United States. Unfortunately with the approach of summer, given past history and the emergence of the Islamic State forces now active in Gaza, things are likely to continue. With this in mind, the EPDR is more critical than ever.

Communities in the south of Israel, in particular Sderot, Ashkelon, Yavne, Ashdod and others continue to struggle for survival. Almost a year after last summer's Israel Defense Force (IDF) Operation “Protective Edge”, many citizens find themselves still struggling to get back on their feet and are ill prepared for another round of attacks from the terrorist organizations in the Gaza strip. Aside from the physical damage there is also economic, psychological and societal impacts still being absorbed and continuing to harm these communities nearest the border with Gaza.

But it isn't all bad news. Thanks to your support we are moving closer to meeting our goal of sending our first class of Israel's future leaders through an EPDR course so they can come to the aid of these communities.

The ILI is proud to welcome to the ILI Board of Directors, Retired Colonel Gideon Bar-On, previously the commander of the Home Front Command Search and Rescue Unit (SAR). The SAR is comprised of volunteer IDF reservists designated for search and rescue operations in Israel and around the world. The unit was established to fill the need for implementing a force for search and rescue in times of national disasters in Israel and beyond its borders during emergencies.

The primary expertise in SAR is the evacuation of people trapped in rubble of buildings and installations. You may recall that recently Israel's SAR was among the first on the ground in Nepal responding to the need to rapidly rescue victims trapped in the rubble in the aftermath of the massive earthquake experienced there earlier this year. They were also some of the first to respond in our own hemisphere, when disaster struck Haiti.

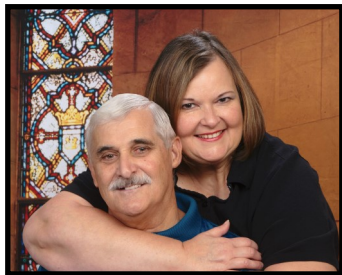
Retired Colonel Bar-On personally lead the SAR team during the second Intifada when SAR responded to attacks in Tel Aviv including at Mike's Place; The Stage Club, and the Dolphinarium. When the 4 story building housing the Versailles wedding hall in Jerusalem collapsed with 650 guests in attendance, 351 people fell through the opening and SAR responded. Internationally the SAR unit, under the command of Colonel Bar-On responded to an earthquake in India, the bombing of the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa,, Kenya and the attacks on the Taba Hilton Hotel in the Sinai.

With leadership, experience, and the skills of Retired Colonel Bar-On, we fully expect to conduct an EPDR program of excellence that will benefit both the peoples of Israel and the state of Alabama in a reciprocal role, cemented in gratitude, for the help given to establish the ILI- EPDR initiative.

Thank you for your attendance at Alabama Israel Task Force events and your support for this first initiative. I am proud of the accomplishments in the last year of the Alabama Israel Task Force and look forward to working alongside of them towards the EPDR initiative. As the Southeast Director for the North American Israeli Leadership Institute 501(C3), I want to ask you to help me to move this initiative forward and complete our first course in Israel this year. We are approximately one third of the way to realizing our goal at this time. With the heightening tensions, please give what you can to help us reach out to the future through trained leadership that can assist those who will fall victims to acts of terrorism and natural disasters. We, here in Alabama, know first-hand the impacts of natural disasters living in tornado alley. **We can, together, with your support, be better prepared to respond in the future!** To financially support this effort, visit our website at www.aitf-web.org.

Alabama-Israel Task Force (AITF)
PO Box 6693 Huntsville, AL 35813
www.aitf-web.org

Meet Michelle Smith, Our newest AITF Member & Volunteer



Two of our newest AITF members and volunteers, Michelle and Bill Smith.

It has been my pleasure to be a volunteer with the Alabama-Israel Task Force (AITF) for approximately six months now. During this time, I have learned that this group of caring men and women from the Huntsville area are truly concerned about the nation of Israel and its people. I feel honored

to be a volunteer for this Task Force! Laura King, Founding Member of AITF and Southeast Director of the ILI, recently asked me if I would be willing to share about my background and why I choose to spend my free time volunteering for this organization.

First a little about myself...I am happily married to Bill Smith, who is one of the sweetest, kindest, and most generous men in the world. Bill served in the Vietnam War and after 24 Years of military service in the US Army, retired. He is a founding member of the Huntsville Chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America and enjoys fishing, hiking, and traveling. We have been married for 38 years and are the parents of four children: Rick (Karmell) Smith of Taylor, SC; Denee (Greg) Clark of Freeland, Michigan; Lance (Lauren) Smith of Allentown, PA; and Jackie Smith of Macomb, IL. We also have three babies at home, our loveable cats, Rocky, Boo Boo and Cairo.

My professional background is in marketing and I have held positions in the fields of Journalism, Public Relations, Fund-raising and Marketing. I was a reporter and editor for a newspaper in Galesburg, IL and have written articles and stories for various newspapers, magazines, blogs, and websites throughout Illinois and the United States. I am also the author of a book on child abuse which was published in 2013.

Now that I am no longer working, I spend my free time traveling with Bill. We enjoy living in the South and really like the City of Huntsville and all it offers. My interests and hobbies include: studying my Bible, reading, social media (especially Facebook), writing a journal, sketching, crafting, cooking and baking.

With regard to volunteering for AITF, I have two main reasons for being engaged with this group. The most obvious reason is that first and foremost I love the people of Israel and I appreciate the Jewish connection to my Christian faith. From the time when I was a little girl attending Sunday School at the First Baptist Church in Galva, IL I remembered how much I loved learning about the Hebrew Patriarchs, Kings, Queens, and spiritual leaders of the Old Testament. I loved hearing the stories of David and Goliath, Daniel, Esther, Jacob and Esau,

and Joseph and his brothers. These stories sparked a bond and love for the people of Israel that have lasted a lifetime

When I was a teenager, I wrote a term paper on the Holocaust and the preparation for that assignment had a strong impact on my life. I couldn't believe the inhumanity of Hitler and his Nazi regime, and my heart grieved for the millions of Jewish men, women and children who were murdered in the death camps, simply because they were Jews. Learning about the Holocaust brought to me an even deeper concern and love for the nation of Israel. It also sadly taught me that the world can also be very evil and inhumane. I count it a privilege to pray for the peace of Israel and to ask God to protect His people.

I am also a Zionist and I believe that the same God who delivered the Biblical Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors and planted them in the Promised Land, chose to establish them as a nation once again in 1948. I believe with every fiber of my being that Israel has the right to exist in peace, behind secure and defensible borders. In an age of terrorism, ISIS, and other threats, and instability in the Middle East, that it is incumbent on us to support the only country in the Middle East that shares America's belief in human dignity and freedom. This is my view and I am honored to share this view with others and I am proud to be a part of AITF, which proactively supports the Nation of Israel. Knowing AITF supports Israel makes the time I spend as a volunteer extremely worthwhile, and brings me a sense of great joy. It is truly an honor to support AITF as a volunteer.

Israel Awareness

Nov. 15 and 16

at

The Dwelling Place

2550 Redstone Rd SW, Huntsville, AL

Featuring Mr. Juha Ketola -

International Director of the
International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

Schedule:

11/15	10:30AM	Speaker, Mr. Ketola
11/15	6PM	Speaker, Mr. Ketola
11/16	12PM	Leader's Luncheon
		Speaker, Mr. Ketola
11/16	2PM	Speaker, Mr. Ketola
11/16	6PM	Speaker, Mr. Ketola and Mr. Eeki Elner



More information about Mr. Juha Ketola is provided on the insert included with this newsletter.