

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

*How Hady Amr represents Biden to the Palestinians; Nachman Shai's goodbye; Inside Israel and Jordan's new bid to rehabilitate the Jordan River; A hip-hop artist in the Holy Land; British TV judge Rob Rinder's crowded docket; A Jewish nonprofit is changing the way a Florida city responds to 911 calls; and How an emergency vehicle in Jerusalem came to be known as 'Bikey McBikeface'.*

JANUARY 4, 2023

## How Hady Amr represents Biden to the Palestinians

*As the first U.S. special representative for Palestinian affairs, Hady Amr talked to Jewish Insider about his hope of improving life for the Palestinians and helping keep the peace in the region*

By Gabby Deutch

The same day President Joe Biden was inaugurated two years ago, Hady Amr was sworn in at the State Department as the deputy assistant secretary for Israeli and Palestinian affairs. While Biden faced an urgent set of challenges both global and domestic, Amr was tasked with keeping things stable in the Holy Land, not pursuing any sweeping diplomatic agendas.

This past November, Amr got a promotion: He's now the special representative for Palestinian affairs, the first time Washington has appointed a representative to the Palestinian people and leadership. Secretary of State Tony

Blinken said Amr's goal is to "strengthen our engagement with the Palestinian people."

He is essentially an envoy to a state that doesn't yet exist, and his message to Palestinians adds up to two words: Trust me. He is a deep believer in the two-state solution, but in his new role he will not be focused on the peace process.

"Certainly, we would all love to be standing in the Rose Garden with a two-state solution, obviously, but I don't think any of us believe today that's going to be possible," U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides told *Jewish Insider* when asked about Amr's role. "But we can keep a vision of a two-state solution alive. We can work towards that

goal. [Hady]'s a very pragmatic guy."

Amr wouldn't disagree. His background is in development economics, not diplomacy. His goal is to make life better, even incrementally, for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, on projects like increased 4G internet access in the West Bank, or the new 24/7 opening hours of the Allenby border crossing between Jordan and the West Bank.

"How do we move to making a world more equal for people?" Amr asked. "Whether that equality comes in the form of access to water or access to work or access to freedom of movement, better security, equal justice, that's the legacy I want to leave

behind in any and every bit of work that I have.”

A child of the 1960s, Amr was born in Lebanon and moved to the United States at a young age, where he grew up in suburban Northern Virginia. His prevailing worldview comes from Martin Luther King Jr.

“I was drawn to public service after learning about the activism of Martin Luther King Jr., and his commitment to equality,” said Amr, who is 55. “My political consciousness is about equal rights. It’s about equal justice.” His hero spoke of a country where all children could grow up with dignity and opportunities and the ability to achieve the same American dream. That’s also the prism through which Amr views his work with the Palestinians.

“We believe Palestinians and Israelis, like people everywhere, are entitled to the same rights and the same opportunities,” he told *Jewish Insider* in December during an hour-long phone interview. “To have a happy, safe, secure, prosperous future, their lives need to be as equal as possible, because they’re living in a tiny area, in an interconnected manner. And they’re joined at the hip.”

Observers of Biden administration policy on Israel will recognize in Amr’s comments the echo of a line — which Amr helped author — that has now become *de rigueur* in Foggy Bottom and at U.S. embassies in the Middle East.

“The Palestinian people deserve a state of their own that’s independent, sovereign, viable and contiguous, in addition to deserving to live — along with Israelis — safely and securely while enjoying equal measures of freedom, prosperity and democracy,” Amr said in a November press briefing. Everyone from President Joe Biden to Blinken, down to Amr and any official working on Middle East issues, has used that line: that Israelis and Palestinians deserve “equal measures of freedom, prosperity and democracy.”

It’s an idealistic goal, but achieving it — and finding a way to measure that success, absent a negotiated end to the conflict — remains difficult..

“That wasn’t there before, that the United States will proceed in a way that is designed to try to establish equal treatment for Israelis and Palestinians,” said Martin Indyk, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel

who served as the U.S. envoy to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the Obama administration. “In practice, it’s extremely difficult to do.”

“We’re focused,” Amr said at the November press briefing, “on the future and lifting up the lives of ordinary Palestinians.”

Like Amr, Biden supports a negotiated two-state solution. But unlike his Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama, Biden has taken less of an initiative to make that happen. There is no special envoy to the peace process; no team in the U.S. government is now actively focused on bringing the two sides to the negotiating table.

The Palestinian Authority is rife with corruption and led by an aging president, with no successor in sight. Israel just completed its fifth election in nearly four years and last week swore in a right-wing government, with several prominent anti-Arab voices. On Tuesday, U.S. officials contacted senior officials in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s new government to criticize National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir’s visit to the Temple Mount in the Old City, according to State Department spokesperson Ned Price. (Amr declined to comment on the new Israeli government.)

2022 was the deadliest year in the West Bank since 2006, and the security situation continues to deteriorate. For Amr, success will be hard to define and even harder to achieve.

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How did Amr get here? The answer, as it often is in Washington, is that he knew the right person.

Amr’s first government position was in the Clinton administration, when he had a desk job at the Pentagon. He then worked on Vice President Al Gore’s 2000 presidential campaign. Afterward, during the political wilderness of the George W. Bush years, he joined a think tank and started a consulting business.

In the years after Sept. 11, his firm sought to finesse American messaging to Muslims around the world who distrusted U.S. global leadership, and Amr wrote policy proposals suggesting how the U.S. could improve public diplomacy to the Muslim world.

At the time, Martin Indyk was running the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. He hired Amr to go to Qatar and start an outpost of the think tank in Doha. Amr spent the next four years, from 2006 to 2010, running Brookings Doha.

“He was just fabulous,” Indyk recalled. A few years later, in 2013, Indyk brought Amr onto his peace process team to work on economic issues. It was Amr’s first time working full-time on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Scott Lasensky, who served as a senior advisor to former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro, worked with Amr in the trenches of the Obama administration. Lasensky recalled the ease of working with Amr, as opposed to some of the more difficult diplomatic personalities.

“As I think back to my time in government, I sometimes wonder what was going on in the minds of those who screamed or threw things or slammed the phone down. He was never one of those people,” said Lasensky. (At the recent Zoom bar mitzvah of Lasensky’s son, Amr offered webcam advice.)

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From the beginning of the Biden administration, Amr helped undo several of former President Donald Trump’s policies regarding the Palestinians, namely the cancellation of aid to the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). He has also been a strong advocate for the reopening of the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem, which served Palestinians and was shuttered when Trump moved the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. The Israeli government has to give its sign-off for the opening of any foreign diplomatic outpost and has thus far not approved the reopening of the consulate.

