Leadership for 2008 Campaign

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As long-time supporters of Israel, the Pitlors are pleased to bring in a speaker who is an authority on the diplomatic and military history of the Middle East.

The community event will be held on Thursday, Nov. 1, 7:30 p.m., at the downtown Hilton Hotel. The keynote speaker will be best-selling author Michael Oren, author of Power, Faith and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present. The Humanitarian Award and Spirit of Federation Awards also will be presented that evening.

“It’s been a number of years since there’s been one. We have always enjoyed the feeling of togetherness at past community events and thought it was time for Omaha to experience that again,” Marcia said. “Once we made that decision we wanted to make sure to bring in an outstanding speaker, a real ‘wow factor.’” She acknowledged that, “everybody may not know the name Michael Oren, but the overwhelming feedback we’ve received is that he’s a leading expert, a tremendous speaker and a ‘wow’ kind of guy. Without a doubt, this is the place for Jews in Omaha to be that night.”

“Over the years, these events have been highly successful and a wonderful experience,” added Steve. “The reason for this success -- beyond having a great keynote speaker -- is that the entire community can come together for a common cause. The time is right for us to celebrate being part of the Omaha Jewish community.”

Both Marcia and Steve are passionate about the importance of giving generously to the Annual Campaign.

“Locally, all you have to do is look around and see the tremendous number of programs and services that benefit from the Annual Campaign,” said Steve. “And our overseas commitment has never been more critical. With Iran and Syria, modern day terrorism is right on the steps of Israel and we need to help protect our homeland from future threats.”

“The Annual Campaign is what runs our Jewish community, both here and abroad,” added Marcia. “I’m often reminded of a comment my dad once shared. He said that it doesn’t matter whether his money goes to our own community or overseas. Jews help Jews -- throughout the world.”

Israel’s leading environmentalist headlines Klutznick-Harris Symposium

by LEONARD GREENSPOON
Holder of the Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization at Creighton University

Who better than Dr. Alon Tal -- widely recognized as Israel’s leading environmentalist -- to serve as keynote presenter for this fall’s Klutznick-Harris Symposium on Jews and the Environment?

His presentation -- “What Makes Jewish Environmentalism Jewish?” -- will take place on Sunday, Oct. 28, 7:30 p.m., at the Jewish Community Center, topping off the first of two days of activities associated with this 20th installment of the Symposium.

Tal’s academic credentials are impressive: a B.A., with honors, in Political Science from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, a law degree from the Hebrew University’s Law Faculty, and an M.S. and doctorate in Environmental Health Policy from the Harvard School of Public Health.

His list of academic and public positions is equally prestigious, including academic posts in the United States, New Zealand, and Israel, before assuming his present teaching and research responsibilities at the Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research, at Ben Gurion University.

Always active in the public sphere as well, Tal has been associated with the Israel Union of Environmental Defense, the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, and presently serves as chair of the International Board of Directors of the Land Development Committee for the Jewish National Fund, which has wide oversight of environmental issues and impact on development within Israel. He also represents Israel on a number of regional and international commissions and at the United Nations.

Tal is the author of numerous books -- including Israel: An Environmental History, Speaking of Earth: Environmental Speeches that Moved the Earth, and Pollution in a Promised Land, as well as articles, and reports. Widely sought after as a speaker, Tal is the recipient of major awards, including the Charles Bronfman Humanitarian Prize in 2005. It was this award that attracted the attention of Steve Rickes, who initially recommended that Tal be invited to the Symposium.

There is also a personal side to Tal. As he himself has written, “I probably became an environmentalist growing up between dinner table conversations with my father, who ran EPA analytical laboratories during the 1970s, and the cross-country running trails and white water canoeing streams of rural North Carolina. Like many active members of Young Judaea and its summer camps, I was inspired to make Aliyah on my 20th birthday. Thirty-three days later, I joined the IDF para troopers.” Astonished by the proliferation of litter and general environmental conditions he saw across the country (and in Lebanon) during this military service, he decided to pursue a career in environmental studies.

Moreover, Tal is no stranger to Nebraska. Much of his doctoral research was done with the nutrient control program in the Central Platte Natural Resource District, where he interviewed and met with many of the farmers there. Tal, like a number of other Symposium participants (and many Omaha residents), is an avid bike rider. He and his wife have three daughters.

The Symposium, consisting of 13 presentations in addition to Tal’s, will begin at the JCC on Sunday, Oct. 28, 10:30 a.m. Sessions will continue until 5 p.m. Tal’s keynote address will be followed by a dessert reception. Monday’s presentations, Oct. 29, 8:45 a.m. until 2 p.m., will take place at the Skutt Student Center on the Creighton University Campus.

All events are free and open to the public. For further information, please contact Fran Minear at 280.2308 or fminear@creighton.edu.