

STATE NEWS

Students complete seminar in Israel

Program focuses on creating leaders

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Eighteen students from New Jersey have completed a three-week seminar in Israel as part of an educational outreach program for young Jewish adults.

The Diller Teen Fellows Program is a 15-month international leadership program for Jewish teens from North America and Israel that seeks to foster Jewish identity and develop future Jewish leaders who are committed to Israel, Judaism and community service.

"This trip has been life changing and one I will never forget," Ari Bernstein of Montclair wrote on the trip's daily blog. "I have always been proud to be an American,

and I always will be, but Israel is my home away from home. ... Israel is in my heart now as well."

The students from Essex, Sussex, Morris and Union counties traveled all over Israel, visiting famous sites including the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, Caesarea and Kinneret. They stayed with families in Israel.

In addition to the Israeli seminar, program highlights included the Diller Teen Leadership Congress and a 10-day peer exchange in North America, during which the North American communities hosted their Israeli peers. Other activities throughout the year included workshops, Shabbaton weekend retreats and group and individual community service projects.

Currently, there are 15 communities in North America paired

with Israeli sister communities. The Metro-West New Jersey fellows were paired with fellows from Rishon L'Tzion, Israel's fourth-largest city.

During their 18-day stay in Israel, the MetroWest Dillers came to regard the Israeli Dillers as a second family.

Meital Rosenberg of Parsippany chose to remain in Israel for an additional two weeks after the program ended and expressed a desire to visit the family she stayed with in Israel.

"The trip was unbelievable. It is impossible to say which part was my favorite, but it was a journey for all of us," Rosenberg said. "We became one cohesive family and saw Israel the way that usually only people who live there get to see it."

Diller fellows said the trip left them with a better understanding of tolerance and community.

"I am so thankful for Diller. It has truly changed my life in ways never imaginable," Molly Dickman of North Caldwell said on Day 11 of the Israeli trip. "It has taught me to stand up for my opinions and beliefs and that there is no one right way to practice Judaism."

"Although we don't all practice the same form of Judaism we are all working towards the same goal, of becoming a unified Jewish community," said Carmelle Bargad of West Orange.

The cost for the program, including the three-week seminar in Israel, was \$3,500 for participants. Two-thirds of the costs were subsidized by outside groups, including the Diller Foundation. Teen fellows were eligible for grants up to \$1,000 from MetroWest UJC. The participants were chosen through an interview process.