

An app for chaotic lives

A couple who moved here from Israel devise an iPhone app to help schools and other organizations keep in touch with families.

See Page 2

The indomitable Jill Stein

Though her poll numbers are single digit, the gubernatorial candidate is happy just to get her message out.

See Page 3

Harvard Hillel director to retire

Dr. Bernard Steinberg is stepping down Jan. 1 after serving 18 years in the post.

See Page 4

CJP ups Israel spending

Budget priorities include advocacy work for the Jewish state and more innovative religious schooling.

See Page 5

Not your mother's mikveh

Mayyim Hayyim conference addresses ways the ancient ritual can meet 21st century needs.

See Page 13

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Abdul-Jabbar courts the Jews

He recalls how one oppressed group helped free another

By Dawn Swann

Special to the Advocate

A 7-foot-2-inch African-American Muslim may not be the first person you'd expect to see lecturing at a Jewish federation event. But last Sunday, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar packed the auditorium of Worcester's Hanover Theatre for the Harold N. Cotton Leadership Lecture sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts. The basketball legend/historian brought along a signed stack of his latest book, "Brothers in Arms" – and a message urging tolerance.

"Brothers in Arms" chronicles the US Army's 761st Tank Battalion. The 761st was originally intended as a token all-black unit, but it was pressed into action when the Allies needed reinforcements. The Black Panthers (as they were nicknamed) fought for 183 days – more than double the length of traditional units.

They endured the Battle of the Bulge, and they helped liberate Jews from concentration camps.

Recognition did not come until 1978, when President Jimmy Carter awarded the battalion the Presidential Unit Citation for Extraordinary Heroism.

Among the warriors was Leonard "Smitty" Smith, a buddy of Abdul-Jabbar's father on the New York Transit police. Although Smitty was like an uncle to Abdul-Jabbar, it wasn't until 1993 that he learned about his role in the war. That discovery prompted Abdul-Jabbar to write "Brothers in Arms."

Last Sunday, the 63-year-old Hall-of-Famer commanded the stage. The blue theater light gleamed off his long burgundy shoes, turning them an electrified shade of purple. He was at once eloquent, soft-spoken and intense. He called "Brothers in Arms" a labor of love. He drew parallels between segregation laws in the United States and the racial laws of the Nazis. He noted that in helping to liberate

Continued on Page 28



'When the civil rights movement first started in the teens and '20s, blacks and Jews came together to fight a common evil. ... It doesn't have to end. It can be a beginning.'

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

At The Jewish Federation of Central Mass. event in Worcester

Is loyalty oath good for Israel?

Moral, practical issues at stake

By Charles A. Radin
Advocate Columnist

The proposal to require prospective citizens to swear loyalty to Israel as a democratic Jewish state provides the latest

good reason for bemusement and worry about what is going on in the land in general, and between the ears of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in particular.

Without question, Netanyahu fully backed the original proposal, which passed a cabinet vote by 22-8 and produced widespread outrage in Israel and in the wider world because it required the loyalty oath only of non-Jews.

Nothing passes a cabinet vote by a margin like that without the prime minister's firm support.

Netanyahu defended the amendment before the vote, telling the cabinet, according to *The New York Times*, that "there is broad agreement in Israel on the Jewish identity and

Continued on Page 26

The chilling past of a retired Weston dentist

With ruses, alibis and luck, he survived the death camps

By Amy R. Handler

Special to the Advocate

He jumped off a train, pretended to be a Catholic, outwitted Nazis, escaped a beating ordered by Dr. Josef Mengele and endured the worst of the Nazi work camps.

Dr. John R. Saunders – born Ignacy Silberherz 85 years ago in the Polish city of Stanislau – was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust. Saunders practiced dentistry for 35 years in Boston. Now 85, he lives in Weston with his wife, Annalie. The couple has two grown children.

At Temple Isaiah in Lexington on Nov. 3 at 7:30 p.m., Saunders will speak about his liberation from Mauthausen-Gusen by the 11th Armored Division of the 3rd US Army on May 5, 1945. He says the liberation was a lucky break. A



Dr. John R. Saunders

reconnaissance unit discovered the camp while on a mission to secure bridges over the Danube. Among the soldiers who came to the inmates' aid were members of the all-black, 761st Tank Battalion,

chronicled by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (see story above).

