

Israel: Floating nursery incubates coral

On a recent mission to Israel with Jewish National Fund, a few lucky participants found themselves on a boat off of Eilat, engaged in a fun and fascinating project.

After a brief lesson from marine biologists about the loss of coral reefs around the world, they glued little pieces of coral onto objects that resembled golf tees, loaded them onto a grid and floated them down into the Red Sea, where they were left to grow. It was the underwater equivalent of planting saplings in a forest, with no drip irrigation required.

“It is a simple but brilliant answer to a problem that has surfaced around the world,” said Ralph Rotman, one of the guests on the boat that day. ... Leave it to some smart Israeli to devise a potential solution that could positively affect the entire world.”

The National Institute of Oceanography in Haifa, Israel, has entered the picture with research scientists Dr. Baruch Rinkevich and Dr. Shai Shafir. With the idea of actively restoring reefs, as opposed to just conserving them, they built the first mid-water floating coral nursery in the world and are sharing the concept with other countries, including Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Jamaica and Tanzania.

“Coral reefs are often portrayed as ‘the rain forest of the sea,’” said Shafir. “This refers to their being one of the most productive biological ecosystems on earth, to their high

level of biodiversity, and above all, to their function as the building blocks of the ecosystem framework.”

He explained. “These nurseries are not attached to the bottom of the sea, because then they would be exposed to the same dangers that the reefs are falling victim to. Instead, a buoy is attached to the frame that houses the nursery and floats it at a depth that we choose, often depending on the season. We like to keep them shallow enough so they can get sunlight, but in the stormy season we can lower them to protect them from sustaining damage.”

Eilat’s small farm can grow between 6,000-10,000 corals; it takes about a year for them to mature enough to transplant.

“Basically, what we’ve done here is copy the forestry concept,” said Shafir, “and the idea is really taking hold around the world because you can use it almost anywhere.”

According to an organization called the International Coral Reef Initiative, coral reefs cover less than 1 percent of the ocean floor, but support about 25 percent of all marine life, with more than 4,000 species of fish alone. Reefs act as natural breakwaters, minimizing impacts from cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons, and form the basis for tourism and fishing industries. The United Nations has estimated the total economic value of coral reefs to be between \$100,000 and \$600,000 per square kilometer per year. □

New shul breathes excitement into congregation

An enthusiastic crowd of more than 150, adults and children, enjoyed the inaugural year of High Holy Days services, held by The Shul of Bellaire.

According to Rabbi Yossi Zaklikofsky, participants were a mix of nonaffiliated Jews, as well as many “card-carrying” members, who chose to try something new. The spiritually invigorating services and inclusive atmosphere created a feeling of soulful Jewish commonality, which was felt by all, said the rabbi.

Services were held for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur at Gatherings Banquet Center in Bellaire and the Bellaire Civic Center auditorium, respectively. They were led by Rabbi Zaklikofsky, along with visiting Cantor Mendel Jacobs, from New York.

Steven Kaufman said, “Rabbi Yossi has done it again! He never ceases to amaze me with his blend of tradition with a modern-day twist. His stories and anecdotes made me, and I’m sure others, feel like he was talking only to me, and it was the message I needed to hear. I’ve always thought that the High Holidays weren’t for me, and The Shul of Bellaire luckily proved



Rabbi Yossi Zaklikofsky

me wrong, by honoring their promise to blow me away!”

A highlight of the services was a children’s program. More than 40 children participated in the educational, hands-on, fun-filled experience, led by Chana Gurevitch and Chana Laufer, both counselors from New York.

The Shul of Bellaire is a branch of Chabad-Lubavitch, the largest and fastest growing Jewish movement in the world today. Chabad-Lubavitch has been successful, globally, in attracting Jews from all walks of life, by their embracing and unique approach to teaching Torah and its timeless values to the modern Jew.

“We are humbled by the amount of Jews who chose The Shul for their High Holiday experience in our first year,” said Rabbi Zaklikofsky, who together with his wife Esty founded and direct The Shul of Bellaire. “If the High Holidays are indicative of what lies ahead, then we can look forward to a very exciting year of growth and Jewish activity.”

To learn more about The Shul and its broad range of programs for adults, children and families, visit JewishBellaire.com or call 713-839-8887. □

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