Amr has amassed some critics who allege that his desire to work with the Palestinian Authority necessitates forgiving some of the PA’s more egregious behavior, such as its “martyr payments” to the families of terrorists, banned under the 2018 Taylor Force Act.

“The administration is doing a very bad job. They’re not making known that the PA is rewarding and incentivizing terror,” said

Sander Gerber, a hedge fund executive and activist who helped write the Taylor Force Act. “I found [Amr] to be clear-sighted on the problematic aspects of the Palestinian Authority, and he wants to find some kind of solution. He’s deeply committed to two states for two peoples. But he understands that the Palestinian Authority needs to undergo serious reforms for that to happen.”

In the November press briefing, Amr said the U.S. will continue to “build our relationship with the Palestinian Authority,” and pledged to work with the PA to deescalate tensions in the West Bank. “We’re also going to engage with the Palestinian Authority on important reforms that we believe are important to make Palestinian society more vibrant and more free,” he said, without naming specifics.

“His reputation on the right is that he’s not a friend to Israel. I have not found that to be the case,” Gerber added.

“I think that that’s probably characteristic of the far right, where people are suspicious of anyone who supports a Palestinian state,” said Michael Koplow, chief policy officer at Israel Policy Forum, who authored several reports with Amr during the Trump administration. “I don’t think it’s representative of Israelis writ large.”

Still, Amr has managed to gain the support of a number of groups in the U.S. Jewish community and the Palestinian and Arab American communities. After Amr’s appointment to be special representative for Palestinian affairs, the American Jewish Committee congratulated him in a tweet, calling Amr “our friend.”

At J Street’s national conference in Washington in December, Blinken mentioned Amr in his address and received raucous applause. (Amr did not speak at the confab, but when he attended its gala dinner, he was quickly mobbed by attendees.)

After Israel’s founding, the State Department had an informal policy of keeping Jews out of positions that dealt with Israel. Indyk broke that streak when former President Bill Clinton named him the first Jewish U.S. ambassador to the Jewish state.

Lasensky has discussed this difficult history, which also kept Arab Americans from important State Department positions that touched on the Arab world, with Amr.

“The Jewish community largely has

gotten over those barriers unscathed, but they were tough. In some ways, it’s gone the other way, that you can only have a Jewish ambassador to Israel,” Lasensky told JI. “Arab Americans, I think, are still dealing with more of the questions and suspicions as a class.”

Amr, who declined to speak about his faith, has Jewish, Muslim and Christian family members, and he identifies as Muslim.

“The notion that’s about in the Jewish community that somehow there’s something wrong with Hady Amr in his position because he’s an Arab American is just wrongheaded,” said Indyk. “What’s good for Jewish Americans should be good for Arab Americans. Americans cannot have a double standard.”

In his role, Amr sees himself most of all as a representative of the United States, rather than any one constituency or ethnic group.

“I’m working on behalf of the United States. I am here to advance U.S. interests,” he explained. His goals are not his alone: “The president has said, Israelis and Palestinians equally deserve to live safely and securely and enjoy equal measures of freedom, security and prosperity. That’s what I’m working towards, along with a two-state solution, and those are the pillars of my work.”

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Before ever reaching a peace accord, or even making the small improvements Amr desires, he knows he needs to lower the temperature in the region.

“The big charge now, clearly, and he knows it very well, is that the situation in the West Bank is explosive,” Indyk said.

“We are remaining actively engaged with Israeli and Palestinian counterparts to urge them to work cooperatively to lower tensions and discourage armed conflict. And, you know, specifically we’re urging Israel to ensure policies and procedures do not lead to civilian harm,” Amr said in an October speech to the Arab Center D.C.

In that presentation, Amr ticked off Biden administration actions: hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to the Palestinians, largely through UNRWA; \$100 million

to support the East Jerusalem Hospital Network, which Biden announced while in Jerusalem in July; improving water flow to Palestinians; and approving thousands of work permits for Palestinians in Gaza to work in Israel. He also pointed out that one of Blinken’s first civil society meetings in 2021 was with the Palestinian American community.

“We are engaging, and we are not walking through the world with blinders on, to hear the concerns that the community has,” Amr said.

Palestinian leadership and many left-wing pro-Palestinian activists have criticized the Abraham Accords, the 2020 agreements that normalized relations between Israel and several Arab nations. For decades, the prevailing foreign policy worldview in the Middle East had been that Israel could not have strong relationships in the region until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was resolved.

“Israel’s growing integration and broad-based opportunities it creates — this is something that we can leverage to improve the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza,” Amr told JI. “I think there’s real interest, particularly with Morocco, to work for ways to improve quality of life for the Palestinian people. When a country like Morocco shows that it is able to work with Israel, and work with the Palestinians to take steps to make improvements for Palestinian lives, it makes it easier for other countries to normalize relations with Israel.”

How does Amr measure his success, and the nebulous goal of what he described as “preserving a horizon of hope”?

It starts with a family tradition he incorporated into his office culture.

“The way I think about my family and my work is this: ‘How did I — how did we — make the world a better place this week?’” he told JI. Amr, his wife and children discuss that question every Friday night over dinner. “Whose lives did we improve this week? ‘I wrote a memo that was great’ doesn’t cut it. Whose life is better because of what we did that week?” ♦

# Nachman Shai's goodbye

*'There are eight million Jews in the Diaspora and whether they are under pressure from antisemitism, or living full and happy lives, they should be on our radar screen, and we should look at them, work with them, help them and see them as members of our own family'*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Nachman Shai has long been a major figure in Israeli-Diaspora relations, dating back to his time as a senior vice president at United Jewish Communities, now known as the Jewish Federations of North America. But in June 2021, as a member of then-Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's coalition government, he was tapped for Israel's top role working with the diaspora — and immediately faced an unprecedented crisis.

Days after the collapse of a residential building complex in Surfside, Fla., home to a sizable Jewish community, Shai, who served as a member of the Knesset for the Labor party from 2009-2019, arrived to South Florida with a team from Israel's Homefront Command's Search and Rescue unit, who assisted in rescue-and-recovery efforts. Shai himself was there to show support and comfort to the Jewish community there.

"It was my second or third week in the job, and I believe that it changed the course of the dialogue," Shai told *Jewish Insider*. "The Jewish community suffered tremendous casualties, scores of people were killed and the fact that an official spokesperson from the State of Israel came, stayed with them, spoke to them and addressed them in their synagogue sent a message that we hadn't thought so important before. The feedback I got was that it mattered to them very much."

