



Spring 2007

Ketura Highlights



Volume #37

An English Journal by Parents and Members of Ketura

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Irving Kessler

As in past years, Greta and I managed to travel from Newport, Rhode Island to Ketura where we celebrated my eighty-fifth birthday, and the birthdays of our grandchildren, Asher, Shir, and Avi. A visit to Florence Yudkin's gravesite reminded us that scores of grandparents may not be able to make the same journey and might appreciate an overall view of kibbutz 'Highlights' not usual in a long distance phone call.

We are happy to report that our good friend Michelle Sampson is winning her heroic struggle with illness and was among the many who are active (including Greta) in preparing the Purim Spectacular!

The new kibbutz leadership was most supportive in the production of this issue, giving up valuable time to do so. There were two Bar/ Bat Mitzvah weekends, creating a hectic movement between living quarters. Festivities involved many who prepared delicious foods and desserts served al fresco next to the Beit Knesset. Mazal Tov go to the Lehrer and Factor families and their celebrant children.

It was not possible in our brief visit to cover all the interesting stories here; we want to thank those who wrote for us or allowed us to interview them. A special thanks to our son, Seth, for his guidance and many assists, and to Robin Gilmore for her layout expertise while living overseas (Dezigning Women - one of Ketura's businesses).

We hope you will enjoy this issue – let us hear from you: igkessler@gmail.com



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MASKIR'S REPORT by MOSHE FALKOF

Dafna Shimshon-Musnikow handed me the reins of the Mazkir (General Secretary) in September 2006. I have 35 years experience in kibbutz, but I never realized the significant and crucial role that the mazkir plays in the eyes of the members. Fortunately, members respect you in that role for being willing to carry the heavy responsibility of the community's welfare.

When I was a university student, I remember writing an essay predicting my future. I was already dreaming of kibbutz, and I wrote that I would probably be mazkir one day! Arriving in Israel with a degree in economics, I began my career at Kibbutz Hatzetim, famous for being the home of Netafim, the world-wide leader of the drip irrigation market. After a short army service that included one war (1973) and four years of kibbutz experience, I came to Ketura in 1976 for a six month stint to help out the young kibbutz. I met my wife Mala here; we are the parents of three daughters, and home for two nieces as well. I have done my share of agricultural work (I am still a Shabbat milker), but mostly have been involved with accounting (five years at Ardag) and education. I have taught elementary school, worked with grade school children in the kibbutz children houses, and have just graduated from six fascinating years with the Naale program for Russian-speaking high school youth. As that program drew to a close, I realized I could do anything, including being mazkir of the kibbutz.



KETURA FACTS:

What is the organization in my charge?

- 140 members and candidates
- 140 children under 18 years of age
- 66 youth over 18 years of age, including soldiers, students, backpackers, and even those who are living independently in the city

What about the second generation settling down on the old farm? Up until now, only one 'ben meshek' (Nisan Pollack) has chosen Ketura as a way of life. A few more are considering joining adult members of the community, and I am sure that others prefer to wait until they have families and professions. We know that our graduates are very proud of their Ketura roots, and identify with the values that we hold dear.

Hopefully we will be wise enough to recognize their needs in a changing world, so that they will seek Ketura as a viable life-style for themselves.

Several members of the kibbutz are already experiencing the wonders of grandchildren. We begin to appreciate the importance of our parents as the grandparents of the children who have grown up on the kibbutz. We continue to enjoy the visits of the sabas and savtas, although the visits are generally shorter than they used to be. But, gosh, the years have gone by, and we all have so many good memories of those visits. The summers haven't gotten any easier to bear, but then again, we have a new attraction --- I know that my parents, Mel and Lucille Falkof, will be making the trip this year: my oldest daughter, Tamar, will be married on the kibbutz in May, G-d willing.

Kibbutz Ketura is finally enjoying some warm spring days after a month or two of very cold nights. People get up in the morning and say, "What a beautiful spring day!" As you know, the Arava barely experiences spring before the heat of the summer comes roaring in.

In the meantime, we are busy with running our community and our daily lives.

First and foremost, we have committees that keep us moving ahead, answering to the needs and questions of the members. Let me offer a list divided into age groups that receive committees' attention: the pre-school education, the Noam Youth Movement advisors, and the youth-soldier-students, and other big kids. All those committees guarantee that opportunities are provided for our offspring at all ages.

