

From the Desk of Alon Schuster – Head of the Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council

Each Friday Alon updates residents of Sha'ar Hanegev on goings on in the Regional Council. The following is a portion of his updates over the past month.

September 18, 2015.

Coordinating expectations

Last week, during the course of my reserve duty, I met the commander of the Air Force. He confirmed to me that our ability to issue alerts against mortar shells has indeed improved. In all, what did we want? Fifteen ordinary seconds of warning? Well, hooray, it looks like we've got them...

In the framework of our regular contacts with IDF commanders in the sector: They are working seriously on building up our ability to confront the threat of the Gaza attack tunnels.

In the framework of negotiations over the State Budget: We're insisting on the need to appropriately budget the establishment of the ground defense apparatus along the border—in the format that's already been approved by the Israeli defense system.

Recognizing our limitations: There is no real prospect for the imminent development of our resources for intercepting mortar shells while they are flying.

So listen to what's happening in education...

Please add the following statistics to my previous column's review of the start of the new school year: We have some 400 kindergarten children and 350 daycare children (baby homes and nurseries) who are being accompanied by 200 early childhood educators and staff. Our older children include of approximately 800 elementary school students and 1,200 post elementary students (in middle school and high school).

At the upper end of our youth activity we can add the five Year of Service volunteers from the Society for the Protection of Nature who are staying in Nir Am and operating the Sha'ar Hanegev Center for Field Studies.



September 4, 2015.

"Let's come back home"

That's what Vered Laor and her husband said as they declared their intentions to return home to Kibbutz Erez where Vered was born. They arrived together with another 19 families and their 40 children. This constitutes a dramatic change of direction for this small kibbutz.

For the last seven years Kibbutz Erez has been working to stimulate its demographic growth. The kibbutz insisted on absorbing new residents into full membership and for that reason was prepared to let go of several really terrific people who wanted to live on Erez as 'economically independent' families.

In recent years, members of the kibbutz have sharpened their vision of the desired lifestyle for their renewed kibbutz. They planned its new residential neighborhoods and added budgets for their establishment. The kibbutz's absorption committee worked actively to gather, one by one, a collection of wonderful families. This morning, the kibbutz convened a general assembly in which members heard the requests of 20 families who were applying to be absorbed in the kibbutz. Following the vote, which takes place at the end of this week, the expectation is for the kibbutz to grow significantly and its population of children to grow.

The great emotion in which I congratulated the members of Kibbutz Erez was appropriate to that historic occasion in the kibbutz's history. They had implemented a positive and significant move in a critical area. They proved that despite the fact that each one of us is here for a finite time, the joint enterprise that they've built together—a harmonious community living cooperatively—isn't a project meant to last only a few years or for three generations. This was an undertaking that succeeded in overcoming what seemed to be, not many years ago, the failure of a dream: It was the dream of veterans of the Palmach's Yiftach Brigade that emerged at the end of the War of Independence.

In Erez they proved that a determined, responsible and devoted group of individuals can meet the most complex of challenges. Well done!

August 28, 2015

Water animals

This joyful week for Israeli sports was an opportunity to take pride in our local athletes. Look at our swimmers, approximately 370 of them, who practice at the hydrotherapy center. They swim at various skill levels, including three groups of competitive swimmers. Last week the Israel Swimming Championships took place at the Wingate Institute and included child, teen and adult divisions. Our delegation

consisted of 26 swimmers who represented us with honor. The most outstanding achievements by local swimmers were of Alon Marschenko (10) who set two Israeli records for his age group; Einav Shimoni (14), who was crowned Israeli champion for her age group in the 100 meter backstroke; Ori Friebach, champion in the 17-18 year old division; and Efrat Rothstein, Israeli women's champion. Our team emerged from the championship with 18 medals. Two of our female swimmers qualified for the Israeli swimming team which will compete at the European Swimming Championships. Our swimmers train a dozen times during the week; one practice before the school day and one in the afternoon.

Congratulations to our terrific swimmers and the team of coaches headed by Amir ('Fish') Cohen.

And more from the Hydrotherapy Center

Keren, the mother of a special needs daughter, writes us how her daughter took part in a summer camp that helps parents move through the end of the summer vacation: "This is the fourth year of the Shamayim BaMayim ('sky in the water') summer camp, led by Orly Doron. As usual it was wonderful, amazing and successful, with an obvious investment in the quality of the camp! Sha'ar Hanegev residents have proved, once again, that they know how to contribute and give themselves. There was a huge and diverse team of volunteers at the camp: from high school teens to pensioners who are young in spirit. Everyone came here motivated by a single and clear goal—to give, to give and to give more. On behalf of the children and parents, I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart—the Regional Council, the hydrotherapy center, the Social Welfare department and everyone else who connected with this amazing project. See you at the next summer camp!"

And perhaps...

Yankele ('Mister Potato') Cohen, one of the founders of Nahal Oz, tells us the following story: "About three weeks ago I got a call from the agricultural liaison with the Gaza Strip. He asked me if I could assist a farmer from Beit Hanoun by advising him on the varieties of potatoes he needs to buy for growing crops for the Fries industry. I suggested that the liaison arrange a meeting between us so that we could talk directly. I proposed that we meet at Kibbutz Erez that same week, where we were demonstrating the results of trials of different varieties. Prior to the meeting, I came up with the idea that we in Nahal Oz would import the seeds and grow them for the farmer into the autumn; my assumption was that our level of cultivation would produce higher quality seeds than what they could produce themselves."

"Then the appointed day arrived, and to our surprise we were visited by 40 potato and vegetable growers from the Strip! We organized ourselves quickly and gathered in the Erez club, where the national agricultural guide lectured them briefly on potato growing in Israel. Several of the Gaza Agricultures agreed to my proposal that we cooperate in the area of seed growing. We scheduled a meeting in Nahal Oz for two weeks later in which we'd try to reach agreement on a small-scale Experiment that would indicate our future path."

"From Erez, the group of Gaza growers continued for a visit to the Eshkol Regional Council. Perhaps from the modest Israeli potato peace and quiet might grow?"