

CITIZEN DIPLOMACY INITIATIVES (CDI)

*When the People Lead, their actions will begin to transform
Israeli and Palestinian communities with a new dialogue
initiated by Palestinian and Jewish Americans*



SIX TRACKS TO TRANSFORMATION

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History of the Project

In 1997, representatives of the Israeli city of Kfar Saba and the Palestinian city of Qalqilya traveled together to Gainesville, Florida, to seek the assistance of the University of Florida in building a water treatment plant. That event set in motion the establishment of the first trilateral sister city relationship with an American, Israeli and Palestinian city. Gainesville, Kfar Saba, and Qalqilya partnered in a new paradigm for creating normal relationships at the municipal level. While city leaders from Kfar Saba and Qalqilya did not believe they could establish a bilateral relationship between their cities, they eagerly endorsed Gainesville Mayor Bruce Delaney's proposal to form a trilateral relationship, with Gainesville serving as a bridge for Palestinians and Israelis to develop normal relationships. Elected leaders in all three communities provided the legitimacy and credibility for residents to comfortably take on the role of citizen diplomats, leading to the development of trusting relationships that have endured and continued to strengthen, despite political and physical barriers.

This was not Gainesville's first foray into the arena of citizen diplomacy. In 1982, during the height of the Cold War, Steve Kalishman and Paul S. Rothstein, both Jewish Americans, convinced the Gainesville City Commission to invite the Soviet city of Novorossiisk to establish a formal relationship with Gainesville. Alarmed by increasingly hostile exchanges between the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union, which had 50,000 nuclear weapons pointed at each other, Steve and Paul started a movement that culminated in the pairing of more than 200 U.S. and Soviet cities, creating hundreds of cultural exchanges at a time when no cultural exchange agreement existed between the two countries. These relationships eventually helped lead to the thawing of U.S./Soviet relations, which culminated with the end of the Cold War.

Dr. Manal Fakoury, a Palestinian-American, has been active in bringing awareness to Americans of the lives of ordinary Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Her voice of reason, compassion and non-violence, as well as her vast influence with Arab and Muslim leaders in the U.S., make her an invaluable asset for the objectives of CDI.

On September 26, 2011, Manal, Steve and Paul led a delegation including Gainesville Mayor Craig Lowe and City Commissioner Randy Wells, the art and music directors of a Gainesville school, and a Los Angeles-based Hip Hop group (Luminaries) as citizen diplomats to meet their counterparts in Israeli and Palestinian communities. An Israeli film crew captured more than 50 hours of amazing encounters with mayors, governors, national leaders (including Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad), businessmen, teachers and ordinary people for a feature-length documentary called *When the People Lead*. As a result of that two-week journey, Manal, Steve and Paul believe that trilateral sister city programs, along with other citizen diplomacy initiatives, offer the best chance for creating normal relationships among Israeli, Palestinian and American communities.

CDI PROPOSALS

Six Tracks to Transformation

1. Creating trilateral sister city relationships among American, Israeli and Palestinian communities.
2. Producing and distributing the documentary-- *When the People Lead*.
3. Organizing a tour by the Luminaries, along with the art and music directors, throughout Israel and the West Bank.
4. Promoting and facilitating the sale of Palestinian and Israeli goods in the U.S., including a store at the Ben Gurion Airport featuring goods from Palestinian and Israeli communities.
5. Expanding the Maccabiah Games to include Palestinians and Palestinian cities such as Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilya and Hebron.
6. Expanding travel by Americans to Palestinian and Israeli communities, including a pilot project to extend Birthright in Gainesville to allow three additional days to be spent in Palestinian communities.

TRACK ONE

CREATING TRILATERAL SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIPS

WITH AMERICAN, ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN COMMUNITIES

Origins

The first trilateral American/Palestinian/Israeli sister city relationship resulted from collaboration by Palestinian and Israeli local officials in their neighboring cities of Kfar Saba and Qalqilya to solve an environmental issue impacting both cities. A joint delegation traveled to Gainesville, Florida, in 1997 to seek the assistance of the University of Florida in obtaining a USAID grant to build a water treatment plant that they could share. Gainesville Mayor Bruce Delaney, who had just returned from a visit to Gainesville's Russian sister city of Novorossiisk, suggested to the delegates, a Palestinian mayor and an Israeli deputy mayor, that they join Gainesville in a three-way sister city relationship.

Kfar Saba and Qalqilya are only a couple of miles apart. About a quarter of Qalqilya's residents worked in and around Kfar Saba every day. Many Kfar Saba residents shopped, dined and had their cars repaired in Qalqilya. The cities enjoyed relatively good relations. For political reasons, however, their leaders did not believe they could form a bilateral sister city relationship. When Mayor Delaney invited them to join Gainesville in a three-way relationship, they readily accepted the opportunity to give it a chance.

A few months later, in February, 1998, the Gainesville City Commission unanimously resolved to invite the cities of Kfar Saba and Qalqilya to join with Gainesville in a three-way relationship. Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan led a delegation from Gainesville to hand-deliver the resolution to the mayors of Kfar Saba and Qalqilya, who enthusiastically accepted the invitation to begin a long-standing relationship with the City of Gainesville. The Gainesville delegation visited schools, hospitals, businesses and municipal facilities, and met with citizens interested in participating in the program. Reciprocal delegations were invited to visit Gainesville to continue to develop the relationships.



Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan at the Chamber of Commerce

In July, 2000, delegations from Kfar Saba and Qalqilya traveled together to Gainesville. The delegates met with the mayor and city commission; administrators and teachers at the University of Florida, Santa Fe College and public and private schools; doctors and hospital administrators; and representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, the Alachua County Library and Rotary International. They visited city facilities and public works projects. They spoke at churches and synagogues. They lived with host families and attended dinners and receptions. Everywhere they went, they were greeted with warm hospitality and a real interest in initiating ongoing relations and cooperative projects. An NGO, “Kfar Saba/Qalqilya Good Neighbors,” was created to administer the sister city program in Israel.

At the same time, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat met in Washington, D.C., with President Bill Clinton in an attempt to create a peace agreement. Everyone expressed high hopes that the leaders would strike a deal, resulting in a major breakthrough in U.S./Israeli/Palestinian relations. Gainesville, Kfar Saba and Qalqilya would lead the citizen diplomacy movement by becoming a model of trilateral cooperation.



Kfar Saba and Qalqilya delegates with Gainesville Mayor Paula Delaney in July, 2000.

Unfortunately, the talks did not produce a peace agreement. The result: a second intifada, led by Hamas; a number of suicide bomb attacks in Israel with at least one originating from Gainesville's sister city, Qalqilya; the invasion of Qalqilya by the Israeli Army; and the construction of the separation wall.