The next group of committees is the heart of the operation: work, finance, economic, pension, and building committees. We also consider our leisure time and quality of life: the budget, culture, environment, and religious committees. We are a multi-generational

community, with every kind of work opportunity, and with many needs taken care of by the general budget. I have chosen to describe the kibbutz as a multi-committee operation because I think that responsible management has become an essential part of the kibbutz secretary's job. I would like to note the mega-projects coming up in 2007:

1. Around September we hope to begin the construction of new houses in compliance with a decision to redouble our efforts to increase the population. The effort includes a new General Plan of the kibbutz, designing houses as we like, and setting up the financial arrangements, probably without government support.
2. A thorough investigation into our budget allotments, the essence of personal satisfaction, will hopefully lead to changes in the economic plan of 2008. In no way do we intend to affect the degree of communalization or the co-operative character of the kibbutz. On the contrary, we are more aware of people's needs. By reorganizing personal budgets, we will try to leave more money at the discretion of the individual.

What's new in the kibbutz in the past year? The new ecologically friendly offices of the Arava Institute were completed in the summer of 2006. The swimming pool had major repairs, and is one of the two licensed pools (for public swimming) in the region.

BIRTHS and BAR MITZVAHS, and WEDDINGS, yes, weddings of our youth:

Weddings:

Yoav, son of Carol and Yoram Hoffman, married Danielle.

Nisan, son of Karen and Terry Pollack, married Tova.

Tamar, daughter of Mala and Moshe, married Ronen.

More are planned in 2007.

Bar Mitzvas / Bat Mitzvas:

Adam Factor, Ariel Finkel, Inbar Hertz, Michael Goldman

Births:

Dan, son of Hanita and Shai Schweber

Eilan, son of Maya Nusinow and Dan Evans

Benyamin Raphael, son of Ruti and Yoni Roth

New Members: Sharon Lipofsky and Marcello Shliesserman and their two children

New Candidates: Igor and Lillia Kirshenbaum from Kiryat Gat, Yonathan Chessler (USA), and Yafit and Dudu Grossman from Eilat

THE PLACE TO BE: Café Kolot – the lobby of the Keren Kolot guest rooms which offers good coffee and homemade cakes

GOOD TIMES: Beach party at Ardag Fisheries; Music Week; 33rd Birthday of Ketura (November 2006)

SPORT: The annual PINI SOCCER TOURNAMENT which Ketura hosts every year for the entire region, was better than ever.

Outside
Café Kolot



Café Kolot – the lobby of the Keren Kolot guest rooms which offers good coffee and homemade cakes



We will miss the young Russians of Naale, as well as Alison and Rabbi Michael Cohen. We hosted many, many Israelis from the north during the Lebanese war. That was a major project, unplanned. Everyone pitched in to make the visitors feel a bit of peace and quiet away from the bombings.

People here are involved in so many things that it is impossible for one person to do it all. Much is volunteer work, either in Eilat or at the After –School Club at Grofit stables, or tutoring students or new immigrants. One of our biggest challenges is the nature of the relationship that we have with our post-army children---will they choose Ketura as a way of life? Time will tell.

WILL IT GET YOUR GOAT?
INDEED NOT!

On February 6, 2007 twin miniature goats were born at the Kibbutz Ketura Zoo. Each was about the size of a human baby, appearing much larger because of the thick fur. One baby goat is gray with black markings on his tail and all black legs; the other is black with white ears.

On day two I found the black goat cuddled against the crevice of the large rocks in their pen, as the gray goat cuddled against him protectively. Later, they stood and nursed. By day four they took short walks with the two adult goats, under the supervision of Tiki Kagan who cares for them and the other animals in the zoo which includes hamsters, rabbits, and even racoons.

And how diid the twins progress? At two weeks the gray goat, Mr. Risk Taker, repeatedly jumped and climbed over the top of the rocks as he acquired new balancing skills.His more cautious twin meanwhile, took one turn at jumping onto a cluster of rocks, one at a time, but quickly lost his footing. Our next report will be in 2008.

Rhoda Kagan



Ketura's Treasurer: Mimi Segal

If you ask me if it's worth investing in Ketura, I'd say without a doubt, "Yes"!

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Miriam (Mimi) Segal. I'm a native Israeli, who came to Ketura in 1979 as part of a pre-army group. After completing my service, I stayed at Ketura, where I worked in landscaping for 18 years. Eight years ago, I began working in accounting and was elected Treasurer two years ago.

In that capacity, I'm also Chief Accountant of our neighboring community, Lotan. This combination enables supervision of work in the two accounting departments. I'm available to both even when I'm not physically present, and am able to be in immediate contact. I manage to "swing" between both jobs by prioritizing, and being familiar with the needs of both positions. The desire to bring in more income is my impetus for taking on these two positions.

Ketura is financially conservative. We're meticulous about monitoring our finances and the pension funds that we maintain in every member's name, so that we won't be a burden on our children in the event that Ketura "goes under". In addition, we set aside funds "for a rainy day" so that we'll be able to cope with unexpected expenses. We also have a higher education fund for our children, under the aegis of Merkaz Hashachar (our non-profit association). There are periods when we're cashstrapped— yes, it happens—but even when we are, we maintain our standards.

