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SOLOMON SCHECHTER KIDS PLANT ROOTS IN ISRAEL

By **David Lazarus** - April 11, 2014



How do you describe planting a tree in Israel with your own hands? Or dancing with Be'er Sheva children "for real" and not just via Skype?

Twenty-six Grade 6 Solomon Schechter Academy students found out for themselves when the school recently went on its annual two-week Israel mission.

For outgoing head of school Shimshon Hamerman, the trip is an annual dream come true, and he is proud to take the school's graduating class to see the land and walk the same terrain as their biblical ancestors.

Accompanying the kids were 10 parent chaperons, Judaic studies director Chani Cohen, executive director Jonathan Kuczer, and Hamerman. School principal Steven Erdelyi, who is to succeed Hamerman as head of school, held down the fort at home while the students were away.

"Our students returned to school inspired," Erdelyi said.

A particular highlight of this year's trip, Hamerman said, was leaving tree roots behind when planting at a Jewish National Fund (JNF) forest with Hadar Epstein, JNF's educational emissary. For eight years, the students had brought their coins to drop into the JNF pushke on Fridays. Now, in Israel, they got the chance to take actual seedlings and cover their roots with the soil of Eretz Yisrael.

"It was exhilarating," Hamerman said.

JNF, in fact, is the annual sponsor of the Solomon Schechter graduation trip. Students stayed at the JNF camp at the Nes Harim moshav and participated in several JNF programs. The trip also gets support from the Jewish Agency for Israel, represented by Federation CJA, which 15 years ago, spearheaded the initiative to partner with Be'er Sheva and with other Montreal Jewish day schools. Solomon Schechter has a thriving relationship with the Afik School there.

In general, Hamerman reported, the school group combed Israel from north to south, visiting JNF projects in the North as well as the Hula nature reserve. They spent Shabbat in Jerusalem at the Kotel as a "spiritual high" of the trip.

The itinerary also included sojourning through the Negev and seeing its mystique, such as hiking in the Ein Ovdad canyon and visiting Masada. All, Hamerman indicated, had a lasting impact on the students and chaperons.

He said plans have already been launched for next year's mission.

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