

# 'We Were There'

## Survivors from Wielun, Poland dedicate former shul grounds in memoriam



*Then ... and Now*  
 (Left): The Podolsky family in Wielun, Poland, before the war.  
 (Right): Rabbi Yona Metzger, chief rabbi of Israel (seated, second from left) visits with Holocaust survivor Zenek Podolsky (seated, second from right) and members of the Wieloner Benevolent Association and their children and grandchildren in New York City.  
 (Below): Metzger (left) and Podolsky share a private moment.



Rabbi Yona Metzger, chief rabbi of Israel, was in New York to celebrate and honor the lives of Holocaust survivors from the Polish city of Wielun, a once-thriving Jewish community near Lodz, only 18 miles from the German border.

Metzger said that often when he speaks before a crowd, people approach him afterwards to tell him what an honor it is to meet him. But on a Sunday afternoon earlier this summer, standing before the Wieloner Benevolent Association, the chief rabbi said, "Today the honor is mine, to be able to stand here with the survivors of Wielun," according to Shirley Podolsky, the daughter-in-law of Zenek Podolsky, one of the survivors from Wielun (pronounced vee-elun).

Hosted by the elder Podolsky, the annual meeting of the Wieloner Association, held at the Empire Hotel in New York City, was a prelude to a unique trip. This past week, 10 Wielun survivors traveled to their

native city to participate in a government-sponsored ceremony to dedicate a plaque in memory of the Jews of Wielun who were killed during the Holocaust.

The Polish powers-that-be decided that the plaque would be placed in Wielun's Zwirki i Wigury Park, a relatively new park which is located on the site where the city's only synagogue proudly stood before it was burned to the ground in 1940.

Before the war, Wielun was a city of some 36,000 families, about a third of which were Jewish, according to Podolsky. The Wieloner Benevolent Association, which was founded by the city's Jewish survivors, originally had 300 members; with the passage of time and the death of its members, that number has dwindled to 40.



Photos: Courtesy the Podolsky

The two-day commemoration ceremony, on Monday and Tuesday, was organized by the office of the mayor of Wielun and other city officials and included Polish dignitaries such as the mayors of Lodz and Warsaw as well as Lecha Kaczynskiego, the

president of Poland. Unfortunately, Zenek Podolsky, a successful real estate developer, and his wife, Fanny, were unable to attend because of health concerns. But their names were inscribed on the official plaque as it was their

generosity that made the commemoration possible.

The official invitation to the event, issued by the Polish government, reads, "In commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Second World War, 1939-2009, honoring the president of the Republic of Poland and the survivors of Wielun."

The only Podolsky family survivors were Zenek and one of his brothers. Their parents and remaining siblings were transported from Wielun to Treblinka, where they perished (except for one brother, who was killed while in the Polish army before the war).

Podolsky said that today the Polish people are "happy that there is quiet in the country" and at the ceremony they "talked about peace in Poland and world peace."

But despite the relative quiet in Poland, Podolsky wanted a plaque in Wielun "so people will know that we were there, so they will never forget the families that were lost in Wielun." —Sharyn Perlman

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## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### HEAR OUR VOICES

Shema Kolainu—Hear Our Voices is a school and center that serves the special needs of children with autism. The organization recently hosted its 7th Annual Legislative Breakfast to educate officials about the need for autism care and research and thank them for their support.

Founded in 1998 by Joshua Weinstein, Shema Kolainu opened its doors to three school-aged children. Today there are over 50 children in its preschool and school-age programs; an additional 800 children receive home-based services.

A veritable who's who of New York government attended the breakfast including: U.S. Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, who



**John A. Catsimatidis, chairman and CEO, Red Apple Group, addresses the Shema Kolainu Legislative Breakfast.**

served as honorary chairs. The event's chairs were State Senators Kevin Parker and Diane Savino.

John A. Catsimatidis, chairman and CEO, Red Apple Group, delivered greetings. The morning was sponsored

by Gristedes, a member of the Red Apple Group.

Honorees at the Legislative Breakfast included: New York State Sen. Shirley Huntley, chair of NYS Mental Disabilities; NYC Council Finance Chair David Weprin; Milton Weinstock, Shema Kolainu board member; Marty Markowitz, Brooklyn borough president; Ed Skyler, NYC deputy mayor; Fred Kreizman, NYC assistant commissioner of community affairs; Elana Broitman, senior advisor to Sen. Gillibrand; and Robert Gottheim, district director for Cong. Jerrold Nadler.

For more information, call 718.686.9600 or visit [www.shemakolainu.org](http://www.shemakolainu.org).

### SUKKOT IN JERUSALEM

The festival days of Sukkot fall on weekends, leaving lots of time for touring Jerusalem. Why not base your trip at the newly renovated Inbal Hotel, located



**The Inbal Hotel sukkah features outdoor elegance.**

in the heart of Jerusalem, in walking distance of the Kotel, the Great Synagogue and all major cultural and historical sites.

The hotel features an elegant *sukkah* for all meals. In addition, the Inbal offers families private dining by building individual *sukkahs* on the balconies of its suites.

Included for guests is the new fitness center, complete with a fully equipped gym, wet and dry saunas, and four treatment rooms.

The Inbal is offering a 10 percent discount for guests who book all four festival meals in advance.

To accommodate those who will be touring or spending part of the holiday outside Jerusalem, the Inbal is accepting reservations for a minimum three-night stay.

And as a member of the El Al Matmid club, Inbal guests will receive Matmid points.

For reservations, call 011 972 675 6669 or email [rsv@inbalhotel.com](mailto:rsv@inbalhotel.com).