In the year and a half since Shai parachuted in to support a grieving Jewish community, his work — from providing support to Jews fleeing the war in Ukraine to pushing Israelis to pay attention to the rise in global antisemitism to launching initiatives bridging the gaps between Israeli and Diaspora Jews — has focused on changing the way the Jewish state views the global Jewish community.

Days before the government he has been a member of is replaced by the incoming government of long-serving leader Benjamin Netanyahu, Shai talked to *JI* about his concerns for Israel-Diaspora relations under the new coalition, his achievements while in office and his steadfast belief that it is time to change the nature of Israel-Diaspora relations and for Israelis to start asking Diaspora Jews "what they need from us."

"The very fact that an official representative of the government of Israel was asking Jews in the Diaspora this question was a revolution," Shai, who founded and co-chaired the Knesset caucus to strengthen Israel-Diaspora ties, said. "There are eight million Jews in the Diaspora and whether they are under pressure from antisemitism, or living full and happy lives, they should be on our radar screen, and we should look at them, work with them, help them and see them as members of our own family."

"And this should be done as a governmental obligation, not as a just 'It's a nicety,'" he added. "It's something we have to work for, and that's the difference in the relationship between Israel and [the] diaspora at this stage."

Shai, who spent two years prior to his posting as minister as a visiting professor on U.S. college campuses, said that such an approach was critical, particularly in dealing with the surge of antisemitism worldwide — and in the U.S. He said he would like to see Israel, and his ministry in particular, spearheading an international effort to combat antisemitism.

Shai's delicate and sensitive approach to working with Diaspora Jewish communities is one that was not always adopted by his predecessors in the role, and he is very

concerned at the lack of compassion and sensitivity already being displayed by the new government — a coalition of right-wing parties.

"As far as I know, there is not any candidate for the ministerial position, but that's the least important concern," he said. "What is more important is that they are trying to adapt the same mode of operation to the relationship between Israel and Diaspora that they applied internally in the country."

Voices within Netanyahu's coalition have expressed a desire the change key aspects of the Law of Return, a unique immigration law that grants anyone with one Jewish grandparent the right to citizenship, overthrow recent recognition of non-Orthodox conversions to Judaism and dismiss non-Orthodox claims to alternative or pluralistic prayer at Judaism's holiest site, the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

"The Diaspora was not a player in the election campaigns and no Israeli was asked to vote on the question of [non-Orthodox] conversions, the Kotel or changing the Law of Return, but now they [the new government] has so much power and are trying to apply the same momentum to the Israeli-Diaspora relationship, which is terrible," Shai said.

"The relationship between Israel and Jews in the Diaspora was always based on a certain set of ideas and values," he continued. "If Jews in the Diaspora — in America, in Britain, in France — now ask themselves, Is this the same Jewish democratic state? Is this the same democracy that we were so proud of? Is this the same government system that takes care of minorities, of human rights, of justice, of law and order and so on? I think the answer now is shaky, it's no longer clear."

"All denominations of Judaism should be treated the same way by the government of Israel, and specifically by this ministry," said Shai, who lists among his achievements the establishment of a department for Jewish renewal, aimed at strengthening a handful of local organizations engaged in exploring what it means to be Jewish.

"I was hoping that this government will survive for three years," lamented Shai in the interview, adding that visiting Jews in the Diaspora over the past 18 months made him realize that having such a diverse coalition consisting of right- and left-wing politicians, Jews and Arabs, including nine female ministers, "was so important for

Jews outside of Israel."

"So, I'm really going to miss it, not only as a politician, but also on a personal level, as I wonder where is my state is going and what it will mean for my children and eight grandchildren in the future," he concluded. ♦

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## Inside Israel and Jordan's new bid to rehabilitate the Jordan River

*'In Israel, what's happening now is a bit like a dream come true,' one Israeli environmental activist said. 'If you came here 10 years ago, nobody would have thought that such a thing could happen.'*

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By Ruth Marks Eglash

In the Bible, the Jordan River is described as a gushing body of water, risky for the high priests carrying the ark of the covenant to cross. Today, if the people of Israel reached these reedy banks, they would have no problem skipping over the almost dried-up stream; their only hesitation might be the pollution.

Over the last 50 years, the river's annual flow has dropped drastically — from more than 1.3 billion cubic meters per year to less than 30 million cubic meters. The climate crisis, coupled with regional conflicts and the practical needs of people in the surrounding countries, have turned the Jordan's waters into a pitiful trickle.

At the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, Israeli and Jordanian officials appeared to recognize the need for action. Ministers from both countries signed what was touted as a historic "Declaration of Intent" to rehabilitate the once-flowing river and ensure it is sustainable for future generations.

Then-Israeli Environment Minister Tamar Zandberg, from the left-leaning Meretz party, also described the declaration as "an expression of the connection between Israel and Jordan, neighboring countries with a river flowing between them."

But such efforts by Israel and Jordan to safeguard and revive the shared stream have been discussed before. Nearly 30 years ago, when the two countries signed their peace agreement, provisions were laid out for rehabilitating the river, including environmental protection, agricultural pollution control, liquid waste restrictions and pest control. There were also plans to create nature reserves and protected areas, as well as tourist and historical heritage sites along the river's banks.

As relations between the countries deteriorated, however, little changed in the status of the iconic waterway. Israel and Jordan, along with Syria and Lebanon, continued to siphon off much of the clean water, and conflicts — old and new — kept cooperation and conservation from

becoming priorities.

In his recent *New York Times* column, Thomas Friedman, who has long touted the environmental crisis as a factor that could ultimately force peace on the region, referred to the declaration between Israel and Jordan and expressed hope that it would now nudge the countries in a new direction.

Environmental activists are hopeful too.

"In Israel, what's happening now is a bit like a dream come true," Nadav Tal, water officer for the Israel office of EcoPeace, a regional environmental nonprofit that has long been pushing for cleanup of the river, told *Jewish Insider* recently. "If you came here 10 years ago, nobody would have thought that such a thing could happen."

Tal took *Jewish Insider* to Yardenit, a tourism site just south of the Sea of Galilee where some Christians believe John first baptized Jesus and where visitors can take a short, leisurely kayak trip along part of the river. Decades ago, Tal explained, Israel rerouted most of the water that flows to the



area from the Kinneret, first to an electrical plant further south and then via its national water carrier to the center of the country and beyond. Human engineering currently allows for only a small amount of freshwater and a mix of high-quality wastewater and saline water to reach the Jordan River, which flows south to the Dead Sea.

