



NA'AMAT Now!

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Fall 2022

First virtual national convention embraces Hollywood theme

By Sharon Sutker McGowan

Through the magic of video, NA'AMAT USA's first virtual convention took attendees to sites including the Hollywood Walk of Fame, a dairy farm at the Kanot Youth Village in Israel, and Haifa in the 1920s. Members were invited to "Walk the Red Carpet," a theme woven throughout the gathering on July 31 and Aug. 1.

Jan Gurvitch, who was elected to serve her second term as president, welcomed attendees and noted that despite the challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic during the past several years "somehow, both staff and volunteers saw this as an opportunity for innovation and growth." She added that Zoom made local events available to members throughout the country. "We toured museums together, learned to cook together and even traveled together," she said.

Also offering greetings were Shirli Shavit, director of NA'AMAT Israel's International Department; NA'AMAT Canada President Sandy Siegel; and Dr. Hillel Newman, consul general of Israel in Los Angeles. Newman thanked NA'AMAT for its efforts to improve Israeli society. "The real stars are all of you



Susan Seely meets children at a NA'AMAT daycare center.

gathered at the convention for your dedication and your work," he said.

The convention, chaired by Gail Simpson and Susan Isaacs, included the election and installation of the national board of directors and a presentation by Executive Director Susan Seely, who recently visited NA'AMAT's installations in Israel. Participants were uplifted by the financial report provided by Finance Director Marcy McKenzie, which stated that NA'AMAT USA transferred \$2.6 million to Israel in the past three years — including \$882,000 in 2021 — to support day care, women's health

and empowerment, professional scholarships and technological high schools (see graphic, next page).

In her presentation Seely announced that this fall NA'AMAT's Ayanot Youth Village will start offering an architecture diploma track to graduates in conjunction with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). After completing the two-year program, the young people serve in the IDF for three years, including one year in which they are paid to work in the construction/building unit of IDF. This will give them a head start when they join the

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Virtual convention

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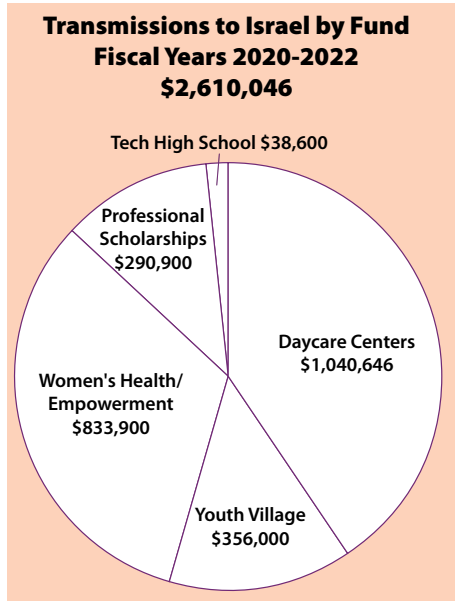
workforce. The new architecture program is the latest example of NA'AMAT's work to provide opportunities for Israeli youth, especially those who come from underprivileged families, Seely said.

Seely noted that along with providing educational resources to children and teens, NA'AMAT continues to advance and strengthen the status of women.

"I met with one woman Knesset member who is working with NA'AMAT to pass legislation ensuring that women get



Susan Seely visits with staff and students at NA'AMAT's agricultural village in Kanot.



equal pay for equal work, and on legislation expanding the definition of domestic violence," she said. "I heard the heart-rending story of a woman who escaped with her children from the abusive control they were subjected to at home." They are now at *Beit NA'AMAT L'Nashim* (also known as the Glickman Center), a shelter for survivors of domestic violence in Tel Aviv.

Seely has set an ambitious goal of doubling the amount of money NA'AMAT USA transfers to Israel, "exponentially increasing our ability to make a difference in the lives of Israelis of all backgrounds." She added, "With the help of our terrific staff, board and membership, I am confident that NA'AMAT is poised for significant growth in both membership AND impact," she said.

