

State&Local

Hunt for green solutions links Israel, New Jersey

Two-day conference builds on know-how of high-tech sector

JOHANNA GINSBERG
NJ/N Staff Writer

New Jersey politicians, developers, and Meadowlands representatives were practically begging Israel to send its best green innovations their way at the first-ever America-Israel Green Buildings Conference.

"We want to marry what's going on in Israel with what's going on here," said Caren Franzini, chief executive officer of the NJ Economic Development Authority.

Susan Bass Levin, acting executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, drew sweeping comparisons between Israel and New Jersey.

"Geography is destiny here and in Israel; it has shaped Israel's economy and society. Well, it's the same on this side of the harbor," she said. "We're entering the next great age of transit investment. There's gold in those hills for companies that can make better, greener [technology].... Israeli companies, we are looking to you for partnership and to make New Jersey strong and green."

That partnership was the centerpiece of



New Jersey developer Jeremy Halpern and Israeli architect Irit Greenberg exchange business cards at the conference as they discuss possible joint "green" ventures both here and in Israel.

the June 3-4 conference, which brought an estimated 125 participants to the Times Center in New York on June 3 and close to 80 to the Meadowlands Commission's Environment Center in Lyndhurst the following

day. At the NJ site, they gathered in a circular room surrounded by windows overlooking the state's wetlands.

With 72 Israeli companies invested here, New Jersey is the top choice for Israeli innovators looking to locate in the United States. And with 18 NJ companies in Israel, Israel is New Jersey's seventh-biggest trading partner.

And while energy issues have pushed Israel to be a leader in innovations for sustainable development, New Jersey was named America's seventh-greenest state in a recent *Forbes Magazine* survey.

During a panel discussion on green development, the conversation turned to why the United States lags so far behind not only Israel in terms of green design for buildings but also behind much of Europe. Developer Emanuel Stern, president and CEO of Hartz Mountain Industries, Inc., pointed out that innovation on this side of the ocean is not lacking, but government incentives to market the innovations are. "The irony is that most solar panels we install in Germany come from the United States," he said.

Developers pointed out that the biggest challenge for going green is the bottom line, since the cost of energy-efficient building falls mostly on their shoulders, while the benefit is often realized by tenants. They said government regulations, and in particular, building codes, are not keeping pace with green innovation — something that



Mark Levenson, a member of the New Jersey-Israel Commission and the America-Israel Chamber of Commerce, chaired the steering committee for the America-Israel Green Buildings Conference, held in New York and New Jersey June 3-4.

Photos by Johanna Ginsberg

can handcuff the implementation of efficient technology.

"The norm has to be: Here are the regu-

See **Green** page 18

Green from page 6

lations, and we will live with it," said developer Jeremy Halpern, vice president of Atlantic Realty Development Corporation. "Building owners did not put fire sprinklers in until a few years ago, because the code changed. Some people did it a few years earlier, but now everyone has done it. This is just like that," he said.

Stern pointed out that green building "will not happen through corporate philanthropy but by government packing it with incentives and codes."

Israeli companies also had a chance to showcase their inno-

'Israeli companies, we are looking to you for partnership and to make New Jersey strong and green.'

ventions and technologies before the receptive audience of developers, architects, engineers, business owners, and academics from this side of the Atlantic.

Business cards flew during every break, as Israeli professionals and Americans exchanged contact information and ideas, looking for ways to partner and network.

Among those on the lookout for promising leads was Judith Sheft, vice president of technology development at the New Jersey Institute of Technology and a member of the New Jersey-Israel Commission.

From transit to agriculture, participants hoped the next breakthrough in environmental technology bears the stamp of the Jewish state and the Garden State. ■

jjginsberg@njewishnews.com

www.njjewishnews.com

Solutions for the here and now

FREDDA SACHAROW
Special to NJ Jewish News

Carbon footprints and sustainability may be sexy new buzz words in the United States, but Israel has been grappling with the reality of these life-altering issues for decades.

"Israel is energy-challenged. It does not have the resources that the United States or the Arab nations have, or that Canada and Venezuela have. It has to get its energy from outside its borders," said New Jersey attorney and West Orange resident Mark S. Levenson. Levenson cochaired the steering committee that planned the America-Israel Green Buildings Conference, held June 3-4 in New York and New Jersey.

"Also, Israel lives in a dangerous neighborhood, so sources of supplies are always subject to interruption," said Levenson, a partner at the Newark law firm Sills Cummis & Gross PC.

As a result, Levenson said, Israel is years ahead of its closest ally in addressing matters of conservation and sustainability.

Among the conference organizers were the America-Israel Chamber of Commerce, the New Jersey-Israel Commission, the NJ State Department of Commerce and Economic Development Commission, and the Government of Israel Economic Mission.

"Addressing the issue of green building is not some pie-in-the-sky effort," he said the morning after the conference wrapped up.

"We can all sit here and talk about gas and autos and stuff, but the truth is that 25 percent of our CO₂ emissions come from cars — but 35 percent comes from buildings."

"Green buildings" — homes, schools, and commercial enterprises — are designed with an eye toward increasing the efficiency with which structures use resources.

The conference had two goals: introducing Israeli companies with innovative technologies to NJ developers and showing Israeli companies what their NJ counterparts are already doing to create buildings with minimal impact on the environment.

"Small companies in Israel are really ahead of the curve in this area of sustainability," said Levenson, who moderated two panels during the conference.

He spoke with enthusiasm of an Israeli company that demonstrated a film designed to cover windows while reducing solar light to keep office buildings cool, and another company that displayed products that turn waste water into clean water.

"We worry about \$4 a gallon for gas; [Israelis] were paying that years ago — and are paying \$7, \$8, \$9 a gallon now. So they have been much more interested in becoming energy-savvy," Levenson said. Levenson, who chairs his firm's Israel Practices Group, has visited Israel about 65 times since 1982.

The self-described "passionate Zionist" is a member of the New Jersey-Israel Commission, which encourages trade relations between the two governments.