

HARTFORD'S OPERATION PROMISE RAISES \$1.45 MILLION TO "LIGHT THE FSU FLAME" AND SAVE ETHIOPIAN JEWS

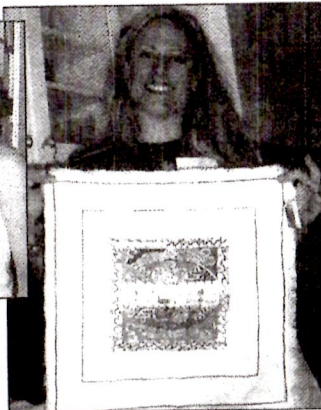
Operation Promise is the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford's special supplemental campaign to save the world's poorest Jews in Ethiopia, and re-ignite the spark of Judaism in the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Two recent events helped push the total dollars raised for this initiative to more than \$1.45 million, surpassing the goal and putting Hartford's dramatic results in the national spotlight.



Above: Deeds for Needs, Inc. co-chairs Stephanie Gitlin, Melissa Weinstock, and Robin Fierston at Operation Promise toy drive event.

At Right: Leslie Neiditz hopes to spread the beauty of Ethiopian Israeli crafts and benefit Operation Promise.

Photos by Harriet J. Dobin



"A flame was snuffed out and it is slowly getting lit again."

Last month, Amy Sills of West Hartford visited St. Petersburg - a new city in a foreign country - while on vacation with her son Jacob. She will never take her family's Jewishness for granted now that she's experienced a taste of emerging Jewish life in the Former Soviet Union. "Jewish heritage is at stake there, people don't admit they are Jews and they don't know very much about their religion." A last minute itinerary change gave Amy and Jacob the opportunity to attend opening day of a Federation-funded Jewish summer camp in St. Petersburg. Mrs. Sills noted that "Judaism permeates everywhere. The grandchildren and teenagers are teaching Jewish culture and customs to their parents and grandparents. This really resonated with me, I felt like I had a home there."

Mrs. Sills, vice-chairman of the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford's Operation Promise Campaign, shared her experiences with donors at a June 27 reception she hosted with husband Stephen. An additional \$75,000 was raised that night for Operation Promise. A new video featuring George Weiss, Bob Naboichuck and Jaime Seltzer shot on location during the May 2006 UJC Mission to Addis Ababa and Israel was also screened and guests heard eyewitness reports.



"I'm proud to be Jewish. I'm proud to be part of Federation and part of a community that helps."

Stephanie Gitlin attended the Women's Philanthropy VOICES event with Camryn Manheim last May and couldn't shake the image of hungry sad Ethiopian Jewish toddlers from her memory. "They don't look like us, or speak the same language, but they're Jewish and need our help". And she knew she had to act. A few phone calls to the Federation office and her Deeds for Needs, Inc. partners Robin Fierston and Melissa Weinstock set the wheels in motion for a special Operation Promise toy drive.

On Thursday June 29, more than 35 women attended an Operation Promise Coffee at the home of Melissa Weinstock, and brought dozens of toys, games, puzzles and coloring books which will be presented to an Israeli absorption center later this summer by Federation Campaign Chairman David Federman and Director of Campaign Operations Kim Margolis. At the event they heard an eyewitness account on the struggles of Ethiopian Israelis from Mission participant Jaime Seltzer.

Leslie Neiditz had just returned from a family trip to Israel. She spoke of meeting Ethiopian community leaders who emigrated decades ago and are now dedicated to helping the newcomers avoid "creating a black underclass in Israel". "Once they arrive in Israel, how can they give up who they are, retain their own culture and learn to live in a new society? There are a whole new set of issues beyond mere survival", she said. She visited an Ethiopian crafts workshop and hopes to import and sell Ethiopian wall hangings, bracelets, mezuzot and ritual objects to benefit Operation Promise-funded programs in Israel.

Above: Hartford's Operation Promise team includes, l-r, Mindy Shuch, Steven Neiditz, Bob Naboichuck, Amy and Stephen Sills, Jaime Seltzer and David Federman, displaying hand-woven Ethiopian Jewish ritual "tallit" (prayer shawl).

At Right: Operation Promise vice-

