

iVolunteer Hosts Kickoff Event On the Upper East Side

By S. Tauby

“Since the Jews were shown unconditional hatred during the Holocaust, we must show Holocaust survivors unconditional love in the last years of their lives,” said the coordinator of the iVolunteer kickoff event, at which over 60 people showed up to demonstrate their support.

iVolunteer is a dynamic team of volunteers who visit Holocaust survivors in their homes in Manhattan, providing them with companionship and assistance. Since the program’s start in September, iVolunteer has trained and matched over 20 volunteers.

“I can’t wait to get started with iVolunteer and visit with a Holocaust survivor. I think this program is providing a valuable service to our community. The survivors were there for us and gave us a future; the least we can do for them is be there for them now,” said a new volunteer.

The program’s name illustrates the goal of this unique visiting program, which brings caring neighborhood volunteers into the apartments of frail Holocaust survivors. During their weekly visits, volunteers may read to survivors, escort them to doctors’ appointments, or assist with shopping and light household tasks. The visits enrich the lives of both survivors and volunteers, and guarantee that the experience of the Holocaust will not be forgotten.

iVolunteer creates a sense of community by providing both survivors and volunteers with social events and special pro-



Rabbi Tzvi Tauby, director of iVolunteer, with Yossel, a survivor who is part of the program.

grams, including monthly Friday-night meals for the volunteers and luncheons for the survivors.

iVolunteer volunteers come from all walks of life. Many of them are professionals who want to make a difference in the lives of their neighbors. Others are local high-school and college students who are excited by the chance to reach across the gen-

erations and establish a unique friendship with a lonely senior. All iVolunteer volunteers are screened and trained prior to beginning their home visits. In particular, volunteers are trained to identify survivors’ other social service needs so that iVolunteer can bring in an outreach caseworker to help the senior gain access to additional benefits and services when necessary.

Volunteers communicate regularly with iVolunteer directors Tzvi and Elisheva Tauby, who work tirelessly to ensure that every senior and every volunteer is satisfied with the relationship. Mrs. Tauby makes an initial visit to each senior’s home in order to assess his or her needs and concerns.

“I feel so privileged to be able to get to know such unbelievable people and hope to assist them in any way I can,” Mrs. Tauby explains. “When I speak with volunteers, they often say that they got a lot more than they gave.”

iVolunteer’s enthusiastic volunteers look forward to their visits almost as much as the seniors do. Sarah, a volunteer, describes her feelings: “It is so inspiring to spend time with Holocaust survivors. They have a wealth of wisdom and knowledge to share and have such a unique view of life’s challenges. I also met a lot of wonderful people my age who live in my neighborhood through volunteering with iVolunteer.”

If you know of a Holocaust survivor who would like to participate in the program, or would like to volunteer, or if you are interested in learning about dedication opportunities or partnering with us in our new initiative, please contact Tzvi or Elisheva Tauby at (646) 461-7748.

Shomrim’s “Project Lifesaver” Helps Wandering Patients

By: Paul Deckelman

People are living longer these days, and overall, that’s a good thing. However, one downside to this added longevity is the increasing number of people developing such conditions as Alzheimer’s Disease and the closely related senile dementia, or having strokes that may leave them functioning mentally at less than full capacity. These conditions — currently not curable or even preventable, despite considerable ongoing medical research — can return a formerly healthy, functioning adult to a near-child-like state where he or she must be watched over by a spouse, family member or other caregiver, lest they wander away from home in a vain effort to find... something.

The conditions cruelly destroy short-term memory, while leaving the person capable of remembering things that happened to him or her literally decades ago. A person afflicted with conditions such as these may remember a place where he lived, worked, played, went to school, worshiped or just spent time 30, 40 or 50 years or more ago — and yet have no idea where he lives now. If no one is watching, the person might leave the house or health-related facility in which she lives and make a bee-line for that long-ago remembered place. The elderly person may wander the streets for literally hours, often oblivious to weather, traffic or other dangerous conditions, trying to recapture that elusive memory of a home, school, business or other place that may not even exist any more — while having no idea how to get back to her current home when she grows weary and wants to rest.

Like a person lost deep in the woods, the person may, in effect, be walking around in circles, trying to find a way out. Meanwhile, when the person’s unscheduled exit is noticed, the family or other caregivers become frantic, having no idea where to start looking for the wanderer.

The Boro Park Shomrim Patrol — the renowned civilian volunteer patrol that works closely with the Police Department to protect the safety of community residents — has developed something of a specialty in searching for lost people, from small children who innocently wander away from their parents’ care, to such aged Alzheimer’s patients who also wander off from their caregivers. Sometimes, the wanderers are neither small children nor elderly people, but teenagers, young or middle-aged adults afflicted with other conditions, such as Down syndrome or severe autism, which likewise leave them unable to figure out how to get back home, or even ask for help, should they wander off.

As competent and experienced as the Shomrim are in

finding such disoriented people — and they’ve done literally dozens of such successful searches over the past 10 years or so — they will be the first to tell you that it is no easy task. A small army of volunteers must be deployed over a wide area for many hours before the wanderer turns up. Of course, the person is in danger every minute that he remains at large until the rescuers appear.

But new state-of-the-art technology could help speed the recovery of such persons, if it is proactively deployed *before* the person wanders off.

The Shomrim have embarked on “Project Lifesaver” — an effort to convince families to equip their vulnerable elderly or younger Down syndrome or autistic patients — with a tracking device, worn like a standard watch, that sends out a radio signal that the patrol can home in on. The results have been stunning.

In one recent case, a man in his 70s, afflicted with Alzheimer’s, wandered away from home around 8:00 a.m. one morning, while his wife had run down to a nearby grocery to buy him breakfast. She was only gone about 10 or 15 minutes — but that was all the time it took for him to put on his slippers and overcoat and leave the house. When she came back and realized that he was not there, she left the house and walked around the block, but could not find him. She called Shomrim, who mounted a full-scale search, mobilizing 45 volunteers, in cars and on foot. Even so, he was not found until 3 a.m. the following day, wandering the streets in Brighton Beach, many miles from his Boro Park home.

Fast forward one month. The same man wandered away from home again, this time in freezing cold weather. However, in the interim, his family had equipped him with the “Project Lifesaver” tracking device band. This time, within half an hour of being called, Shomrim volunteers were able to home in on him and find him — again, heading for the Coney Island/Brighton Beach area — and bring him safely home.

That is just one of a number of successful search and rescue incidents involving people whose families have had the foresight to equip them with a “Project Lifesaver” tracking band, an investment that proved very worthwhile when the people did indeed wander off.

The Shomrim urge every family that has a patient with Alzheimer’s, or any other of the medical conditions that could leave him lost and disoriented, to get in touch with the patrol now, before potential tragedy strikes, to find out about “Project Lifesaver,” thus safeguarding the patient, as well as their own peace of mind. Please contact Shomrim at 718-535-9027.

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