Qalqilya and Kfar Saba delegates on the road to a better future

Armed resistance

During the Second Intifada (2000 – 2004), Hamas became the political leaders of Qalqilya. They had no interest in relations with Israel or any Western countries, especially the United States. The sister city program was suspended. Activities among the cities ceased, including exchanges of delegations. Nevertheless, Steve Kalishman continued to communicate as a citizen diplomat with individuals in both Qalqilya and Kfar Saba, with whom he had developed trusting relationships.

Communications from Kfar Saba and Qalqilya lamented the loss of opportunity to interact with one another due to the armed conflict and the separation wall. Suicide bombers dispatched from Qalqilya into Kfar Saba caused unimaginable grief, prompting the Israeli army to invade Qalqilya with an iron fist. Some of the residents of Kfar Saba, while grieving, still were able to acknowledge the despair of the residents of their sister city of Qalqilya.

One email from Kfar Saba stated:

We and our Palestinian neighbors believed that we could live together in peace and quiet. Israel Milo, Michael Dotan, Dr. Ernesto Kahan and I visited our friends in Qalqiliya a few days before the mess started. Meanwhile the situation became very difficult. Lately some radical Muslims came from Qalqiliya to commit suicide in Kfar Saba zone. A few innocent people had been killed. We try to get used to the terrible situation and keep our lives normal but it is not so simple. The population in Qalqiliya suffer a lot, but the Palestinian Authority became an enemy to us. But we didn't lose our hope for better future. We will never forget our great time in your lovely town.

An email from Qalqiliya:

At dawn on Friday, April 26, 2002, Israeli troops invaded Qalqiliya from three axes, imposing a strict curfew on the city, disconnecting electricity and water. In certain suburbs the troops evacuated the residents from their houses, handcuffed the young, putting veils on their eyes, humiliating old people, women, children and leaving them long hours in open areas.



On September 11, 2001, Islamic fundamentalist terrorists commandeered four jets and flew two of them into the World Trade Center towers. The Mayor of Qalqiliya sent the following letter to the Gainesville Mayor Paula Delaney:

PALESTINIAN NATIONAL AUTHORITY
Ministry Of Local Government
Qalqilia Municipality

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية
وزارة الحكم المحلي
بلدية قلقيلية

Ref. No. _____
Date 1.10.2001

الرقم : _____
التاريخ : _____

Hon Excellency,

Madame - Paula M. Delaney
The Mayor of the city of Gainesville
The U.S.A

cc: CCAM

Dear Madame,

First of all, we the Mayor, the members of the municipal council, the staff and the citizens of the Palestinian city of Qalqilia extend our deepest condolences to the American people for the tragic loss of the innocent victims of the evil act that took place on 11.9.2001 in New York and Washington.

We express our sympathy and solidarity in this critical situation with the American Nation.

We hope that terrorism be eradicated from all over the world, and we hope the world distinguish between terrorism and the legal acts of oppressed people to defend their basic rights.

We hope also to see a just solution to the problems in the Middle East and other tensed areas in the whole world, by putting an end to the daily sufferings of the Palestinians people and stopping the violations of his rights.

We consider what has happened is criminal acts and contrary to the spirit, instructions and values of Islam as well as the values of the Arab civilization.

We hope that the reaction of the U.S.A to these acts will be reasonable and must not lead to more killings to innocent people, because such killings will breed more grudge and hate and will not help stopping violence and terrorism.

We value life and human dignity. Therefore we hope that the citizens and residents of the U.S.A whether Americans or non-Americans enjoy their lives and live in peace.

Looking forward to a prosperous and quieter life for all



M. Zahran yours
Mayor of Qalqilia
Marouf Zahran

Tel . 09-2940014/fax . 09-2940439
P.O:B (2)

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YOU DECIDE.

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2001

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Mideast leader expresses support through program

By Elizabeth Studstill
Contributing Writer

In the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks on U.S. soil, there has been a flurry of communication between Gainesville community leaders and the mayor of a small city in Palestine.

"We were shocked with the sad events in New York and Washington," wrote Marouf Zahran, the mayor of Qalqilya, to Gainesville attorney Steven Kalishman on Sept. 29. "We express our sympathy and solidarity in this critical situation with the American nation."

Kalishman is the president and founder of Gainesville's Sister City Program, a citizens' initiative to build bonds across geographical and cultural borders. Gainesville is involved in a three-way partnership with Qalqilya, Palestine and Kfar Saba, Israel.

The Sister City Program began in 1982 with the establishment of a partnership between Gainesville and Novorossiisk, of the former U.S.S.R. Kalishman, whose wife Natalia is a

Novorossiisk native, first visited the city in 1976 as a Merchant Marine. Subsequent visits to family members there convinced him that cross-cultural exchange between the nations could help to bridge the misunderstandings between the two cultures. Since the partnership began, delegations composed of officials and citizens have traveled between the two cities.

The goal of the Sister City Program is to allow ordinary citizens to become involved to heal cultural division.

"Most people don't know what to do, we're just waiting around for the government to take action," Kalishman said.

By building many individual relationships between citizens of different cultures the Sister City Program, which has been duplicated around the nation by

other cities, aims to ease international tensions. He said the Gainesville-Novorossiisk partnership, along with similar programs in other cities, helped to improve relations with Russia.

"We pray for peace to prevail in the whole world and in particular the tensed regions."

Marouf Zahran
Mayor of Qalqilya

"We're hoping in Israel the same thing will happen," he said.

Gainesville's Sister City Program in the Middle East was established in 1998 after UF involvement in the construction of a water treatment facility in Qalqilya sparked inter-

est. A delegation led by Kalishman and Gainesville Mayor Pro Tempore Pegeen Hanrahan established the tri-city partnership in order to "foster and promote friendly relations and mutual understanding among peoples of the three cities," according to the program's mission statement.

The attacks on New York and Wash-

ington have added a new dimension to the partnership in the Middle East. In addition to the e-mail sent to Kalishman, Mayor Marouf corresponded with the office of the mayor of the City of Gainesville, addressing his letter to former Mayor Paula DeLaney. In each correspondence, Marouf expressed sympathy to the American people, condemned the terrorist attacks and voiced his wish for peace.

"We pray for peace to prevail in the whole world and in particular the tensed regions," he wrote to Kalishman.

Kalishman was impressed by the outreach from the Palestinian mayor and saw it as indicative of the value of the Sister City Program in building bonds between cultures that are often thought to be in conflict. He responded to Marouf in an Oct. 4 e-mail, in which he thanked the mayor and emphasized that the Sept. 11 attacks "demonstrated the need for programs such as ours to strengthen the bonds of friendship among peace-loving people."

In the fall of 2006, a joint delegation from Kfar Saba and Qalqilya once again visited Gainesville to explore collaboration on municipal projects. Kfar Saba Deputy Mayor Israel Milo wrote:

Marouf and I share a dream to build a garbage recycling park, which will be situated on Palestinian Authority land, and under its management. This project is supposed to be built near the Green Line so that Kfar Saba and other nearby Israeli cities will be able to bring their garbage to the recycling facility, if they wish to do so. We will be very glad if during our tour in Gainesville we will be able to see how the garbage is dealt with – evacuation, recycling with sewage water.

