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## Nothing fosters solidarity like a mission to Israel

As Jews around the world mark Israel's 60th anniversary next month, the S.F.-based Jewish Community Federation will celebrate in grand style.

The federation's long-planned Israel@60 mission sets sail next week with more than 80 community leaders participating, among them San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom and incoming federation CEO Daniel Sokatch.

While federations and other Jewish organizations launch Israel missions all the time, it's unlikely a trip on this scale has ever been attempted. Six separate tracks — three in business, as well as art and culture, history and archaeology — will cover the country in depth.

Mission participants will meet with leaders and tour facilities of Israel's high-tech, biotech, green tech and real estate industries. They will receive briefings from senior

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military and political figures such as President Shimon Peres and Bank of Israel head Stanley Fischer.

And they will be in Israel to mark the nation's three most important secular holidays: Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day.

Imagine dancing in the streets of Tel Aviv as Israel celebrates 60 triumphant years of life.

J. will be there, too. Staff writer Dan Pine will accompany the mission and report from Israel in the weeks ahead.

Mission co-chairs Robert Blum and Bobby Lent, along with trip organizers at the federation and the Israel Center, are to be commended for their meticulous planning and ambitious goals.

Nothing else fosters Jewish solidarity with Israel like a visit to the country. Missions like this one play a crucial role in cementing permanent bonds. And they have serious practical benefits.

Other groups, of course, realize the benefits as well. This week's j. reports on two recently completed Israel missions: one organized by the local Jewish Community Relations Council, the other by the America-Israel Friendship League's chapter here.

The JCRC "study tour" included public officials and civic leaders from disparate groups such as the S.F. Chamber of Commerce and the Latino Issues Forum. The AIFL trip gave Bay Area professionals

who work with teens a close-up look at violence prevention and coexistence efforts in the Jewish state.

As important as it is for Jews to visit, it is equally valuable for the broader community to see Israel up close, recognize its strengths, and its vulnerabilities and stand by the nation in the face of threat.

No doubt Israel@60 participants will return with indelible memories and a renewed passion for Israel. Business leaders may return with expanded commercial ties to the country, something good for Israel and the Bay Area.

We wish all those going on the Israel@60 mission a most valuable trip and safe journey.

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