Located here now, however, is a newly built wastewater treatment center, and land has been set aside for a water desalination plant. The renewed plan between Israel and Jordan is to clean up the river's water supplies, boost the flow of cubic meters and divert a significant amount from here to Jordan, one of the world's driest countries.

Tal, who is also EcoPeace's field coordinator for the Jordan Valley, calls the rehabilitation project "urgent."

"We have to do it now because the pollution is still continuing," he said. "We've already seen what happens when we neglect nature. Take the Dead Sea, for example; we neglected the Dead Sea, we allowed water diversion and industry, then nature took its revenge with sinkholes, destroying the infrastructure and the people there are now really suffering."

"That will happen here, too, eventually. If we don't fix problems in nature, it will come back to hurt us," Tal continued, giving the example of a recent discovery of cholera in nearby Syrian waters. "Nobody's had cholera here for decades, but it's a waterborne disease in places with poor sanitation. It's all pretty straightforward."

Mansour Abu Rashid, a former major general in the Jordanian armed services who describes himself as a peace activist and who has been involved in efforts to rehabilitate the river from the Jordanian side, told JI that renewing the waterway was important for both countries, but was essential for his homeland.

"As you know, Jordan is one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of water," he explained. "In Israel, there is now enough water for drinking, for industry and for agriculture from desalination plants, but in Jordan we have around four million refugees from neighboring countries and there's not enough water to support us and them."

Abu Rashid said the declaration signed between Israel and Jordan at COP27 will be a

big boost for Jordan's fledgling water supply. The plan requires Israel to release some 180 million cubic meters into the river to clean it up; a portion of that will be directed towards Jordan.

"The Jordan River is not only a river for water, it's also important religiously in Islam, Christianity and Judaism – it's a holy river and we have to revive it," explained Abu Rashid. "It is also very important for the peace between Jordan and Israel."

Idan Greenbaum, head of the Emek Hayarden regional council, concurred, saying that the waterway had been neglected for far too long and the cleanup was now essential for both sides.

"We have a very peaceful border with Jordan," Greenbaum, who lives on the Israeli side of the river just south of the Sea of Galilee, said. "All that separates us is the river and a fence. When there are dangers in Jordan – brushfires, agricultural diseases and other natural disasters – it crosses over quickly into Israel."

"Those who live in this area do not have the privilege to fight with our neighbors," Greenbaum continued, adding, "we pay the price of politicians who are not careful with their decisions. When there is unrest in Jerusalem, on the Temple Mount, it impacts us here."

Greenbaum recalled a 2017 incident in which the guard at Israel's embassy in Amman opened fire, killing two Jordanian nationals, one who was attempting to carry out an attack. At the time, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised the guard for his bravery, sparking a diplomatic crisis with Jordan; a few weeks later, Greenbaum said, rabies-infected wildlife crossed over the border from Jordan, putting human life at risk.

"Right now, relations with Jordan are very good," he said. "We are trying to grow them, but it's hard because of the situation internally in Jordan."

There has been some unrest in the Kingdom over the rising cost of living and dissatisfaction with the rule of King Abdullah II, but the country is also closely watching as Israel's new government, which includes right-wing figures who have argued for a change in the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif, which contains the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, which

is under the custodianship of Jordan. Jews refer to the site as the Temple Mount; the Western Wall sits below it.

Jonathan Schanzer, senior vice president for research at the Washington, D.C.-based think tank Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, said the river rehabilitation project was a "bull's-eye if the goal was to find an issue of mutual interest to both countries."

But, he continued, cooperation of any kind with Israel has become deeply unpopular in Jordan, where some elements of the population even derided receiving gas from its Jewish neighbor.

"Quiet cooperation between the two countries seems to be the only cooperation that really works in recent years," said Schanzer, who recently authored a report on Jordan's place in the Abraham Accords normalization process with Israel. "Israeli intelligence, military assistance and continued provision of water and energy happen out of the eye of the Jordanian public, but the interaction of the two countries in just about every other way has been fraught with tension."

"Much of this tension derives from a decision taken on the part of the royal court and the political elite in Amman to engage in vitriolic rhetoric against Israel," Schanzer continued. "The Israelis continue to absorb this quietly, but they are growing frustrated."

Greenbaum also expressed frustration over the quiet cooperation and the impact of political unrest between the countries, but said he was optimistic for the river renewal project. Roughly 14 kilometers (9 miles) of the Jordan River is under his regional purview and, he said, the plans include creating a national park and protected nature reserve.

"EcoPeace knows how to work with the Jordanians and the Palestinians on environmental projects, they can bring the sides together," he said, adding, "Besides, we don't have much of a choice here but to partner with our neighbors. If we don't cooperate it will be a problem for all of us."

In Jordan, Abu Rashid said he was also hopeful that the important project would go ahead, regardless of the decisions made by Israel's new government.

"They aren't giving us water out of mercy for Jordanians, it is written in

an international agreement signed by the leaders of both countries and the parliaments of the countries,” he said. “People have to respect what has been signed and the new government must continue to supply Jordan with water as mentioned in the peace treaty.”

Abu Rashid added: “In areas of military and security, Jordan and Israel have good cooperation, but this is not enough. I hope on other issues such as politics, trade, industry, water, tourism and cross-border cooperation they can do the same.”

EcoPeace’s Tal also said he was

optimistic the plan would move ahead. There are always uncertainties, he told JI, “but what we do know is that there is now a will and a channel of communication that we need to keep open.” ♦

JANUARY 3, 2023

## A hip-hop artist in the Holy Land

*As a ‘music ambassador’ with the U.S. State Department, Mahogany Jones uses rap and poetry to build bridges among Jews and Arabs in Israel*

By Gabby Deutch

Over the years, eager diplomats from around the world have come to the Holy Land, hoping to be the ones to finally make peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Earlier this month, a very different kind of ambassador landed on the shores of the Mediterranean: Mahogany Jones, a hip-hop artist who for the past decade has served as an American music ambassador, traveling to conflict zones around the world to teach lessons on hip-hop, art and activism on behalf of the United States.

She toured in Israel for a week, leading workshops and playing in concerts that brought together hundreds of Jews, Muslims and Christians — both on the stage and in the audience. She played shows in Nazareth and Jerusalem with System Ali, a Jaffa-based band whose members are a mix of Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel.

One day, when leading a workshop in Haifa, she heard the sound of live music outside and left her perch to freestyle with the klezmer band that was playing on the street.