CITIZEN DIPLOMACY INITIATIVES
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During their visit to Gainesville, the delegation spent a full day with John Schert, director of the UF Hinkley Center for Solid and Hazardous Waste Management. They also met with Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan, Chamber of Commerce President Brent Christensen, Santa Fe Zoo director Jack Brown, UF College of Journalism Dean Jon Wright and Oak Hall School Headmaster Richard Gehman. Once again hopes were high that despite the physical, political and psychological barriers, the trilateral relationship could become a successful model of Israeli/Palestinian/American cooperation. However, four years passed before any substantive exchanges resumed.

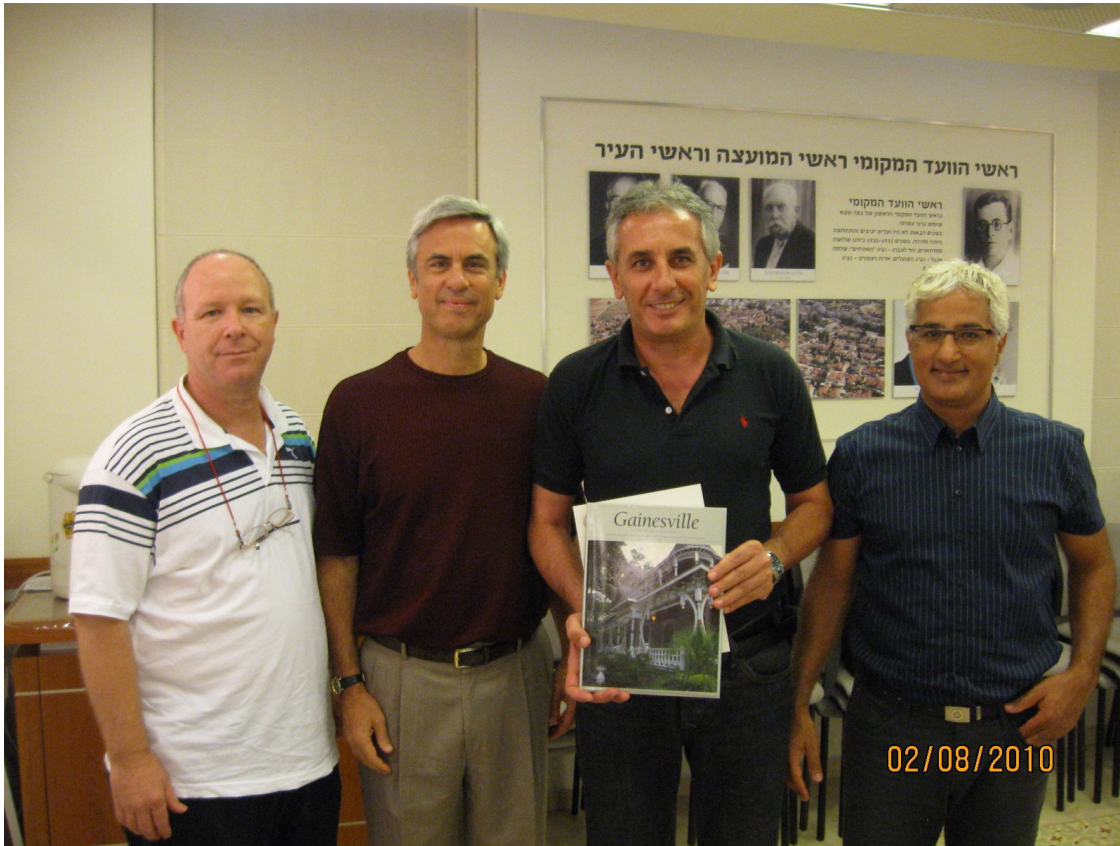


Delegates visit the College of Journalism in 2006

Resumption of Official City Relationships

In July, 2010, Gainesville Mayor Craig Lowe attempted to revive exchanges with letters to Kfar Saba and Qalqilya. Steve Kalishman's visit to both cities in August, 2010, led to the resumption of relations. The political leadership of Qalqilya had returned to Fatah, and the municipal leaders expressed an enthusiastic interest in developing a broad range of relationships on a "dual track" basis. The Gainesville link proved to be the enduring feature that created the framework for resumption of active relations. The critical American presence, the base of the triangle, provided the space essential to breathe life into the relationships begun 13 years earlier.

The participation of American cities in developing trilateral relationships with Israeli and Palestinian communities is a cornerstone of CDI. The Gainesville experience represents a case study in real time of the value of American involvement, through both local elected officials and citizen diplomats, at the municipal level, to help preserve Israeli/Palestinian city-to-city relationships. Acting as a safety valve to release tensions and help navigate around the ubiquitous volatility, American participation protects the three-way relationships. Withstanding pressure to abandon established links during rough, even hostile times, and strengthening ties during more relaxed times, active American engagement is a necessary component of the preservation and prospering of these Israeli/ Palestinian citizen diplomacy initiatives.



(from left) Kfar Saba attorney Michael Dotan, Steve Kalishman, Mayor Yehuda Ben Hamo and City Council member Yair Avraham



City of Gainesville

Craig Lowe, Mayor

July 27, 2010

Sameer Dawabsheh, Mayor
Qalqilya, PNA

Dear Mayor Dawabsheh:

Greetings from your sister city of Gainesville, Florida!

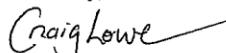
In 1998, by agreement of all three mayors, the Gainesville City Commission unanimously passed a resolution (copy enclosed) inviting Qalqilya and Kfar Saba to establish a three-way "sister city" relationship with Gainesville. The resolution was hand-delivered to the mayors of Qalqilya and Kfar Saba by Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan and a delegation of 10 Gainesville residents. The delegates were warmly received in both cities, and returned to Gainesville excited about the potential benefits of the program.

In July, 2000, Qalqilya Mayor Marouf Zahran and Kfar Saba Deputy Mayor Israel Milo each brought five-member delegations of leaders from their respective cities to Gainesville. The delegates visited many Gainesville organizations and institutions, which generated broad support for our unique program.

In 2006, Mr. Zahran and Mr. Milo returned to Gainesville to continue to establish relationships and possibilities of mutual cooperation. A number of Gainesville residents have also traveled to Qalqilya and Kfar Saba to develop beneficial people-to-people programs. Mr. Zahran, PNA Deputy Minister of Civil Affairs, has offered, and we have agreed, to coordinate all sister city activities and exchanges with him.