Since the opening of Alga Technologies in 2001, ten to fifteen Ketura members have joined its staff. Alga Tech has occasionally experienced production or marketing snags, and our members who are Alga Tech employees have had to go unpaid, which is the main cause of our cash flow problems. Because we cooperate with Alga Tech's management

personnel—who themselves are Ketura members—we manage to overcome these "humps" together by acting as guarantors to loans, thereby helping cash to flow back into Ketura's coffers.

It's been a few years since the sword of Ardag's closure has hung over us. Here too, we put money aside in order to offset the loss of income. Today, most of our income from Ardag is in the form of dividends as well as payment for services rendered. Its management is still seeking solutions to its regulatory problems, and we're hoping that Ardag's entry into Ashdod Port and partnership with the caviar industry will, at least, not reduce profits.

Because we're agriculture-based, and try not to depend on outside labor, it's incumbent upon us to see that our outlay doesn't exceed our income. Agriculture is by nature an unstable business, and labor depends on the human element. Therefore, our business plan is not deficit-oriented. Our biggest problem now is our Jewish Agency debts that have inflated since Ketura's founding. Various attempts have been made to cancel or reduce them, but there's always about 8-10 million Israeli shekel debt looming on our horizon.

We're currently seeking funding to build housing for incoming families. We realize that if we don't grow our population, we have no future. This issue is now at the top of our community agenda. We'd like to avoid taking on more long-term debts that our children will have to inherit. Using our present income to build means tightening our belts even more.

In short, Ketura is now a stable and growing entity. If you were to ask me if it's worth investing in Ketura, I'd say without a doubt, "Yes".



ALGA INDUSTRIES - AN UPDATE

I was impressed by the quiet confidence of Alga Industries' new Managing Director, Hagay Tzur, a member of Kibbutz Sde Boker for 28 years. He spent twenty two years in industrial management and served for ten of them as head of their scotch tape factory. Mr. Tzur had visited Ketura and its algae production facility in the past. In fact, he had hoped to obtain this Ben Gurion University concept for his kibbutz, but understands that the number of sunlight hours at Ketura made it the logical choice of locations.

Hagay is focused on eliminating all technical and operating problems. This would leave only the biological issues which professors at Ben Gurion University must solve in their laboratory. For example, he noted, how can we confront a change in climate which has already produced colder nights and an impact on production?

For now, he feels, we are able to minimize errors through observed experience. "The market is constantly changing, but every kilo

now produced is being sold", according to Tzur. While competition exists, none of them are currently able to challenge Alga. The next step is to increase production to one and a half kilos from the current one kilo.

The combination of the University Research and Development Departments and a well-run Alga Industries plant can bring handsome rewards to its partners: the Jewish Charitable Association (formerly, the Baron de Hirsch Fund) and our kibbutz.

A final note – Hagay makes the round-trip from home to office by automobile every day, a three to four hour trip. Now that's admirable dedication! It was as exciting interview experience! Thank you, Diane, for setting up the appointment.

Irving Kessler

THE ARAVA INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

By David Lehrer

Spring semester, February 2007, started off messy, but not the kind of mess that one would think might occur in an institution that works for environmental cooperation in the Middle East. No, this semester began with the students covered in mud and clay, smiling at the chance to work outside on a hands-on, student-run project to create an outdoor clubhouse made of mud, sand, clay, straw, recycled bottles, and trash.



One of the most exciting pieces of news this semester is that after years of frustration at not being able to obtain study permits for Palestinians to study in Israel, due to a military ban, The Arava Institute has enrolled four Palestinian students. The ban made it nearly impossible for qualified Palestinians from the West bank and Gaza to enroll at the Institute. After the December court case, where AIES joined a petition with the organization GISHA to end the ban, this is the first semester in eight years to enroll this number of Palestinian students! Along with the nine Jordanians, ten Israelis, nine North Americans, and two Europeans (totaling 36 students), this is the second largest group since 2000 and certainly one of the most diverse.

As always, this semester is chock full of courses and activities. This spring the academic program has expanded by three courses: Environmental Mediation, Environmental Movements, and The Ecology of the Arava Valley. In addition we have added two new faculty members to our staff.

This semester is sure to be a joyous celebration of cultures as we travel on our journey through environmental learning.

EXOTIC SWIMMERS

Visiting Ketura's newest enterprise can be an exciting, yet confusing, experience. Located in an old turkey-run space, the exotic fish hatchery is crowded and dark. After experimentation, very colorful fish are now being sold in the world market. Names of the fish meant little to me. There are two main varieties of Mollyfish being raised, as well as the Twig Catfish.

The hatchery is the full time passion of Micha Eshchare who developed his expertise while working in the Eilat laboratory of Aquaculture Sciences. With the help of Ed Hofland, he convinced kibbutz leadership to risk investment in this project. To date, and after a few hitches, the hatchery has made three shipments for export using the services of an Arava moshav wholesaler. Micha expects the fish business to maintain continuous growth.