“I was doing my workshop, but all of a sudden I hear this magical music,” Jones recalled in a Wednesday phone interview

with *Jewish Insider*. “I take a break and I peek outside and I see, like, this tuba, and I see an accordion and instruments. I’m like, ‘What is going on?’” Her drummer slipped outside to check out the scene, and she sent some of the people in her workshop to ask the musicians if she could join in.

“They’re like, ‘Hey, come on.’ We’re rapping. It’s going down. They’re playing klezmer,” Jones continued. Even though she came up in New York’s spoken-word scene two decades ago, at the same time as artists like Talib Kweli, Mos Def and Erykah Badu, this was her first impromptu street performance. “It took me — I lived in New York City. Street performance happens all the time. I was too chicken. I come all the way across the globe, with a klezmer band, it’s not fazed by a hip-hop street performance.”

Jones, 44, first gained attention for her music more than two decades ago, when she won BET’s “Freestyle Friday” program four times in a row. Her newest album, “Better,” came out last month. But throughout her career, Jones became best known for her activism (what she calls “artivism”) around the world and in Detroit, her adopted hometown.

She has been to 16 countries with

the State Department, including Bosnia, Uzbekistan, Iraq and Finland. She works with local populations that are experiencing tensions or distrust, like in Israel; she also arrives in these countries as an American goodwill ambassador, to help people trust the embassy and the U.S. government personnel who are there to offer services to them.

“A lot of times people may be intimidated or not comfortable with coming to the U.S. Embassy and my role is being, like, ‘Hey, I’m human too, and a lot of the negative misnomers that you have about what Americans are like, I’d like to just, in-person, dispel those,’” said Jones. She wants to help young people feel free to express themselves, to be who they are and to feel a sense of comfort and belonging.

“You do programs like this with artists like Mahogany Jones, who has done this in so many different difficult spaces, because they’re able to bridge those divides and create that safe space in which different actors can share their culture, can share who they are,” said Paul Rockower, who used to lead Next Level, the State Department program that uses hip-hop to foster cross-cultural connection, and is now the

executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Phoenix.

A short documentary film from Jones' time in Sarajevo shows her animatedly leading a group of teens in a call-and-response: "I love ... hip hop!" It's the first day of the program, and they're smiling but tense; by the end of the program, two weeks later, they're freestyling and dancing in an onstage performance.

"The tools in my bag that I can share with you, you can use them to be free, be comfortable. You may not be the next Eminem or whatever, right? But you get an opportunity to express yourself, to be more comfortable with yourself, to express and talk about things that matter to you in ways that matter, whether that's through poetry or whether that's through rap," said Jones. "I want to share that with you."

Jones was invited to Israel by Polina Levy Eskinazi, in the embassy's cultural affairs unit. The trip was supposed to take place nearly three years ago, but the COVID-19 pandemic intervened.

"We were looking for an amazing American artist who is also an educator, who can easily connect with diverse audiences and with young people. All these led us directly to Mahogany Jones," Eskinazi told JI.

In Israel, Jones worked mainly with educators to teach them the skills to bring

hip-hop and poetry to their students.

"I was trying to teach, 'How do we use art to unravel uncomfortable conversations?'" she said. She focused on pedagogy, rather than engaging participants in those uncomfortable conversations — they grew close to each other through music, rather than having politically charged conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"I wanted them to take away [from the workshop] being able to create safe spaces for their students to feel comfortable enough to make mistakes, feel comfortable enough to share their creativity feel comfortable enough to share their vulnerabilities," she said, adding that she also shared the "nuts and bolts" of hip-hop and songwriting.

Participants in workshops included Jews and Muslims, Christians and Druze, religious and secular Israelis, men and women, and people from different economic backgrounds. The American Embassy's intention in organizing Jones' tour was to "create a better society that is more tolerant and respectful and therefore more democratic, resilient and strong."

This trip was doubly meaningful for Jones, a Christian, who got to visit religious sites she had read about since childhood.

"I knew it was going to be spiritually moving for me. I didn't know that it was gonna be fun," said Jones, who had never

traveled to Israel before. "It was beautiful. Everyone was so open. Everyone was just so gracious. Of course the food was incredible. Haifa was like Brooklyn on steroids. Tel Aviv was like, I don't know, like L.A. meets Amsterdam meets all of your favorite places in the world, like rolled up into one."

She saw the beauty of a small, ancient place where the world's three religions commingle, where any random date tree might have biblical significance and every stone could be an archeological wonder. But it was "sobering," too, Jones added, seeing and feeling the tension there.

"Here I am in Nazareth, and it's 6 o'clock. It's December. There's a huge Christmas tree. I've just passed the nun, I just passed a monk. And I'm listening to the [Muslim] call of prayer, and five minutes ago, I saw somebody just pull out their [prayer] mat," she recalled.

"To see that and to be, like, man, what's wrong with us, we can't figure it out? 'I live on this side of my beliefs, I live on that side of my beliefs.' But hey, we're all on the same side, and we're all sharing space," she noted. "It's complicated, but every day we are doing what we need to do to figure it out, and to honor our traditions and to honor who we are, and to somehow still figure out how we're going to do life together." ♦



# British TV judge Rob Rinder's crowded docket

*Rinder, known as a popular daytime barrister on the U.K.'s ITV, has sought to connect with his Jewish roots*

By Jenni Frazer

Robert Rinder — berobed TV judge, popular presenter on a breakfast show and a contestant on the British original of “Dancing with the Stars” — is nearly ubiquitous on Britain’s TV screens. For good measure, he writes an advice column for the tabloid national newspaper *The Sun*, co-presents the BBC show “Amazing Hotels: Life Beyond the Lobby” and is taking part in a Christmas pantomime, a much-loved tradition in British theater. And on top of that, he runs marathons for charity and has a legal thriller novel in the works.

But Brits got to see another side of Rinder’s essential, sunny optimism in 2018 when he appeared on the British roots-journey show, “Who Do You Think You Are?” That was when he discovered more harrowing details about his maternal grandfather’s Holocaust experience, some of which he knew already when he traveled with him to Poland as a student, seeing a glass factory where his grandfather, Morris Malenicky, had worked as a slave laborer. Malenicky was liberated from Theresienstadt as the war ended, and then joined 300 other young Jews in England’s Lake District, becoming one of the so-called “Windermere children.”

That discovery led Rinder, 44, to dig deeper into his Jewish past. The result, two years later, was a two-part BBC documentary, “In My Family: the Holocaust and Me.” Rinder’s search for stories of his ancestors comes amid an ongoing debate in Britain and America about the position of Jews in the public eye, one made more urgent by the uptick in antisemitism on both sides of the pond. In Britain, that debate has been spearheaded by the 2021 book (and a subsequent TV documentary) by David Baddiel, *Jews Don’t Count*, which argues that, in a world of identity politics, Jews no

longer count as a minority.

