Celebrate Israel: Boston unites Greater Boston Jewish and Israeli communities

By Karen Kuwaiyi

May 31 promises to be the greatest celebration of Israel in New England’s history.

Thousands of people from Greater Boston – families with young children, Israelis who call the Boston area home, synagogue groups, teens and more – are expected to gather for Celebrate Israel: Boston, a festival of Israeli music, art, dance, food and community at Gann Academy in Waltham.

Presented by Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) and the Israeli-American Council (IAC) in partnership with the Consulate General of Israel to New England, the event will feature internationally renowned Israeli musicians and performers, children’s acts, interactive Israel-focused art projects, Israeli games, a basketball clinic taught by Tamir “The Jewish Jordan” Goodman, a special appearance by Patriots’ wide receiver Julian Edelman and activities for Israel lovers of all ages.

The celebration marks the culmination of community collaboration – one that has united an unprecedented number of local Jewish and Israeli organizations, synagogues and schools, said Barry Shrage, president of CJP. “The task of transforming a school campus into ‘Israel on the Atlantic’ has taken extraordinary efforts,” Shrage said. “Never before have we gathered so much talent, community participation and excitement to celebrate the art and culture of Israel.”

Boston’s celebration is the first one that involves a close collaboration between the Israeli-American organization and a federation. The IAC is also sponsoring a Celebrate Israel festival in four other cities around the country during the month of May.

“Celebrate Israel Boston has shown the power of teamwork and true partnerships over the past year of planning and we are thrilled to be a part of this amazing community,” said Na’ama Ore, regional director of IAC Boston. “For Israeli-Americans, this is a taste of home that we get to share with everyone who loves and supports Israel. We are delighted to bring the best of Israeli music, dance, and art to the Greater Boston community.”

“We can’t wait to bring everyone together, and we’re thrilled to partner with the Israeli American Council and the Israeli Consulate to make this possible,” Shrage said. “The result of this incredible collaboration between organizations has led to groundbreaking teamwork.”

Among the coordinated activities:

*PJ Library in Greater Boston, Sifriat Pijama B’America, the JCC Early Learning Centers and the Haifa Municipality, Department of Early Childhood Education plus a host of Israeli and American Jewish preschools working together to offer movement, crafts, storytelling and games, bracelet and mosaic making and much more in Hebrew and in English. This is a unique collaboration between Israeli and American educators who will be exploring the diversity and excitement of Israel for families with young children.

*Teen volunteers from BBYO, NFTY-New England, the North Shore Teen Initiative and the Israeli Scouts of Boston spearheading a food drive for the JF&CS Family Table. They will be working together to pack up much needed donations. Festival participants are encouraged to help stock the food bank shelves -- canned tuna, salmon and vegetable soup are especially needed.

*The Diller Teen Fellows and the Israeli Scouts of Boston–Shevet Ofek –Tzofim, two of the main teen service organizations in Boston, working side by side for the first time running several activities, including letter writing to IDF soldiers; a social media station where teens can learn to advocate for Israel regardless of where they stand on the political spectrum; a button making station where people can design their own “Stand with Israel?/I love Israel” button and the creation of a large collaborative sign, “Together We are One,” where people can add their own symbol to represent the Israeli and American Community in Boston.

This is just a handful of the activities that will be taking place. For full details, visit celebrateisraelboston.com. Save money and skip the ticket line -- advance tickets are half price ($5) before May 30.

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