

Engaging with business leaders Engaging with business leaders



As an American citizen who made *aliyah* a few years ago, I try to completely immerse myself in Israeli culture. Even so, I still appreciate little touches from the United States here and there. Whether it's a candy bar not sold in Israel or the occasional movie or TV show that keeps me up-to-date with the latest pop culture trends, there's nothing like a good infusion of American culture every now and then. However, despite the easy access I have to all things American, it's rare to get a taste of something from my native state of Rhode Island.

That's why it was so refreshing for me to spend time with the delegation of business leaders who recently visited Israel. (The Voice & Herald's Dec. 9 issue included a story by Avi Nevel, "Trade trip to Israel a success.") I had the distinct pleasure of joining the group on several occasions during their weeklong stay. I am grateful to Avi Nevel, of Nevel International, and Kathy Tufts, of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, who included me in many of their activities. I had the pleasure of meeting members of the group, including Dr. Nancy Carriuolo, president of Rhode Island College, and Carolyn Rafaelian, creator and designer of Alex & Ani, a Rhode Island-based jewelry company.

I first met the group here in Jerusalem soon after their arrival. During a welcoming lunch, we swapped stories about some of Rhode Island's quirks – such as the challenges of visiting the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Some delegates asked me which attractions they should visit during their brief time in Israel. I've become so used to having all the amazing elements of Israel at my disposal everyday that I struggled to identify the "must-sees" for first-time visitors. At week's end, the delegates I had talked with told me how much they had enjoyed their brief sightseeing opportunities.

During their visit to the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, we saw a slideshow of Rhode Island sights. It was fun to view images of Providence on display at a college in the middle of Israel!

Delegates distributed gift bags filled with Rhode Island-sourced products, including a Mr. Potato Head doll from Hasbro. When my work colleagues saw the toy on my desk and inquired about it, I enjoyed telling them the history of this popular children's toy.

I was privileged to join the group at the home of the U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro. While there, I felt that I had one foot in the United States and one foot still firmly rooted in Israel, as his home was a perfect fusion of the two worlds.

Along the way I even learned something new about the state I was born and raised in, such as its historical connections to Israel. Until the delegation's visit, I was unaware that Judah Touro (for whom the famous Touro Synagogue in Newport is named) left \$50,000 to Moses Montefiore, which he used to build the first Jewish neighborhood outside the Old City of Jerusalem, directly across from Mount Zion.

People from Rhode Island often ask me, "When will you be home next?"

I tell them, "Israel is my home. I visit Rhode Island."

However, though I've spent most of my adult life living outside Rhode Island, I can't discount that it was where I was born and raised. Israel is where I belong, but Rhode Island is where I am from.

Israel is my present and my future, but Rhode Island is and forever will be an important part of my past. It was nice to get a taste of both communities here in Israel.

A touch of Rhode Island in Israel

Friday, 06 January 2012 02:40

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