Rinder appears to transcend this conversation, because, he told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview in London, “I’m not just culturally Jewish. It is the inescapable label placed upon you. But I am also religiously Jewish. I am very publicly proud of being Jewish, and having a Jewish platform and having *simcha*, or delight, in my Judaism. I’ve never personally experienced overt anti-Jewish racism myself, but have been alongside people who have. I do think, though, that the tragic reality is the sense in which Jewishness is not taken as seriously in the same way as other identities.”

His answer, he says, is to try to introduce people to his faith and hope that they can see the joy he takes in being Jewish — very unusual for a public personality in Britain. In two recent popular TV food shows, for example, one at Passover and a second at Rosh Hashanah, Rinder appeared and spoke knowledgeably about the festivals and why Jews observe them in the way they do. “I love festivals and shul-going and Torah. When I try to share that with other people, it’s always through the prism of celebration and inclusion.”

He recently returned from a quick trip to Morocco, where he had been filming an episode of the BBC show that he co-presents with chef Monica Galetti. But no sooner did Rinder arrive back in the U.K. than he plunged into rehearsals for a Christmas pantomime, where well-known faces pop up in an often slapstick family show. Rinder, to his own amusement, is playing the Mirror in a version of “Snow White.”

Rinder is aware that the more “showbiz” part of his life — he appears daily on “Judge Rinder,” a court show akin to “Judge Judy,” can lead people to watch BBC documentaries with a more serious slant —including the

two Holocaust films he made, painful and personal, drawing on his family’s story — one of which pulled in eight million viewers and very positive reviews.

Along with being the grandson of a Holocaust survivor, Rinder’s mother, Angela Cohen, heads one of the U.K.’s foremost survivor charities, the 45 Aid Society. He is also understood to be fronting a major program next year marking Israel’s 75th anniversary by telling the stories, side-by-side, of three British Jews and three British Palestinians. Rinder explained that he strongly believes that “TV has a place in difficult conversations, such as the stories about the building of Israel.”

Because of his abiding interest in the Holocaust and his family connection, Rinder has had a long relationship — one that predates his celebrity — with survivors and the children of survivors.

Harry Spiro, a survivor who came from the same hometown, Piotrkow, as Rinder’s grandfather, first met the adult Rinder during a return visit by the latter to Windermere, the English Lake District village where the Jewish orphans from the Holocaust first arrived in 1945.

“He’s interviewed me a few times at various Holocaust-related events,” Spiro told *JJ*, “and he’s always been very helpful, putting me very much at my ease. He’s not changed a bit over the years. He makes all the time in the world for you. He is a mensch.”

Maurice Helfgott, chairman of World Jewish Relief — the successor charity to the organization that originally sponsored the arrival of the Holocaust orphans in the U.K. — praised Rinder’s combination of “sharp intellect with tremendous energy, great warmth, a sense of humor and genuine preparedness to put himself out for the people and the causes he believes in.”

"He is particularly involved with Jewish causes," Helfgott added, "but by no means exclusively. I would say he wears his heart on his sleeve. He is extremely good at connecting with people emotionally."

This was evident earlier this year when Rinder, who speaks Russian, briefly reported from the Ukrainian border with Poland, inspired by the connection he had built with his Ukrainian dancing partner Oksana Platero on "Strictly Come Dancing." Platero's family, like many Ukrainians, came under fire when Russia invaded Ukraine in February. Rinder wanted to see what he could do to help — and tracked down the family in Poland, bringing them a wheelchair and medical supplies.

Humanitarian work aside, Rinder has a novel coming out next year, a legal mystery titled *The Trial*, which he said will be the first of a series. He moaned dramatically about the endeavor, declaring, "Hubris is the answer, I didn't realize how hard it would be. I have a column in *The Sun* responding to consumer problems, and I think that's important for people who have limited access to justice in the U.K. And I like editing other people's work. So I thought, well, novels are my pleasure, how difficult can it be? The truth is, very difficult."

Rinder bats aside questions about his ability to juggle his schedule. His TV appearances, he insists, owe much more to the work of production teams. "They do all the work and I just have to turn up," he jokes, adding, deprecatingly, that the ability to perform "a good cha-cha-cha" on a light entertainment dancing show doesn't really rate in the grand scheme of things.

But prior to his public appearances, Rinder, who remains an active member of the Bar, had an illustrious legal career, and might indeed have gone on to become Judge Rinder in real life. "I began as a defense counsel, mainly 'bog-standard' [routine] crime. Then a very important solicitor spotted me in court, and gradually my practice evolved into murders, and on to cases involving terrorism and eventually defending soldiers in war crimes cases."

He wrote a legal textbook and then expanded into cases of large-scale fraud, "chiefly for high-net-worth defendants." In 2010, his chambers — the group of lawyers working in 2 Hare Court — were asked to

send someone as an assistant prosecutor to the Turks and Caicos Islands, a British territory in the Caribbean.

"The government was suspended [because of corruption allegations] and it was decided that we [Britain] should reimpose direct rule." Rinder was sent out to work with Helen Garlick, then with the Serious Fraud Office. The case is now "11 years in," with one judge dying as the case ground on, according to Rinder, and may not conclude any time soon.

Even with the apparently endless corruption case, the Turks and Caicos were idyllic. Rinder spent time on the beach and, because many of the friends he'd made at university had found success as actors, Rinder used his downtime to write a script. (One such friend, Benedict Cumberbatch, chose Rinder to be the best man at his wedding, and conducted a civil ceremony between Rinder and his then partner.)

On returning to the U.K., Rinder was morosely involved in another case, but admits he had lost motivation for his court work. He pitched his script to Helen Warner, ITV's director of daytime television. "She read it and gave it her full, aggressively undivided indifference," laughs Rinder, adding that in fact Warner, who left TV to become a best-selling novelist, later told him it was the worst thing she'd ever read.

Undaunted, Rinder wrote back to Warner and this time she asked him if he was qualified in arbitration, because ITV was seeking someone to front a court show. "To be honest with you, because they were all in television, I just assumed they were talking nonsense. People in television aren't like lawyers. They spend a lot of time in meetings: one person makes the decisions and the rest simply want to cover themselves with glory when things go well, or absolve themselves of responsibility if things are a disaster."

