

Blueprint Negev a Priority for Ruderman Family Charitable Foundation

The new synagogue at Bahad 1 Army Base outside of Mitzpe Ramon, funded by the Rudermans.



EVEN DURING THE DAY, the new synagogue at Bahad 1 Army Base, an IDF officer training school located near Mitzpe Ramon, stands out by virtue of its height and design. But look at it at night, when it's lit up, and it is mesmerizing; you almost get the sense that it's on fire.

"We live in a Jewish country where the army and religion are intimately intertwined," said Jay Ruderman, a former Boston resident who now lives in Rehovot, Israel. Jay and his wife Shira, as well as Jay's sister Sharon Shapiro of Brookline, MA, donated funds to JNF through the Ruderman Family Charitable Foundation to build the synagogue. Both Sharon and Shira are proud Sapphire Society members.

"The strength of the army comes from protecting the Jewish State and people who are religious play a significant role in that," he continued. "When the army chief of staff told Shira that more and more soldiers who are training to become officers are religious and the current synagogue was too small to serve their needs, she came to the Foundation and said, 'I really want to do this for the leaders of the army.' It feels great to do something for people who give so much for their country."

Designed by architect Eli Armon, the synagogue's wavy concrete pillars are 42 feet high and intersected with metal beams. Its likeness to a burning bush set up high is deliberate;

it signifies G-d and a fire that is never extinguished. As for the building's materials, Armon chose concrete for its simplicity so that it fits in with the rest of the base and because it connotes an unfinished modesty.

This project is part of JNF's *Blueprint Negev* campaign to sustainably develop the Negev Desert and increase its population, in which the IDF plays a significant role. "If you're going to bring 500,000 people to a region," said JNF CEO Russell F. Robinson, "one of Israel's biggest employers is the army. The army made a decision to move bases and people to the Negev out of the center of the country where it's become so expensive. We are working closely with them to help make the Negev Desert a home, not just a place where people are stationed until they're released. Deliberately, housing will not be on the bases save for those in training. People will live in nearby towns. This will serve as an economic engine for the region; everything is tied in. Nothing is just a project; it's all part of a vision: *Blueprint Negev*."

Said Jay: "The synagogue will always be here. It took a long time to build; the wavy columns were difficult to cast, but it will always be here. And that means a lot to us."

In addition to the synagogue, the Ruderman Family Charitable Foundation is also heavily involved in recycling.



Jay and Shira Ruderman.

"When we lived in Boston," explained Jay, "we recycled everything—newspapers, cardboard, glass, plastics, and tin. Then we moved to Israel and we saw that no one recycled anything; it was virtually unheard of. We felt so bad about it. How could people not be looking out for the environment in such a small country?"

So the Rudermans, together with matching funds from Amy and the late Natan Parsons and JNF, started a recycling program in Arad, a city in the Negev Desert northeast of Mitzpe Ramon. Because JNF's focus is on the Negev, they looked to that region and found an interested partner in the city of Arad. To date, receptacles for glass, paper, and plastic have been placed all over town, and local manufacturers that recycle the material have been put to use. After-school educational programs have also been implemented to teach the youth about the importance of recycling and a museum in Arad displays art projects that students made out of recycled materials.

"The idea is to create a model for other towns and cities to copy," said Jay. "This works because everyone is involved—the children, the residents and even the municipality which invested its own resources as well. It's so important to do projects in Israel's periphery and this is one of them."

Indeed, thanks to the Ruderman Family Charitable Foundation, recycling will now be the middle name of the citizens of Arad. The goal of this one-of-a-kind environmental project, called "Arad: A Recycling City," is to brand Arad as an "eco-oasis" and attract an increased population.

"A project such as this can help improve the city's image and the quality of living for its residents," said Jay. "That's why we chose Arad, as a city that truly needs these benefits."

The result of these efforts will be a true recycling city, which has not been achieved in Israel to date. "This should serve as a model for other cities," said Jay. "After all, Israel is a small country, and it's important to all of us that it remains beautiful and healthy. Recycling is one of the key ways of achieving this."