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'Dream Team' Raises Bar in Israel for Giving Back to the Community

Superstar Pro Soccer Team Innovates with Sport and Education Program for Disadvantaged Kids

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New York. The President of United Jewish Communities Overseas Supplemental Giving/IEF (Israel Education Fund), Terry M. Rubenstein, has announced a joint effort with owners of Hapoel Keter Tel Aviv - one of Israel's premier soccer clubs - to broaden the outreach of the innovative Hapoel Keter Tel Aviv Youth Club Soccer program.

"In this unprecedented climate of violence and tension, it is vitally important to take all steps to ensure that Israel's vulnerable children don't fall through the cracks; that they continue to have a range of opportunities that will provide a positive, normative quality to their daily lives," states Rubenstein. "We are excited about the opportunity to partner with this exceptional program and the outstanding philanthropists behind it."

One year after the group of prominent Israeli businessmen - Moshe Theumim, Sami Sagol and Moti Orenstein - purchased and turned around what has become Israel's 'dream team,' they focused on leveraging the Club's professional achievements and love of soccer for the benefit of the community. According to Theumim, "We all believe that we have a social responsibility to give back to our community. And we can't think of a more important way to do that than by reaching out to make a difference in the lives of Israel's youth from the vulnerable and disadvantaged areas of Israeli society."

Founded in 1998, the Club's innovative sport and education program focuses on advancing children within the school system by integrating sports activities into their daily routine. Sports are the means to the end: the development of young, healthy citizens who are motivated students and have the tools to become contributing members of society. Today, the soccer program serves more than 7,500 children from the Jewish, Arab and Druze sectors, and includes schools throughout Israel. Innovative outreach, such as the Children of the Dream program for Ethiopian kids; the Bridge to Peace for Arab and Bedouin children; the Peace Line program for children living in 54 vulnerable communities along Israel's northern border; and programs at boarding schools for at-risk children, is a hallmark of the Hapoel Keter Tel Aviv Youth Soccer Program.

Matan Vilnai, Israel Minister of Science, Culture and Sport, has recognized this program as one of the most meaningful social projects in Israel today. According to Vilnai, "In a few short years, Hapoel Keter Tel Aviv has transformed the lives of thousands of Israeli children. The linking of sports and education is keeping kids in school and enabling them to become productive citizens."

In 2001, Hapoel Keter Tel Aviv made history in the Israeli soccer world by becoming the first Israeli team to advance to the eighth final in the UEFA (Union of European Football Association) cup. They play Italy in the finals in February. "We are proud of the success of the Club both on and off the field. And of the fact that over the past year, we have continued to open more schools throughout the country," says Theumim.

This effort will bring together major donors in North America - foundations, families and individuals - with their counterparts in Israel. Rubenstein and

Yitzhak Shavit, Vice President of UJC Overseas Supplemental Giving/IEF, have been working closely with Israeli private philanthropists to create more opportunities of this nature. "Today, our major donors have counterparts in Israel who want to make a difference for their community, for their country," states Shavit. "Focusing our effort in this manner should achieve greater results for the identified needs within a more compact time frame. At the same time, we are creating important new bridges among our communities."

For more information, contact UJC Overseas Supplemental Giving/IEF.

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