As the resolution states, we look forward to a long-standing friendship and association with the people of Qalqilya and Kfar Saba, for the benefit of all three cities. I hope you will have an opportunity to visit Gainesville sometime soon, and that I will be able to visit Qalqilya as well. I believe that non-political, citizen diplomacy initiatives can provide meaningful opportunities for our citizens to participate in improving relations.

Sincerely,


Craig Lowe
Mayor

Encl.

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While in Kfar Saba and Qalqilya, Kalishman met with both mayors, who expressed an interest in reviving the program. The director of education of Qalqilya was eager to discuss all kinds of educational exchanges, including Skype conferences, a joint web site and trips both ways for students, teachers and administrators, with the full support of the mayor and the PNA. The director of the Qalqilya municipal hospital talked about cooperation in the medical field. The director of the new Kfar Saba performing arts center (Yeruham Scharovsky) was interested in cultural exchange. Kfar Saba attorney Michael Dotan, a school board member whose wife is a teacher, wanted to connect schools, with the full support of the mayor.



Gainesville, Kfar Saba and Qalqilya representatives meet in 2010 to plan future exchanges.

At a restaurant between Kfar Saba and Qalqilya, representatives of the three cities met to create an action plan for the following year and beyond. Once again, hope revived of creating a model of cooperation for other Israeli, Palestinian and U.S. cities to duplicate in establishing connections through three-way relationships.

Qalqilya delegation visits Gainesville

In May, 2011, an official delegation from Qalqilya traveled to Gainesville, including Mayor Samir Dawasha, Director of Education Yousef Odeh, Qalqilya Municipal Hospital Medical Director Dr. Ramez Abdallah, and Marouf Zahran, Deputy Minister of Civil Affairs of the Palestinian National Authority. The delegates met with Mayor Craig Lowe, the city commission, City Attorney Marion Radson and City Manager Russ Blackburn. They also met with doctors and administrators at McKnight Brain Institute, the UF College of Medicine, North Florida Regional Medical Center and Shands Orthopedic Institute. They toured the city's Public Works Center, Gainesville Regional Utilities' South Energy Center, the Wastewater Reclamation Center, the Gainesville Police Department, Santa Fe Zoo and Planetarium, Oak Hall School, the Harn Museum, Sea World and a Habitat for Humanity house built by Muslims, Christians and Jews.



Delegates enjoy a lively discussion with City Commissioner Randy Wells at The Hoda Islamic Center



Discussions were held at Shands regarding medical exchanges

Public forums and dialogues were held at B'nai Israel Synagogue, Gainesville Mennonite Church, the Temple of the Universe, Trinity United Methodist Church and Santa Fe College. The group also visited the UF International Center, the College of Education, a political science class (Arabic/ Israeli Conflict) and an Arabic language class. They had lunch at Rotary and dinner at the Hoda Islamic Center. May 19 was proclaimed by the mayor as “Qalqilya Day” in the city of Gainesville.

The entire program was accomplished through private donations and volunteers, including interpreters. The delegates stayed in the homes of Jewish and Palestinian Americans.



Rabbi David Kaiman (left) listens to the discussion at B’Nai Israel Synagogue

The Gainesville Sun and WCJB provided news coverage, and the city commission meeting at which the delegates made a presentation was broadcast live via Cox Cable.



Gainesville Mayor Craig Lowe presents a key to the city to Qalqilya Mayor Samir Dawabsha

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City of Gainesville, Florida

Office of Mayor Craig Lowe
PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, on February 23, 1998, the Gainesville City Commission unanimously resolved to invite the cities of Qalqilya, Palestinian National Authority and Kfar Saba, Israel, to establish a three-way sister city relationship with the City of Gainesville; and

WHEREAS, the resolution was hand-delivered to the mayors of Qalqilya and Kfar Saba by Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan and a delegation of Gainesville professors and lawyers; and

WHEREAS, reciprocal delegations from Kfar Saba and Qalqilya have come to Gainesville to further explore the possibilities of mutually-beneficial cooperation among the three cities; and

WHEREAS, a delegation from Qalqilya is currently visiting Gainesville to further develop relationships with the medical communities, schools and the municipal governments of both cities; and

WHEREAS, the City of Gainesville can enjoy significant benefits from its relationship with Qalqilya by providing opportunities for its citizens to share experiences and cooperative projects with people from Qalqilya.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Craig Lowe, by the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Gainesville, do hereby proclaim May 19, 2011 as

Qalqilya Sister City Day

in the City of Gainesville and invite all our citizens to join me in welcoming and extending our hospitality to the delegation from Qalqilya.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the official seal of the City of Gainesville, Florida, this 27th day of April, A.D., 2011.



Craig Lowe
Craig Lowe
Mayor

The Gainesville Sun

www.gainesville.com

Friday, May 20, 2011

Visiting West Bank delegation expresses hope in Obama's words

By Chad Smith
Staff writer

A delegation from Gainesville's sister city in the West Bank watched on Thursday afternoon as two new city commissioners were sworn in here, applauding politely and, for some, listening to translations in Arabic.

At about the same time, President Barack Obama was giving a speech in Washington in which he said Palestine's borders should be restored to those before the 1967 war with Israel.

Later, the four delegates learned about Obama's statements, saying it was a big development in Palestine, where two parties typically at odds — Hamas and Fatah — announced earlier this year they would form a united government across Gaza and the West Bank and are seeking a spot at the United Nations table.

Speaking about Obama's comments, Marouf Zahran, a member of the delegation and Palestine's deputy minister of civil affairs, told the City Commission, "It's so appreciated by our people, and we hope that this declaration will help foster a... peace process."

Zahran is the former mayor of

Events involving Palestinian delegation

A delegation from Qalqilyah, Gainesville's sister city in the West Bank, will participate in forums and give talks while visiting here.

SUNDAY

2 p.m.: Presentations by delegates followed by question-and-answer session. Mennonite Meeting House, 1236 NW 18th Ave.

7 p.m.: Panel discussion moderated by Winston Nagan, a law professor at the University of Florida and founding director at UF's Institute for Human Rights, Peace and Development. Trinity United Methodist Church, 4000 NW 53rd Ave.

MONDAY

6 p.m.: Public forum. Santa Fe College, 3000 NW 83rd St., Room WA 104 (Building WA is on the southern end of campus along South Road)

Qalqilyah and came to Gainesville with three other local leaders — Samir Dawabsha, the current mayor; Yousef Odeh, the city's education director; and Ramez Abdallah, the medical director at Qalqilya Municipal Hospital — to primarily discuss education and medical issues.

Gainesville and Qalqilyah are two parts of what is believed to be the only three-way sister city program between municipalities in the U.S., Palestine and Israel.

Steven Kalishman, the president of the nonprofit Sister City Program Gainesville Inc., said he hoped to coordinate a

trip soon for the delegation from the Israeli city in the relationship, Kfar Saba.

Wearing a Palestinian flag on his lapel, Zahran said support for a two-state compromise is growing around the world and felt Obama's remarks would put pressure on the Israeli government to respect Palestine as a sovereign nation.