Rinder freely admits he didn't really know what he was doing at the start of "Judge Rinder." The show was screened in the so-called "dead zone" of weekday afternoons, but became a secret guilty pleasure for thousands of viewers and "captured the public's imagination." Rinder's pithy put-downs and frequent acerbic zingers were greeted with delight, as women lined up to sue their wedding photographers

or admitted their secret membership of a vegetable spread society, the Marmiteers. An example of his put-downs: telling a man who had broken the sunroof control on his friend's car, ensuring that it remained permanently open: "Sir! Your friend once had a car, he now drives a mobile igloo!"

As "Judge Rinder" became popular, the demand for the lawyer's presence in various unlikely guises grew. He pooh-poohs questions about how he finds time to undertake all the various commitments. "I used to work 120 hours a week when I was counsel. The truth of the matter is that behind the 'Wizard of Oz' curtain, very little goes on. When you do TV, everyone else does the work. It's not really hard work, compared with what so many of my legal colleagues do. It's a bit like standing by the goal line in football, everyone else does the work and you push the ball into the goal mouth, then everyone says oh, how *marvelous* you are."

Rinder recognizes that he is unlikely to appear in court in a jury trial anytime soon, because of fear of prejudice for either the prosecution or the defense. But he now uses his high public profile to promote causes close to his heart: "issues where social activism and law intersect with one another. I especially care about housing, and do what I can to answer consumer questions well; and I still teach a little, too." ♦

# A Jewish nonprofit is changing the way a Florida city responds to 911 calls

*The Community Assistance and Life Liaison program aims to transform the conversation around the role of police in public safety.*

By Ruben Brosbe

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

In the summer of 2020, amid the protests following the murder of George Floyd, police and city leaders in St. Petersburg, Fla., began looking for a way to respond. What emerged was a request for proposals from organizations providing social services to respond to certain 911 calls, in lieu of the police.

A little more than two years later, the winning organization, the Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services, has earned national recognition and, last month, a \$200,000 grant from a charitable arm of the National Football League for its work leading The Community Assistance and Life Liaison (CALL) program — which aims to transform the conversation around the role of police in public safety. The program's overall annual budget is \$1.27 million, a 12% increase over last year.

"We think that what they're doing could be a model or could be a template for others to follow," Anna Isaacson, SVP of social responsibility for the NFL, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "We see the impact... and hope that other local organizations, other law enforcement agencies see the success and look to replicate successful models."

There are a number of programs around the country that pair social workers with police in response to certain 911 calls. By contrast, CALL does not work according to a co-responder model. Instead, 911 dispatchers screen and reroute calls to Gulf Coast JFCS mental health professionals called "navigators."

"St. Petersburg made a very bold step to identify calls for service that not only

received a different response, but — what if we completely diverted them from law enforcement?" Megan McGee, police special projects manager for the St. Petersburg Police Department, told *eJP*.

According to Gulf Coast JFCS' executive director, Sandra Braham, CALL is the rare program in which "staff are responding without police. And it really truly does free the police to do policing."

Since February 2021, CALL navigators have responded to a range of 911 calls that would previously have gone to the police. In the nearly two years since the program began, Gulf Coast JFCS has responded to more than 8,000 calls. According to the SPPD, the city has seen a 17% reduction in suicide deaths since the CALL program's launch despite a 60% increase in calls to the police department related to suicide.

"People would call having mental health episodes, or someone who's experiencing homelessness or sleeping in their car," Braham said. Now, 911 dispatchers are able to determine whether a call may carry a risk of violence. If not, they patch the call to Gulf Coast JFCS' team. The organization's navigators respond in pairs.

"We are able to deescalate the situation to find out what's going on and what's causing the crisis," Braham said. "Sometimes it's as simple as you know, 'My grandmother is on oxygen and we can't pay our electric bill.'"

According to both the St. Petersburg Police Department and Gulf Coast JFCS, the CALL program has had a transformative impact on the community. When SPPD was designing CALL, police officials felt firmly that it should not be a co-responder model, and also that it should be led by an outside organization.

"If we tried to develop this program in-

house, not only would that take a very long time [but it would] be very difficult to do," McGee said. "Also, it would be viewed as an extension of the police department."

The goal, said McGee and Braham, was to provide a response to common mental health episodes and other crises that would not result in people getting arrested, jailed or committed involuntarily to mental hospitals. The process for involuntary commitment in Florida is outlined in a 1971 state law called the Baker Act. CALL allows responders "to assess the situation to determine if they're off their meds, to get them to the doctor and to follow up with them," Braham said.

"Officers are limited in what they can do with mental health crises," McGee added, as opposed to "somebody like a clinician who has the flexibility to sit and really spend time, devote time working with a client and also be able to come back and have follow-up. I mean, that's a huge piece that our officers don't really have the ability to do."

When the SPPD put out the call for proposals for the CALL program, Braham felt like it was a natural fit for Gulf Coast JFCS because of the array of services her organization provides. Gulf Coast JFCS began providing counseling and family services to the Jewish community in Pinellas County, Fla. in 1960. In 1974, the social work and social services agency expanded its services and began offering them to the broader community. Today, Gulf Coast JFCS plays a variety of roles, from connecting people to affordable housing to welcoming and supporting refugees, job training and job search support, in addition to connecting Jewish families to Jewish life.

That spectrum of services positioned Gulf Coast to respond effectively to the wide range of non-emergency 911 calls that SPPD

wanted to divert. Additionally, Braham felt the CALL program aligned well with Gulf Coast's founding on Jewish values.

"We work with elders, we work with behavioral health, we work with drug addiction, we work with survivors, we work with children who are in school and troubled," Braham said. "This was a way to really do something that was innovative and spoke to our values as a Jewish organization

in this respect, treating people with dignity, and of course, repairing the world."

Gulf Coast JFCS was ultimately chosen based on "their commitment in the community," McGee said. "They really took the time to understand what we were trying to do, a different type of response for a different type of call and how they would staff each call."

CALL's budget is less than 1% of the

SPPD's annual budget of \$133 million. With the grant from the NFL, the JFCS hopes to expand its hours by hiring more social workers. It is also planning to pilot providing short-term housing for homeless families. According to Braham, "Now they call and say, 'Can you send someone on the CALL program? We don't want the police.'" ♦

JANUARY 5, 2023

## How an emergency vehicle in Jerusalem came to be known as 'Bikey McBikeface'

*Fifteen friends of a 19-year-old terror victim donated an ambucycle in his memory, naming it with a twist they knew he'd love.*

By Melanie Lidman

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

The Israeli emergency response organization United Hatzalah has a fleet of more than 1,000 ambucycles, or mopeds outfitted with emergency lifesaving equipment. Most of the ambucycles, which the organization uses to respond to some 2,000 calls per day, were donated in honor of people or milestone events.