For many years, Saunders did not speak about his life during the Holocaust, not even to his wife or children. The memories were too painful, he says, and he didn't want his family to feel afraid or sorry for him. A dozen years ago, prompted by a writing workshop at Bedford Public Library, he finally opened up. Besides lecturing on his experiences, he has written his memoirs, which he hopes soon to publish.

In an interview with the *Advocate*, he talked about his many close calls.

Q. What happened to the Jews when the Germans occupied your city?

A. About 40,000 people lived in a ghetto. During the first of the Nazi

Continued on Page 6

Study: Israeli commerce adds \$2.4b to state

By Jason M. Rubin
Special to the Advocate

What does the Israeli connection mean for Massachusetts?

In 2009: \$2.4 billion in direct revenue and 5,920 jobs.

That's the conclusion of a study of nearly 100 companies here that were founded by Israelis or that offer products based on Israeli technology.

The study, "The Massachusetts-Israel Economic Relationship," was released Monday on the first of the two-day 2010 Life Sciences Summit, hosted by Brandeis University International Business School. The event was organized by the

Continued on 8



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My dinner with Kareem: from WWII to 9/11

Continued from Page 1

Jews, one oppressed group freed another.

Abdul-Jabbar then opened the floor to questions, deftly segueing among questions like: Why was your Skyhook so effective? ("Because most of the time it went in"); Do blacks and Muslims know enough about Jews, and do Jews know enough about blacks and Muslims? ("When the civil rights movement first started in the teens and '20s, blacks and Jews came together to fight a common evil. [Andrew] Goodman was murdered in Mississippi. [There's] ample history of blacks and Jews together. It doesn't have to end. It can be a beginning.")

Deborah Morales – who coined her title "iconomist" because she says icons like Abdul-Jabbar's go "from success to significance" – sat in the balcony, as rapt as the rest of the audience. Now living in California, Morales grew up in a Jewish family in Framingham. And that may be why *The Jewish Advocate* was granted an hourlong dinner exclusive the night before the event.

Abdul-Jabbar is many things. In his 20-year NBA career, playing for the Milwaukee Bucks and the LA Lakers – he became the top scoring player in league history. He is an actor (remember his comic turn as a copilot in "Airplane"?). He is the author of six books. He loves to talk about history and religion.

Abdul-Jabbar recalled how "Brothers in Arms" resulted from a chance meeting at New York's Lincoln Center in 1992 at a screening of "The Liberators," a documentary about the 761st Tank Battalion. "So I go there and I hear, 'Hey kid!' and, it's Smitty!" Abdul-Jabbar said. "I was 45. I hadn't seen Smitty since I was about 17. I had no idea that he'd even fought in World War II."

We'll pick up the interview from there:

Q. When you saw the documentary, did you realize that Smitty was in it?

A. Yeah, they interviewed him. He was in it. Smitty's tank was one of the first two tanks through the gate at Dachau. I interviewed him to do the book, and then a number of his friends that were still alive.

Q. You interviewed his friends as well?

A. Yeah. And the thing that really got to me the most was when they would start talking about it, they reverted back to being 19 and 20 year old kids. Guys told me they saw [inmates who] looked like walking skeletons.

Q. I've interviewed a few holocaust survivors. And the thing about them, I've never met one who was bitter.

A. They all see themselves as being lucky. I met some when I started to do the book. ... I went to Israel and I met Rabbi [Israel] Lau. That was very interesting because he told his story in [the] documentary that was done on the 761st liberators. ... He was at Buchenwald, and Buchenwald was liberated by black troops. An engineering unit. They were building bridges and fixing roads for the allied forces, and they just happened to help liberate Buchenwald. To hear him describe it, these people were like angels.

Q. Was it emotionally hard to convert to Islam? Was it frightening to be an African-American sports figurehead in a racially charged nation?

A. My parents were concerned that I was joining the Black Muslims, and I told them that I wasn't. So that gave them a little bit of relief. I thought Muhammad Ali was a hero. But I didn't believe in the ideology of the Black Muslims. There was a guy that I knew that was a friend of my dad's. He was an orthodox Muslim in New York. He ... told me what was happening and that Black Muslims

were ... racist just like all the racism that I abhorred, and so it helped straighten me out. I wanted to be Muslim. And in reading "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," I saw that he had figured it out and become a real Muslim.