"What we ask for is for Mr. Netanyahu to abide by and stick to the international law and stick to the will of the whole world," Zahran said, referring to Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

"This is a compromise for both of us."

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Farewell dinner at the Fakhoury palace

After departing from Gainesville, the group traveled to Washington, D.C., accompanied by co-directors Paul S. Rothstein and Steve Kalishman. The group met with the president and staff of Sister Cities International, who recognized Gainesville's pioneering efforts in the U.S. Soviet sister cities movement, and affirmed their support for our trilateral approach to U.S./Israeli/Palestinian sister cities.

The group then spoke with Senator John Kerry and the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations committee staff, who were thrilled to learn about Gainesville's initiative. They encouraged the citizen diplomacy initiatives and expressed support that these programs could improve relations between Israelis and Palestinians. The delegates spent an hour discussing U.S./Palestinian/Israeli relations with Congressman Keith Ellison, and had meetings with officials at the U.S. Institute for Peace, State Department, Senator Bill Nelson's office staff and with Senator Al Franken's foreign relations advisor.



The delegation in the office of U.S. Congressman Keith Ellison

The following day the group met with the director of new Martin Luther King Memorial, who provided a tour of the unfinished park; met with founder of the African/American Civil War Museum; and attended a prayer service and dinner at Masjid Muhammad Mosque with Imam Talib Shareef. The delegation returned home full of impressions and optimism about the future of the program.

Documenting transformative interactions

Inspired by energetic, broad-based support from Jewish and Palestinian Americans, community leaders and other citizen diplomats, a delegation of Gainesville political leaders, citizen diplomats, musicians and artists traveled to Israel and the West Bank in September, 2011, to promote their sister city program and to gauge the level of interest in the concept of trilateral sister city relationships. With generous financial support from Jewish and Palestinian Americans and others, an Israeli film crew was hired to create a documentary memorializing the interactions of American, Israeli and Palestinian elected officials, citizen diplomats, musicians and artists.



A Qalqilya farmer presents an olive tree to Mayor Lowe

For nearly two weeks, a two-man film crew recorded more than 50 hours of footage of the Gainesville delegation's interactions with Palestinians and Israelis. Mayor Craig Lowe and City Commissioner Randy Wells took the lead in engaging local, regional and national Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The three co-directors of CDI, a Palestinian American woman and two Jewish American men, challenged Israeli and Palestinian leaders and ordinary citizens on issues of security, human decency and a vision of a future in which cooperation replaces conflict.





Luminaries' performance at the Qalqilya City Hall auditorium with Qalqilya hip hop artists. This footage reveals the transformative effects of people-to-people contacts, together with the new language of music and art creation that reaches people in a way that words cannot. Performances by The Luminaries, the art teacher (Robert Ponzio) and the music teacher (Jason Stahl) inspired feelings of inspiration and hope in children and their families in Israeli and Palestinian communities that they visited. Generous contributions by major donors, The Dharma Foundation and the Colen Family Foundation, as well as Dr. Riadh and Manal Fakhoury, Gladys Cofrin, Dr. Adil Kabeer, Dr. Jabbar Baroush and Satchel's Pizza, made it all possible.

Taking CDI to the next level of influence and visibility depends on the production and distribution of the documentary, *When the People Lead*. To raise the necessary funds, a trailer needs to be created from the recorded footage and photographs. The trailer will also spur the fundraising needed to create a feature-length documentary worthy of Oscar consideration.



Oak Hall Art Director Robert Ponzio and Music Director Jason Stahl at the wall



Discussion with Mickey Singer at the Temple of the Universe

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Expanding the Maccabiah Games

The International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame website gives the following account of the history of the Maccabiah Games:

The Maccabiah Games are quadrennial Jewish Olympics, held in Israel the year following the Olympic Games. Every four years, the best Jewish athletes from throughout the world compete in Open, Masters, Juniors, and Disabled competitions.

The Maccabiah Games are staged under the auspices of the Maccabi World Union (MWU), a worldwide youth and sports organization devoted to furthering Jewish identity and traditions through cultural, social, and educational activities. The MWU is headquartered in Israel. The concept of the Maccabiah Games was the brainchild of 15-year old Russian-born Yosef Yekutieli. The Eretz Yisroel teenager so energized by news of the 1912 Olympic Games that he conceived the fanciful notion of a worldwide Olympics for Jewish athletes in Palestine. With little encouragement, and not a small amount of ridicule, Yekutieli spent the next ten years developing details of his unique idea.

In 1928, Yekutieli presented his far-fetched proposal to the Jewish National Fund, with the notion that the Maccabiah Games be organized to commemorate the 1,800th

anniversary of the Bar Kochba Rebellion (Jewish revolt against the Romans). Coincidentally, the Maccabi organization was, at the same time, formulating ideas to provide a means of participation by athletes living in the British Mandate of Palestine in important international sporting events; one that would also act as a form of international recognition of Palestine as the Jewish National Home.

Yekutieli's *Maccabiada*, as the Games were originally called, was the right idea at the right time. With the hechture of the Eretz Israel Soccer Association, other Holy Land sports groups fell in line to give the proposed Games their blessings. But approval of the ruling British Palestine High Commissioner was the final hurdle to realization.

In the Fall of 1931, Great Britain appointed Sir Arthur “Andy” Wauchope High Commissioner of Palestine. Contrary to previous High Commissioners, Sir Arthur admired the achievements of Zionist Palestine, including the burgeoning Jewish sports movement. The new High Commissioner gladly extended his patronage to the Maccabiada, on condition that it host Arab and official British Mandate athletes, as well as Jewish sportsmen. The Maccabiada was scheduled for March, 1932.

With approval came the next conundrum: reaching the world Jewish community with news of this unique sports extravaganza. So, in a world absent television, the internet, significant radio, and common language print media, two delegations of Jewish motor-bikers set off from Tel Aviv on an epic promotional tour to the Jewish communities of Europe, where most Jews lived.

CITIZEN DIPLOMACY INITIATIVES
SIX TRACKS TO TRANSFORMATION

The first troupe of promoters hit the road in 1930, biking from Tel Aviv to Antwerp (Belgium). The second set of riders left Tel Aviv a year later for London. Yekutieli, him self, rode with one of the delegations.

On the second tour, May 10 to July 16 1931, the intrepid Maccabiah bikers covered 5,825 miles (9,375 kilometers). From Tel Aviv, they traveled across the Sinai desert through Cairo and Alexandria (Egypt); hopped a ship to Salonika (Greece); then on to Gorna, Sofia, (Bulgaria); Belgrade, Novy, Sad (Serbia), Osijek and Zagreb (Croatia)*; through Vienna and Linz (Austria) to Nuremburg and Frankfurt (Germany); through Metz to Paris (France); and by ferry to Brighton and the English cities of London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds; to Glasgow (Scotland); and then home via Beirut (Lebanon).