But only one of those ambucycles has an official name: Bikey McBikeface.

Bikey McBikeface took to the road in 2017, the donation organized by a group of friends in honor of Yoni Jesner, a Scottish 19-year-old who was killed in a terror attack in Tel Aviv in 2002.

Jesner had dreamed of being a doctor, and was always running around helping people, so it seemed fitting to donate an ambucycle in his name, said Binyamin Casper. Casper studied with Jesner at

Yeshivat Har Etzion in the West Bank settlement of Alon Shvut before he was killed. After Casper immigrated to Israel in 2016, he started thinking about different ways to honor his friend's memory in Israel.

United Hatzalah uses ambucycles because they allow responders to reach the scene of an emergency as quickly as possible, even in traffic. Hatzalah prides itself on arriving at the scene of an emergency in an average of 90 seconds in metropolitan areas and within three minutes across the country.

The organization was founded in 1989 by Eli Beer. When Beer was a 16-year-old volunteer EMT, his ambulance was stuck in traffic while trying to reach a 7-year-old choking victim. The boy died, and Beer resolved to find a way to cut down on response times during emergencies. Hatzalah pioneered a peer-to-peer GPS dispatch system, which notifies the closest volunteers to an emergency.

Donating an ambucycle to United

Hatzalah costs \$36,000. People can also donate other vehicles, including an off-road 4×4 ambutractor for \$92,000, or a mobile ICU ambulance for \$225,000. Fifteen friends joined together to raise \$18,000, and that amount was matched by Casper's wife's aunt and uncle, Phil and Malki Rosen.

"Just before we were ready to dedicate it, the U.K. had run this funny naming rights thing for this scientific boat," Casper said.

In 2016, the U.K.'s Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) invited the public to name a \$300 million polar research ship, and out of more than 30,000 suggestions, voters on the internet chose Boaty McBoatface by an overwhelming landslide. Despite Boaty McBoatface capturing almost a third of the vote, NERC was less than enthused with the choice, and ended up naming the ship "Sir David Attenborough," after the celebrated British nature presenter. British officials, however, did deign to name an onboard submarine with the winning submission.



"Danny Steel [another friend from yeshiva] was inspired by [the] Boaty McBoatface story, and he said, 'Can you ask Hatzalah if we can give the bike an actual name?'" Casper said. "Yoni was a huge jokester, one of the funniest guys I knew... This was a great shtick very much up Yoni's alley." United Hatzalah was more flexible than the British NERC, and the name was approved.

"Usually the donors choose the dedication, and they dedicate it in honor of family members, loved ones, people who passed, bar mitzvahs or weddings," explained Raphael Poch, an EMT volunteer and the international media spokesperson for United Hatzalah. "Many bikes have interesting dedications, and we have numerous bikes [dedicated] in honor of terror victims," said Poch. But he's unaware of another ambucycle that has both a dedication and an official name. "This was a very unique instance where the bike was given a name," he said.

Poch said some of the volunteers name their bikes on an individual basis. He personally names his bikes after Shakespearean heroines. His ambucycles have been named Portia, from "The Merchant of Venice"; Desdemona, from "Othello"; and his current steed, Miranda, from "The Tempest." But it's a personal moniker and, unlike Bikey McBikeface, is not emblazoned on the bike itself.

United Hatzalah has around 6,500 volunteers and around 300 employees. Its 2021 budget was \$27 million, though the 2022 budget nearly doubled, driven by the nonprofit raising \$20 million for its emergency work in and around Ukraine. The organization, which is not connected to individual Hatzalah organizations in the U.S. and other countries, responds to around 675,000 calls per year, about 25% of which are considered life-threatening. It is funded from private donations and foundations, and works alongside — and occasionally in competition with — Magen David Adom, Israel's national emergency medical and ambulance service.

Poch said the dedications on each emergency vehicle are an important link between the donors and United Hatzalah's work. "I know the donors [of my ambucycle] personally, they live two streets down from

my house, and when I go on a mission and I save someone's life I'll tell them the story of what happened," he said. "I've told them I named the bike, so I say, 'Miranda and I saved a life today.'"

Donors can get updates even if they don't live in the same neighborhood as the volunteers. United Hatzalah sends individualized messages to vehicle donors three or four times a year, describing what kind of events their specific ambucycle or ambulance has responded to over the past few months. There is a team of 10 full-time employees at Hatzalah who collect the information about each donated vehicle and compile the donor updates, including a short biography of the person who is driving the vehicle, said Poch.

"The donors feel very connected, they really like getting reports, and feel like they're a partner in this," he said. "We want them to feel the effects of what they've donated, and know what it's been used for." There's another reason for the massive communications undertaking: Poch said it greatly increases repeat donations.

The first driver of Bikey McBikeface was Avi Press, a longtime dispatcher at United Hatzalah's Jerusalem headquarters. In 2017, he rode Bikey McBikeface to an emergency at Damascus Gate and saved the life of a young Arab woman having a seizure during an diabetic episode. In November, Michael Cassar, McBikeface's latest driver, rode the ambucycle to respond to the double bombings at bus stops at the entrance to Jerusalem.

"Marsha [Gladstone, Jesner's mother] loves getting the updates from Hatzalah," said Casper. "It's a beautiful thing for her, every few months to get that boost of, 'Hey, the ambucycle named for your son is doing incredible things.'"

Bikey McBikeface's journey may soon be coming to an end. United Hatzalah ambucycles generally last for about five years, up to a maximum of seven years, before they are retired, and Bikey McBikeface is already six years old. The bike recently came to prominence when a Jerusalem resident posted a photo of the bike on Facebook with a humorous imagined conversation about the origins of its name.

"Yoni is very much in all of the hearts of people who knew him," said Casper.

"His legacy lives on through the Yoni Jesner Foundation, and every year there's a gathering at his grave on Erev Sukkot," the day before the Jewish fall festival. Having Jesner's ambucycle capture attention on Facebook, nearly six years after it took to the streets, made Casper and all of the other donors smile and feel a connection to Jesner that they usually only experience when they gather together on the anniversary of his death.

"The ambucycle encapsulated a lot of Yoni in one shot: his spirit, his desire to help people in life, and his humor, which I think brought out a lot of creativity and humor and generosity from others," Casper said.

If people see the Bikey McBikeface name on a lifesaving device and smile, then it's like a double *mitzvah*, Casper added.

"I look at it as, his soul got a reawakening at this time, to make us stop our usual day and think about the person no longer with us, and their values and what they stood for," said Casper. "We got this added jolt of energy of Yoni's spirit and legacy." ♦