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Masha Leon | Thu. Dec 28, 2006

## AMERICA-ISRAEL FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE TOASTS VISIONARIES

“We are democracies in action,” said the America-Israel Friendship League president and chairman of the board, **Kenneth Bialkin**, at the league’s November 27 “Partners for Democracy” award dinner, held at The Pierre. “We bring journalists, clergymen [politicians] to Israel... and the result is understanding, cooperation and a greater appreciation of one another.” The evening began with a blessing by Rabbi **Joseph Potasnik**, executive vice president of the New York Board of Rabbis, followed by video greetings from Israel’s prime minister, Ehud Olmert. Israel’s New York-based consul general, **Arye Mekel**, offered an unabashed salute to the United States for its friendship and support of Israel, and then came the award medals presentations by AIFL vice president **Charlotte Frank**, AIFL chairman of the board **Benjamin Gaon** and AIFL board member **Harvey Krueger**.

Honored was **Elliott Broidy**, chairman of Markstone Capital Group, who also manages to have time to act as commissioner of the Los Angeles City Fire and Police Pension Fund and to serve as a member of the United States Homeland Security Advisory Council and the Department of Homeland Security’s Future of Terrorisms Task Force. He was appointed by the president to serve on the board of trustees of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Broidy, a trustee of USC Hillel Foundation, also serves on the national board of directors of the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces.

Also honored was **Itzhak Forer**, chairman of Ernst & Young Israel. He transformed Ernst & Young into Israel’s largest accounting, tax and business consulting, firm with 1,300 employees. Ernst & Young Israel audited more than half of the IPOs of Israeli companies in the United States. The program notes informed, “Second only to Canada, Israel lists the highest number of non-U.S. stocks on Wall Street (100+ companies).” Presenter Krueger described honoree **Yitzhak Tshuva** as an [Israeli] version of “a true Horatio Alger story.” Described as a “mega-mover” and a “visionary,” Tshuva came to Israel in 1949 as an infant, after his family immigrated. “He began work at 12 and understood the true meaning of the Torah [injunction] ‘to love your neighbor as yourself.’” **Malcolm Hoenlein**, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, lauded Tshuva for establishing housing for Russian Jewish immigrants and for providing air conditioners for bunkers during the recent war in Lebanon.

In his acceptance speech, Tshuva alluded to his “vision” — the establishment of a “Peace Valley” — a canal that will connect the Red Sea and the Dead Seas, “a vision credited to Shimon Peres.” The canal will produce electricity and the desalinization of sea water, enabling millions to settle in the Negev. This will include the creation of lakes and boardwalks, and hotels for Israelis and for tourists. According to the dinner journal notes:

“The ‘Peace Valley’ vision in the Negev has [such] prominent partners as former U.S. President Bill Clinton, Saudi prince Alwaleed bin Talal Abdulaziz Al Saud and King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud. Like Shimon Peres, Tshuva believes that [this project] will produce hundreds of thousands of jobs, electrical energy and drinking water for the benefits of the Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians and Israelis.”

Tshuva’s Delek Group is one of the leading companies in the Israeli economy: in the natural gas industry, the desalinization of the Mediterranean Sea water, real estate, automobiles, biochemistry, communications, fuel stations and leisure shops. Its subsidiary, Delek USA, operates in the United States as the parent company of hundreds of fuel stations and refineries in Texas. This past May, the company went public. It now trades on the New York Stock Exchange. Tshuva is also active in the El-Ad Group, Ltd., a real estate and hotel enterprise named after his son. In October 2004, the group purchased New York’s Plaza Hotel, which it considers its “crown jewel.” Hopefully the refurbished Plaza’s calendar will include an AIFL dinner.

Award recipient **Jack Kemp**, former U.S. secretary of housing and urban development, was unable to attend but sent greetings. The evening concluded with a keynote address by Daniel Ayalon, who presented an overview of his four-and-a-half years of service as Israel’s ambassador to the United States.