Wherever they went, they announced the “Jewish Olympics,” the Maccabiah, taking place the following spring in Eretz Israel (the land of Israel). (*Bulgaria, Serbia and Croatia merged as Yugoslavia in 1929.)

The original Maccabiah was held March 28 to April 6, 1932. Its overwhelming success guaranteed its permanent future. Originally conceived as a quadrennial event, Maccabiah II was moved up a year to 1935 because of the rising tide of Nazism in Europe. The rumblings of World War II forced postponement of the third Maccabiah. The delay was 15 years. The Games were reborn in 1950 in the new State of Israel, and Maccabiah #4 was held in 1953. Thereafter, the Maccabiah established its current quadrennial formula, held the year following the Summer Olympic Games.

The Games today are organized by an International Maccabiah Committee and are sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee and World Federation of Sports. The Maccabiah Games, ranking among the five largest sports gatherings in the world (in number of participants), are considered Regional Games by the International Olympic Committee.

For each participant, the Maccabiah Games are “two weeks to experience and a lifetime to remember.” For many, the Maccabiah is the athlete’s most significant connection to the State of Israel and for some, Judaism itself. For the young Open athlete, generally 16 to 23 years old and immersed in the machinations of high-level competition, connection with Jewish contemporaries from the far reaches of the world, in the land of Jewish roots, inspires an awakening of heritage.

While all Maccabiah matches, games, and races are keenly competitive, some events measure up to world-class competition. Numerous Olympic and national champions have sought Maccabiah gold, silver, and bronze medals. Among the Olympic gold medallists, world champions, and world record holders who have competed in the Maccabiah Games are Mark Spitz and Marilyn Ramenofsky (swimming); Debbie Lipman (diving); Mitch Gaylord, Abie Grossfeld, and Agnes Keleti (gymnastics); Larry Brown, Ernie Grunfeld, Danny Schayes, (coaches) Nat Holman and Dolph Schayes (basketball); Carina Benninga (field hockey); Lillian Copeland, Gerald Ashworth, and Gary Gubner (track and field);

Angela Buxton, Julie Heldman, Allen Fox, and Dick Savitt (tennis); Angelica Rosenau (table tennis); Isaac Berger and Frank Spellman (weightlifting); and Fred Oberlander and Henry Wittenberg (wrestling). “ http://www.jewishsports.net/the_maccabiah_games.htm

In recorded history, the idea of sports playing an integral role in creating a framework for peoples of radically different backgrounds to exchange violence for fierce competition dates back at least to the Athens-Spartacus Olympic Games. That the framework originally took hold and became memorialized throughout time in a city-state model strengthens the credibility of the entire CDI action plan. Cities are an ideal construct for bridges including sports arches to be built connecting differing peoples weary of conflict; especially in areas as geographically limited as the lands populated by Israelis and Palestinians.

Sports as a centerpiece to propelling transformative thinking has most recently been reaffirmed by the popularity of the movie *Invictus*. Nelson Mandela had the foresight to capitalize on sport as a catalyst to turn a forum filled with bitterness, resentment and distrust into a theater of unity. There, the participation of black and white South Africans together in a sport brought hope to a new reality. Here, expanding the Maccabiah Games to include Palestinians and other Arabs offers a similar opportunity. While it is not contemplated that Israelis and Palestinians would play on the same team, their joint participation in an arena where excellence, discipline and joy are honored would serve to bring hope to a new reality. Moreover, similar to the model with which Nelson Mandela worked, the legal framework for the Games to begin has already been established. As recited above, the British High Commissioner **“gladly extended his patronage to the Maccabiada, on condition that it host Arab and official British Mandate athletes, as well as Jewish sportsmen.”**

The next Maccabiah Games take place in the Summer of 2013. Having additional venues in Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron and Qalqilya, where adequate facilities exist, would lay down another track to transforming relations between Palestinians and Israelis. The Maccabiah Games are sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee. In that the original creators of the Games contemplated and legally required joint participation of Jews and Arabs, the International Olympic Governing Body by relying on precedent, should advocate for an expansion of the Maccabiah Games into Palestinian cities.



Meeting with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has enthusiastically endorsed the expansion of the Macabbiah Games to include Palestinian venues. He approved of inviting Palestinians from all over the world to participate in these competitions. Israelis have not yet been approached on this concept. With encouragement from Israeli leaders and sports figures, the international community and the International Olympic Governing Body, there is every reason to believe that this concept can become reality. If Israelis do not believe that their security concerns can be adequately addressed, the Olympic Governing Body could still sanction Maccabiah Games in Palestinian cities with the participation of Palestinians and others. It would be preferable for the expansion to incorporate both Israelis and Palestinians. However, based on the original legal framework for the creation of the Games, it appears that the Olympic Governing Body has the authority to allow the expansion into Palestinian communities even if Israelis choose not to participate in those venues.

A lot of work has to be done to put this concept into action. The sports to be including would need to be identified. Soccer, track and field, tennis, table tennis, basketball, weightlifting, wrestling and martial arts such as judo and karate are all sports that could be played in these additional venues. Operational and security procedures would have to be given the highest priority.

Palestinian and Israeli goods in American sister cities, and at Ben Gurion Airport

The origins of the Gainesville/Kfar Saba/Qalqilya sister city program derive from a water and waste treatment conference hosted in Gainesville with representatives from Kfar Saba and Qalqilya developing ideas and exchange of services to confront the challenges of water treatment. Identifying and exporting specific goods and services from Israeli and Palestinian cities to an American city that bridges the relationship between those two communities can accelerate opportunities for cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians. Initially the American city would need to encourage local businesses, including local franchises, to carry Palestinian and Israeli products and to utilize their services. The designated and approved American sister city would facilitate test marketing by local businesses and national retailers located in that city. Similarly, the Israeli city that would agree to complete the triangle would also test market certain goods or services to be distributed through the designated American sister city.

Establishing numerous trilateral ties would create a natural flow of opportunities for Israelis and Palestinians to eventually work together to reach economies of scale in transport and operational issues. Commerce with their American sister cities would provide another mechanism for transforming relations between Palestinians and Israelis. While Americans have become familiar with certain Israeli products such as Saba Hummus, few Americans have brand identification with any Palestinian product. To begin to increase awareness by Americans of Palestinian products, a Palestinian-Israeli storefront prominently located in the Ben Gurion Airport would generate immediate and extensive exposure for such items. Nearly a million Americans pass through the post-modern, aesthetically pleasing concourses annually. Browsing through the aisles and shopping at the Israeli- Palestinian store, Americans would foster and promote both Palestinian and Israeli brand identity. Furthermore, Israeli security concerns may well delay the creation of a Palestinian airport in the foreseeable future. A Palestinian presence that increases over time at Ben Gurion Airport may ease the transition to the creation of a Palestinian airport.