Meanwhile, his wife, Ayelet, teaches a senior class in the motza (regional) high school. The couple have two daughters. One of the two part-time assistants is Susie Sweet Kessler, our daughter-in-law. We expect to visit whenever we are here. Viewing this exotic marine life can be most rewarding. Good luck to our youngest industry and its innovative founder!

Your Editor, Irving Kessler

What I Learned from Kibbutz Ketura

People often ask me why a college graduate would want to volunteer on a kibbutz, especially when presented with the alternative internship option through OTZMA, my parent program. You learn to get used to that kind of thing when you major in sociology at a university most known for its medical school. I get inquiries all the time along the lines of, "Sociology, huh. That's just like psychology, right?" and "Oh... and what do you plan on doing with that, exactly?"

The truth is, anyone with a degree in the social sciences has a mental picture of their future about as clear as the Jordanian hills on a windy afternoon in May. Me, I always assumed that I would eventually end up working in some type of food or service industry – I just didn't realize it would happen right away.

I've been working in the dining hall on Kibbutz Ketura since shortly before Pesach. I joke with my OTZMA friends in their cushy internships in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, boasting that I'm the hottest lunch lady this place has ever seen. But you see, working in the cheder ochel involves a lot more than gracefully dishing out ladles of stir-fry chicken or beef goulash and then cleaning up the mess after late lunch. This job takes self-direction, diligence, and above all, a keen understanding of what makes people happy.

Indeed, my education may have ended the day I received my Hopkins diploma, but it started right back up again when I unpacked my belongings in Gimel-3. The last three months have been truly enlightening, as I've picked up quite a few insights into what makes this place run like a sunny-side-up egg on a Thursday morning, including:

That making a perfect pitcher of mint lemonade is the golden ticket to popularity.

That patience is a virtue, especially when breakfast foods are involved; i.e., one blackened

pancake is worth five undercooked ones.

That it's the right thing to do to pretend I haven't noticed when someone returns for a third, fourth, or even fifth helping of shnitzel.

That walking into the dining hall with an uncovered, full tub of chocolate milk powder is a hazard to one's physical health.

That there's no shame in an adult eating off of plastic flatware; conversely, there's no honor in eating without a tray underneath if you can't keep your food on your plate.

That hours of operation are mere suggestions in the cheder ochel because hunger doesn't correspond with Ketura Standard Time.

That it's time to replace the cup tray when there are fewer than eight cups left; anything less than that and everyone assumes they are dirty and sitting there for a reason.

That you can generally guess the age and/or home country of whoever sat at a table based on the crumbs on the floor. (Huge pile of eggshells = teenage Americans; white rice and broken toothpicks under every chair = kibbutz kids from the gan.)

That there is always a more colorful way of describing any given food. For instance, "leftover, unidentifiable, white meat" becomes "twice-roasted turkey filet," and "greasy fish balls" is instead "ground salmon dumplings with savory marinade."

That the moment someone drops a cup, it's absolutely imperative to stop everything and clean up broken glass in order to avoid foot injuries to barefooted patrons.

And lastly, that even outside of the parameters of college, you can still get out of anything by offering to write a paper about it – even working in the cheder ochel.

by shana dorfman, volunteer

TU B'SHVAT

On Friday afternoon the new plantings, next to the horse stables, was prepared by Shimon and the gardening crew. Three singers harmonized and entertained—Bill Slott, Rick Eden, and Jeff Rosenzweig. Kindergartners danced. The kibbutz dining room was beautifully decorated. All those in the dining room sang Tu B'Shvat songs. David Factor read his poem "The Tree of the Year", which is a fairy tale for children. It is about a competition for the best tree, which turned out to be the acacia, or shitah.

Chana Factor

A REFLECTION

I visited Florence's grave today. She rests with other parents and a few chaverim on a slope west of the kibbutz, on a beautiful extension of Mt. Ketura. Gazing south, the new additions to the guest house and Arava Institute housing stands out, not yet hidden by foliage. If you look straight ahead toward the Eilat highway, the sun reflects off the miles of glass tubing which make up an expanding algae production. The smaller grounds which Florence knew are hidden by green leaves, that all of us from less desert like environments like to shade their houses.

It is almost five years since her burial and even the human landscape is changing. We see handsome black features of Ethiopian youths trying to become adjusted Israelis in our calming climate; balancing them are the light blonde hairdos among the new Russian olim. Most of all is the eager look of chaverim entering and returning from military service, the Institute students arriving for their second semester, and the bustle of children preparing their lunches to carry with them to school.

Ketura is moving forward in this new century. Its face is recognizable, but, somehow, only we are getting older.

Irving Kessler