Former national president Chellie Goldwater Wilensky installed the 20-member national board of directors,

which was elected unanimously (*see story on back page*). Goldwater Wilensky noted that NA'AMAT USA has "always been an organization with a great vision and a greater task." She reminded the directors that they "are successors to a long line of visionary women who have dedicated their lives to improving the lives of women and children in Israel."

Past and present board members read five declarations (*see box, back page*) at the convention, including one voicing NA'AMAT's concern about the worldwide increase in antisemitism. "It is critical for all to condemn the rising incidents of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel diatribes and attacks," the declaration said. Another

er stated that NA'AMAT "supports the elimination of discrimination based on age, sex, gender identity, disabilities and race."

On a lighter note, convention attendees were entertained by comedian Talia Reese, who drew laughs talking about her experiences as a Jewish mother, daughter and wife.

After co-chair Susan Isaacs closed the convention with "See you in Jerusalem," the ubiquitous Academy Award tune "Hooray for Hollywood" played in the background as images of the famed Hollywood sign, the Farmers Market and Universal Studios popped up on the screen. Hooray for NA'AMAT!



NA'AMAT chapters around the country, such as Eilat in Greater Los Angeles, organized watch parties to view the convention.

Message from the President

By Jan Gurvitch



Editor's note: This article is excerpted from NA'AMAT USA President Jan Gurvitch's remarks after her installation..

As I begin my second term of office as your president, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to continue the vital work of NA'AMAT. Over 40 years ago I became a charter member of the Bessie Choina Club in Brooklyn, NY. I was drawn to Pioneer Women — not only because it was a family matter. Yes, my grandmothers and mother were members in Brooklyn and Toms River, NJ. In addition, I would soon discover that my husband came from the same “lineage” I did, as both sides of his family included members of Pioneer Women in Philadelphia and Montreal.

I discovered that becoming a member of NA'AMAT was like one-stop shopping. My most important needs would be met by joining my club. My NA'AMAT chapter became a supportive community of friends.

It supported my identity as a Jewish woman. Together throughout the year we would celebrate the holidays with programming and festive meals. Chanukah and Purim would become family holidays as we enjoyed our homemade latkes and sported our latest costumes. Passover would take on new meaning. We would participate in a feminist model seder that would honor Miriam with a cup that would proudly sit next to the cup of Elijah.

It challenged the way we, as women looked at the world. We began to fully understand and appreciate how women were not always treated equally in the world we lived in, whether Jewish or secular. So, as NA'AMAT women we were determined to make a difference. We supported the rights of agunot. We worked with the District Attorney's office to make sure that victims of domestic violence would have their voice heard. We rallied for a woman's right to choose and supported efforts for women to receive equal pay for their labors.

And as Jewish women we were called to action in support of the State of Israel and the rights of Jews to live in a world free of antisemitism and discriminatory practices. We marched together at the Israel Day parade, attending and supported community centered street fairs that promoted Israeli products, and we traveled to Israel together to see NA'AMAT in action. How proud we were to understand that we are a part of a worldwide movement who care about Israel - who care about women - who care about a changing and evolving society that encourages everyone to achieve their full potential.

Having spent a lifetime committed to NA'AMAT and to the belief that volunteers continue to make a difference in the world, I am reminded of a quote from Pirke Avot, Sayings of our Fathers: “It is not up to you to finish the task, but you are not free to avoid it.”

And so each generation has met this challenge and done their part in repairing our world — *tikkun olam*. Our challenge is to now engage a new generation to continue our important work both here in the United States and Israel. The world will definitely be a better place if we succeed.

Todah Rabah.

NA'AMAT welcomes new staff member

Amy Taus has joined NA'AMAT USA as full-time Membership Director. Taus is passionate about Israel and has been involved in Zionist organizations throughout childhood, college and today, she said. She lives in Lewisburg, W.Va., where her Israeli husband is in medical school. Taus earned a bachelor's degree at the University of South Florida and has worked as an educator. She is pursuing a master's degree.