Luminaries (with Ponz and Jason) tour of Israeli and Palestinian communities

Throughout the visit to Israeli and Palestinian communities, Mayor Craig Lowe and City Commissioner Randy Wells engaged Palestinian and Israeli leaders in an exchange of ideas. Other delegates also talked frankly with their Israeli and Palestinian counterparts. The people-to-people interactions set in motion a greater understanding by the citizen diplomats of the challenges faced by Israelis and Palestinians.

However, the effects of talking about cooperation are limited. The language of music and art create experiences among children and adults that are potentially transformative. Throughout the

two-week journey, time and again the breakthrough moments brought on by music and art highlighted the trip. The musicians from Los Angeles known as the Luminaries performed in a number of Israeli and Palestinian venues. Similarly, the music teacher, Jason Stahl, and artist / art teacher, Robert Ponzio (“Ponz”), engaged adults and children in many venues in both lands.



“Ponzart” at a concert in Kfar Saba

In concerts in Qalqilya, Kfar Saba and Taybeh, Luminaries’ music and lyrics created feelings of joy and unity that suffused the crowds. In Qalqilya, the concert began with a local hip-hop group whose lyrics and music spoke in emotionally-charged, aggressive songs. The conflict between Fatah and Hamas fueled their performance. By the time the Luminaries took the stage, the audience had been imbued with these in your face beats and rhythms. The mood of the spectators soon underwent a change. And the local hipsters, after an initial hesitancy, joined the Luminaries on the stage. A spirit of cooperation that had been unthinkable an hour before was created. While not as dramatic, a similar spirit of cooperation and hope spread throughout the audiences in Kfar Saba and Taybeh. Similarly, performances in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and at An-Najah National University in Nablus and Hebron University, were well

received by those audiences. One of the most memorable events occurred one evening after the Luminaries performed at a Kfar Saba youth venue in called “Gallery 29.” After the main performance was over, local high-school musicians took the stage and began a jam session with the Luminaries that lasted well into the night. . Jason Stahl joined in with a borrowed trombone. The students and Americans used blues and rock-and-roll as their common language, bonding in a way that words would have never allowed.



Qalqilya audience at The Luminaries concert

Frequently complementing the Luminaries performances, Ponz painted large, spontaneous murals at these venues which illustrated each event. The children, at first curious, soon began to assist Ponz in his creative energy as they painted representations of the scenes unfolding at the concerts. Each image created also depicted the Sister Cities logo as an illustration of the spirit of our delegation.

Jason also worked with Palestinian and Israeli students to create music. Using professional recording equipment he brought from Gainesville, Stahl recorded tracks by students in Qalqilya, Kfar Saba, Hebron, and the Luminaries. When he returned to Oak Hall School, he had his

students listen and compose guitar, percussion, and horn parts, which were then recorded and interwoven with the Palestinian, Israeli and Luminaries' recordings: creating an international composition that will be used in the film.

The impact of his interactions is best summed up by one 17-year-old student in Qalqilya who wrote to Jason on FaceBook, "It was really awesome to meet you a few weeks ago. That day was the best day in my whole life!! "

Students from that region would like nothing more than to be able to live peaceful and productive lives, and to obtain an education at a college institution of the caliber found in the United States. Jason's impression was: "A 17-year-old is a 17-year-old, no matter where you go. These students have the same dreams about their career, ambitions for their family, and hope for love that our kids have back at home. This is what is really at the heart of what we do."

Spreading the music and art interactions produced by the Luminaries, Ponz and Jason throughout a large number of Palestinian and Israeli communities could be instrumental in shattering walls of mistrust and isolation between Israelis and Palestinians.

American travelers to Israel and the West Bank

Communication with web-based media such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs offers a range of forums for American citizen diplomats to participate in creating and maintaining bonds with Israelis and Palestinians. The Three Cities-One World web site (<http://threecities-oneworld.ning.com>) used by the Gainesville/Kfar Saba/Qalqilya sister city program demonstrates the effectiveness of Internet communications in connecting Palestinians and Israelis. Ponz and Jason have returned from their travels inspired to build upon the bonds that originated in the Palestinian and Israeli communities that they visited.

Using the Three Cities-One World web site, Israeli and Palestinian teachers and children are working with Ponz to post children's art and communications. For the first time, these kids will experience art from children who live only a few miles away in distance, but worlds away in reality. Qalqilya and Kfar Saba are less than five kilometers apart. For Palestinian and Israeli children and their teachers to view and interact with the artwork of their counterparts chisels away at the isolation between these peoples.

Jason has developed a similar program with music. Through the internet, he will share music originated with Israeli and Palestinian children, supervised by their teachers. Similar to the art instruction given by Ponz, Jason worked separately with Kfar Saba and Qalqilya children and

their teachers during the trip. The internet medium will open their ears to listening, for the first time, to music created by their counterparts in Kfar Saba and Qalqilya respectively, and allow them to collaborate on multi-national compositions.

Since returning to Los Angeles, the Luminaries have been actively identifying Israeli and Palestinian musicians with whom they can perform. They played or engaged with a variety of listeners in a range of venues including Jerusalem, Taybeh, Qalqilya, Tel Aviv, Kfar Saba, Hebron, and Nablus. In many of these venues, the Luminaries performed with local musicians.

The success of these endeavors hinged directly on the support of the political leadership of Gainesville, Kfar Saba, and Qalqilya. The participation and endorsement by the local governments provided the structure and credibility for these relationships to thrive. The citizen diplomacy relationships had room to expand because of the consent of the local political leadership in a region beset by conflict and distrust.

The common root throughout all of these musical and art relationships is that they grew out of a physical presence in these Israeli and Palestinian communities. The language of words has its limits. The medium of the internet also has its limits. Being there on the ground, experiencing the human contact, the people-to-people interactions, is so basic yet so essential to bulldozing through walls of fear.

The most effective way for American citizen diplomats to actively engage with Israelis and Palestinians is to go there and meet people. No other means of acquiring information can compare with face-to-face contacts with people. The Soviet sister city experience revealed the incredible power of human connection to transform beliefs and ideologies. Fear and ignorance feed conflict; human interaction creates bonds of friendship that can overcome hatred.

CDI is proposing a broad range of travel experiences, not just to sister city delegations, but to all citizen diplomats who want to meet their counterparts in Israel and Palestine. Every Muslim, Christian and Jew should visit the Holy Land at least once in their lives. Traveling with a CDI group will be vastly different from traveling as a tourist. Citizen diplomats will have the opportunity to meet with their counterparts, to experience life as they do, and to make lifelong friends.

CDI is also proposing the broadening of Birthright trips (starting with a pilot project in Gainesville) to allow three additional days to be spent in Palestinian communities. Having a Jewish-American celebrity join the delegation can provide reassurance of adequate security.