Q. What is a real Muslim?

A. Someone who believes in the Supreme Being. Muslims worship the same G-d of Abraham. Prophet Mohammed was a descendent of Abraham. So we worship the same G-d, and we believe in the validity of all the prophets including Moses, Noah, David and Solomon. ... We just include Mohammed. ... It's all about the Golden Rule. Right? Hillel. Treat others as you yourself want to be treated. That's the essence of it. So if we can all agree on that, we can all get along, and it all will get sorted out on the Day of Judgment.

Q. But right now America ...

A. [Some can be] so intent on dealing with the people who did the cowardly attack [on 9/11] that they want to lump all us Muslims together and then beat up on Muslims that had nothing to do with it and do not support Bin Laden in any way. Most Muslims in America are happy to be here because they can worship as they want. They can't do that back where they come from. ...

Bin Laden's living in a cave someplace where we can't find him, and we can't bring anybody to justice so, America wants to make a convenient scapegoat.

Q. What are your thoughts on the proposed mosque near Ground Zero?

A. I hope they build it because if ... the pressure is successful in getting them not to build it, the Bin Laden people will be real happy about it. Because they want to see us divided. ... Now more than ever we need people to stand up for what Islam is really

Working – and reading – for Abdul-Jabbar

Deborah Morales is the first to admit she makes an unlikely aide to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. "I'm from Massachusetts, and I'm Jewish, and I had no knowledge of sports or black history at all," Morales said.

"When we first started talking it was hard. He'd be like, 'All right, read this article.' Or he'd give me a book and tell me to write down a list of questions after a chapter."

At his urging she read more than 500 books. But she considers more than her client and teacher Abdul-Jabbar. "I was suffering from a very bad illness that was making me not want to live," she said. "Kareem was my very good friend at this time."

Morales offers a sampling from Abdul-Jabbar's reading list: "The Prophet," by Kahlil Gibran; "The Book of Five Rings (Go Rin No Sho)," by 17th century samurai warrior Miyamoto Musashi; "Man's Search for Meaning," by Holocaust survivor and psychotherapist Viktor Frankl; "The Color of Water," by James McBride; and "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" (to "really know what it means to be Muslim").

about and not the fanatic's interpretation. Not what people with weird political agendas in the Middle East are trying to promote.

Q. [Changing the subject] I caught "Airplane" again the other day on TV.

Without losing a beat, Kareem does a stiff-arm fainting routine, re-enacting his role as co pilot Roger Murdock.

Q. That's all my questions.

A. Good.

Abdul-Jabbar is at kareemabduljabbar.com.

ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE NEW ENGLAND REGION WOMEN OF VALOR LUNCHEON HONORING CAROL FULP

Over 300 people attended ADL's Women of Valor Luncheon to see Carol Fulp, Sr. Vice President of Brand Communications and Corporate Responsibility at John Hancock Financial, receive the ADL's 2010 Women of Valor Award. Carol was honored for her leadership in the Greater Boston Community, notably her role at John Hancock where she leads the company's \$12 million philanthropic initiative ensuring young people most in need are served. Carol was most recently nominated by President Obama to be a representative of the United States to the 65th General Assembly of the United Nations.

Those in attendance at the luncheon had the opportunity to hear from Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston and Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, as well as a music group from the Perry School in South Boston who saluted Carol Fulp with a rendition of "Let There Be Peace on Earth". In her remarks, Ms. Fulp made reference to the beginning of ADL's A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® 25 years ago, when WCVB, Channel 5 was the original media sponsor of this award winning anti-bias program sponsored by the ADL. Books from the A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® 's bibliography were the table centerpieces and are being donated to the Ronald Burton Training Center, serving underprivileged youth from inner city neighborhoods.



Co-Chair and ADL Past Board Chair Esta Gordon Epstein, 2008 Honoree Linda Whitlock, Honoree Carol Fulp, 2007 Honoree and Attorney General Martha Coakley, and Co-Chair and ADL Past Board Chair Ginny MacDowell.



ADL Board Chair Michael N. Sheetz.



Liz Walker giving the Invocation.



Governor Deval Patrick and Carol Fulp.



ADL Student Speaker Katia DeStefano



Left: ADL Regional Director Derrek L. Shulman, Carol Fulp, Esta Gordon Epstein, and Ginny MacDowell.