Amy Taus

Taus recently traveled to Israel to visit her husband's family, where she had the chance to learn more about NA'AMAT. “I even found out, after talking to family and friends, that my nephew attends a NA'AMAT daycare center in Shoham. Making this personal connection to NA'AMAT has made me eager to help make an impact and grow the membership of this incredible organization,” she said.

In memoriam

NA'AMAT USA mourns the death of Sylvia Lewis, national president from 1993-1997. Sylvia was a dedicated



and active member of NA'AMAT throughout her adult life. Her involvement started in her hometown of Akron, Ohio, where she founded two chapters. She is remembered fondly for her warmth, intelligence and passionate advocacy for women and children in Israel, which she visited more than 30 times. During her final trip for her great-grandson's Bar Mitzvah in 2018, she was proud to show her family the NA'AMAT daycare center near Tel Aviv dedicated in her honor. Sylvia Lewis was 95. May her memory be a blessing.



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NA'AMAT USA elects 2022-2025 board

Thank you to outgoing board members Doris Katz, Rene Peters, Esther Pullan and Marcia Weiss for their dedication and hard work on behalf of NA'AMAT USA. We welcome Joyce Edelson, Melanie Kutnick and Susan Sparago to the national board of directors. May they go from strength to strength!

Executive Committee

President: Jan Gurvitch, East Windsor, NJ
First Vice President: Selma Roffman, Elkins Park, PA
Fundraising Vice President: Susan Miller, Elkins Park, PA
Membership Vice President: Donna Levin, Elkins Park, PA
Programming Vice President: Judith Shamir, Moreland Hills, OH
Publicity and PR Vice President: Susan Isaacs, Encino, CA
Recording Secretary: Dr. Linda Schoenberg, Cleveland Heights, OH
Treasurer: Lea Templer, Northridge, CA
Strategic Planning Chair: Debbie Kohn, Delray Beach, FL
Advocacy Chair: Randy Sable, Elkins Park, PA
Immediate Past President: Chellie Goldwater Wilensky, Skokie, IL

Directors

Fundraising: Roz Porton, Northridge, CA
Fundraising: Susan Sparago*, Sun Lakes, AZ
Leadership/Publicity/PR: Esther Friedberg, Studio City, CA
Membership/Leadership: Gail Simpson, Agoura Hills, CA
Membership/Publicity/PR: Sandra Reuben, Thousand Oaks, CA
Membership/Strategic Planning: Joyce Edelson*, Porter Ranch, CA
Advocacy/Programming: Susan Neubauer, Thousand Oaks, CA
Finance: Rhoda Birnbaum, Delray Beach, FL
Finance/Programming: Melanie Kutnick*, Highland Hts, OH

* *New board member*

Convention declarations

The declarations below were read aloud at the convention. The complete list of declarations is available at naamat.org.

- ◆ NA'AMAT USA pledges to continue its almost 100-year partnership with NA'AMAT Israel in its efforts to enhance the status of women; provide social service programs for women, children and families of Israel; and advance equal rights and opportunities for women.
- ◆ NA'AMAT USA encourages our members to be active, aware and involved US citizens who promote issues especially supporting women, children and those of equal rights and equal pay.
- ◆ NA'AMAT USA supports the elimination of discrimina-

tion based on age, sex, gender identity, disabilities and race and advocates programs that assist vulnerable people in the workplace and in matters of housing.

- ◆ NA'AMAT USA voices its concern about the worldwide increase in antisemitism. It is critical for all to condemn the rising incidents of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel diatribes and attacks. We urge our members to support efforts to counter antisemitism.
- ◆ NA'AMAT USA supports the political empowerment of women by supporting candidates who demonstrate a strong commitment to issues of women's rights, Israel, human rights, and freedom from bigotry.