The Birthright program, started in 1994, has brought more than 200,000 individuals from 52 different countries (70% were from the U.S.) to Israel for 10 days to experience a taste of Israeli life. The trips are done at no cost to the traveler. CDI will create a program to allow participants to visit Palestinian communities after completing the Israeli program, which would present an opportunity to increase American Jewish awareness of Palestinians and their culture at a relatively nominal cost. On an entirely voluntary basis, these Birthright American Jewish participants would pioneer a new path to bridging relationships. Including participation by American-Jewish celebrities, these trips have the potential for creating far-reaching impacts.

The Hillel Jewish organization, on many college campuses in the United States, has been a critical recruitment vehicle for the Birthright initiative. The Gainesville Hillel Program, with its magnificent facility and its activities to connect to the 8-10,000 Jewish students at the University of Florida, has been identified as one of the premier Hillel programs in the United States. At the request of its executive director, Kevin Dvorchik, the Gainesville Hillel Board of Directors will consider allowing Gainesville Birthright participants, on a voluntary basis through a separately run program, to visit Palestinian communities after completion of their Israeli visit. If the Hillel Board of Directors approves of this pilot program, the participants leaving for the June, 2012, trip would be eligible to visit Palestinian communities. The CDI proposal will be submitted to the Hillel Board of Directors in January, 2012.

CDI would serve as the affiliated organization that would assume responsibility for the safety and security of the Birthright participants during their visit to the Palestinian communities. Additionally, funds would have to be allocated to defray, at least in part, any room, board, and travel expenses for this part of the visit.

CDI will also create other travel opportunities to facilitate and promote the on-ground presence of Palestinian-Americans, Jewish-Americans and other Americans, which can serve as a secure bridge that Israelis and Palestinians can cross.

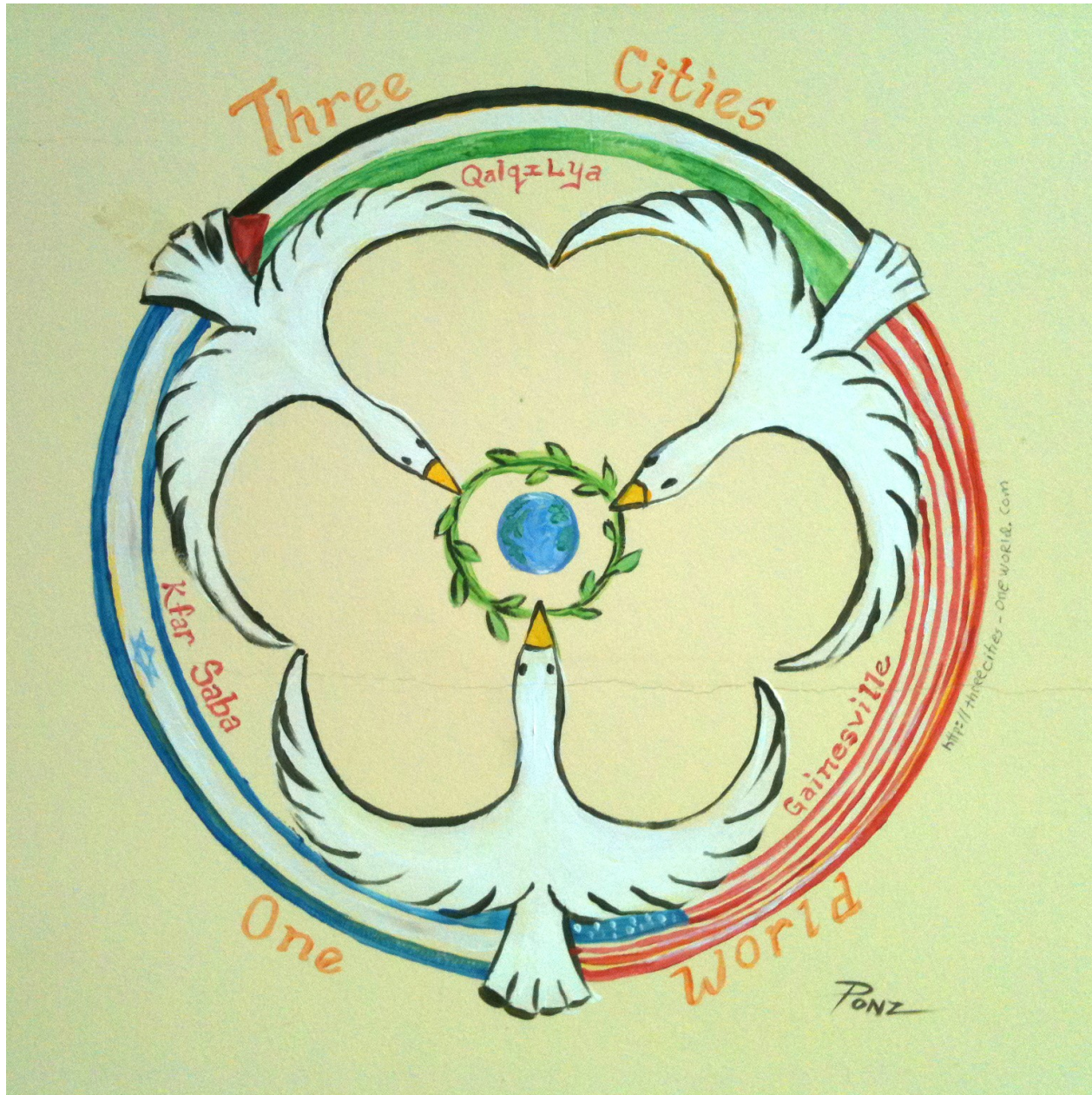


Meeting at the Kfar Saba city hall

CONCLUSION

Led by Jewish and Palestinian Americans committed to playing a constructive role in transforming old paradigms of isolation, distrust and despair, CDI offers six tracks to transformation between Israelis and Palestinians. This is not some pie-in-the-sky fantasy about backslapping, best-friend-forever relationships blossoming among Palestinians and Israelis. This initiative contemplates a permanent framework for American citizen diplomats clothed in local political legitimacy to design and implement specific proposals that naturally form cooperative relationships between Palestinians and Israelis. The lands comprising Israel and a future Palestine would fit into the borders of the State of Massachusetts. With relatively little land to populate, Palestinians and Israelis live in a geographical area where cities take on a dominant role in the facets of everyday life.

The Gainesville/Kfar Saba/Qalqilya trilateral sister city relationship proves the viability of a local American role in creating meaningful ties between Israelis and Palestinians. Reaching out to both communities through art, music, sports, and engaged local political leadership, American citizen diplomats through CDI can assume an effective, perhaps pivotal role in writing a new chapter in Palestinian Israeli relations.



CITIZEN DIPLOMACY INITIATIVES (CDI) **SIX TRACKS TO TRANSFORMATION**

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