

Event Information

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In times of war, parking garage to become 1,750-bed emergency hospital in Haifa's Rambam Health Care

Written by Joanne Hill , The Jewish Tribune

Monday, 17 May 2010 TORONTO – The Canadian Friends of Rambam Health Care Campus (CFRAM) recently hosted an improv theatre with a twist: the stage was the underground parking garage at Greenwin Square, and the actors portrayed doctors and patients at a real-life underground parking garage/trauma hospital currently being built in Haifa. The audience was made up of about 200 surprised guests who, while enjoying food and drinks at the CFRAM fundraiser, suddenly heard an announcement, first in Hebrew and then in English, informing them that the emergency hospital was now ready and guides would help them calmly and safely go downstairs. During times of peace the three-storey underground building at Rambam Health Care Campus (RHCC) will serve as a much-needed parking garage with space for 1,500 cars, but hidden behind walls and tucked into various rooms will be equipment and supplies that will allow it to be transformed quickly into a 1,750-bed emergency hospital able to withstand conventional and non-conventional warfare. Ambulances will bring patients in through tunnels equipped with decontamination stations. If needed, the entire hospital may be sealed off from the rest of the world for 72 hours. The structure is scheduled to be completed by 2012 and will be one of the largest underground hospitals in the world. The site has been dug and construction is under way. Since it is below sea level, pumps are being used to continuously drain water. A new complex above-ground – slated for completion by 2014 – will house a children's hospital, cancer and cardiovascular hospitals and a biomedical research tower. RHCC is a leading trauma care centre that serves more than two million residents in northern Israel. During the 2006 war with Lebanon, about 45 missiles landed dangerously close to the hospital; as a result, doctors and staff realized major changes needed to be made. Six months ago they opened a new emergency department that can withstand missile and chemical attacks. Dr. Rafael Beyar, CEO and general director, RHCC, told the Jewish Tribune, "Rambam has always been a hospital that is associated with the strength of Israel in times of war as well as innovations in times of peace. In the 2006 second Lebanon war, we saw that hospitals are not spared from missiles. For a full month we were actually attacked by missiles from Lebanon, which were threatening the lives of patients...so we must be sure that we have the ability to treat them safely under all conditions.... Some people think that they (hospitals) are targeted because they are highly densely populated." Dr. Michael Halberthal is director of pediatric cardiac intensive care at RHCC; he also works in hospital administration, and during emergencies he is the chief of triage. He was on the frontlines at the hospital during the 33-day war in 2006. "One-third of our casualties were civilians, not soldiers, even though it was war," he said. "We were sitting in our hospital in the northern part of Israel and rockets were falling around us as we worked. We heard explosions, the walls were crumbling. Everybody says we were lucky the rockets didn't hit the hospital because nothing was fortified. I was sitting there in front and it was just a matter of luck." For more information or to donate, phone (416) 481-5552 or email info@cframbam.com. Professor Karl Skorecki's visit to Toronto "Whether he was speaking with high school students, CFRAM Board Members, potential donors, or members of the medical community, Prof. Skorecki shared his passion for science, Torah and the work that is being carried out at Rambam Health Care Campus."

-Suzanne Kaye, CFRAM National Executive Director

Molecular geneticist and nephrologist Prof. Karl Skorecki, Director of Medical and Research Development at Rambam, was hosted in mid autumn by the Canadian Friends of Rambam. The Toronto native son, who immigrated to Israel with his wife and children in 1995 -- in his case, making aliyah directly to Rambam Health Care Campus from the Division of Nephrology in the Departments of Medicine, Pediatrics and Clinical Biochemistry at the University of Toronto – was made most welcome in the city of his birth.

Over 250 people attended his lecture on "The Genetics of Being Jewish," an event co-sponsored by CFRAM and Temple Beth David Continuing Education Committee and Brotherhood, and organized by Prof. Bernard P. Schimmer of the Banting and Best Department of Medical Research at the University of Toronto. In his opening remarks, Prof. Schimmer spoke warmly of his long association with Prof. Skorecki. Among those in the audience were CFRAM Board Members Cary Green, Ron Kalifer, Jules Kronis and Les Wynn, and event volunteers Gayle Hart and Jeff Sattin.

Sam and Pam Handelsman hosted an evening at which Prof. Skorecki told of the enormous strides being made at Rambam in personalized medicine, stem-cell research, and other healthcare matters. Dr. Handelsman told those assembled that his relationship with the guest of honor had begun in their student days at the University of Toronto, and spoke of his pride in his friend's achievements. In attendance were CFRAM President David Green with his mother, Friend of Rambam Goldie Feldman; Board Member Bayla Chaikof with her husband, Leo; Board Member Diane Wilson with her husband, Dr. Jonathan Wilson (who serves on CFRAM's Medical Advisory Board); and many well known members of the Toronto Jewish Community, among them Gary and Linda Goldberg, Ken and Gloria Hershenfield, Jeff and Linda Mandlsohn, Dr. Uri Sagman, and Arnie and Sharyn Recht.

Board Member Jules Berman hosted a lunch at his firm Minden Gross LLB for CFRAM members and others from the financial and business community. Guests included Donald Carr, who several years ago assisted in obtaining Canadian charitable status for CFRAM; Board Members Rachel Blumenfeld of Miller Thompson LLB, Edwin Goldstein, and Ron Kalifer; and Friend of Rambam George Herczeg.

Board Member Marilyn Gotfrid and her husband David hosted an intimate breakfast at their home attended by Dr. Daphne Gladman (Chair of CFRAM's Medical Advisory Board), Carole and Lionel Schipper, Liz Wolfe, and others. Prof.

Skorecki was asked why he had chosen to work at Rambam. He replied that Rambam is like a very close-knit family, and it is this workplace culture that has fostered the institution's world-class accomplishments in medicine and science.

During his visit to Toronto, Prof. Skorecki also shared a challenging exchange of ideas about Torah and science with high school students at Yeshivat Or Chaim and the Ulpanat Orot Girls's School.

"Whenever we meet with Professor Skorecki, we are reminded of CFRAM's significant role in assisting this important Israeli hospital, Rambam, to renew and expand itself so that it can offer first-rate medical care in peace and war. Professor Skorecki exemplifies the hope and brilliance that are linked in the Israeli character. For this, we are very grateful. We always look forward to a visit from him."David Green, President CFRAM.