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MDA honors 'Protective Edge' medics at Beverly Hills gala

Jay Leno hosts and Paul Anka woos American Friends of Magen David Adom event, which raises \$6m.

BY [KELLY HARTOG](#) October 26, 2014, 1:35 pm



Jay Leno with Neomi Zvi, Israel's first full-time female paramedic, at the Friends of Magen David Adom Beverly Hills gala. (Orly Halevy)

BEVERLY HILLS — Hosted by Jay Leno with musical entertainment Paul Anka, Thursday night's American Friends of Magen David Adom's Red Stars Ball was a star-studded affair.

Attendees opened their hearts and their wallets at the Beverly Hilton hotel benefit, raising \$6 million — the most money ever raised at a single event on behalf of MDA — for the blood bank, as well as for mobile intensive care units, motorcycles and fully equipped ambulances.

At one point, so many of the 900-odd tuxedo and ball gown-clad attendees stood up to pledge \$100,000 for an ambulance, Leno quipped, “We want to make sure every Jew in Israel has their own ambulance,” and, “Does anyone has land in Israel where we can park all these ambulances?”

The evening was co-hosted by AMFDA Western Region Board Chair Paul Guerin and opened by Christian Pastor Robert Stearns who sang “Hatkvah” and spoke of his enormous love for Israel.

The gala’s main fundraising focus was on building a new underground blood bank in Israel. The idea took root following this summer’s Operation Protective Edge, when Tel Aviv — where MDA’s blood bank is located — was striking distance from Hamas rockets launched from Gaza.



Paul Anka wows the crowd at the star-studded American Friends of Magen David Adom gala. (Orly Halevy)

While there was a great deal of levity throughout the evening, there was also a very serious note to the proceedings, particularly in light of the latest terror attack in Jerusalem, just 24 hours before the gala.

Israel Consul General David Siegel gave details of the attack that wounded eight and killed three-month-old Chaya Zissel Braun. He said he had learned that the baby was the daughter of a man originally from Los Angeles.

“This is another tragedy in Israel with a Los Angeles connection,” Siegel said.

Siegel added that, as usual, Magen David Adom was first on the scene, “as they are in every tragedy, every terror attack, every accident, throughout Israel.”

He spoke of the importance not only of MDA’s responses in Israel but around the globe, from being on hand at the recent avalanche in Nepal, to helping in the earthquake in Haiti and the Tsunami in Japan.

“What MDA does is critical for humanity and what you [the friends of MDA] do is critical for the future and you have our deepest thanks from the State and the people of Israel,” said Siegel.

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Congressman Brad Sherman spoke about the global threat of terror, and the challenges Israel faces.

“ Hamas has only one purpose and that is to kill as many Israelis as possible,” he said.

Sherman said this is why he joined with others in Congress to pass the Emergency Iron Dome Replenishment Act, which will provide \$225m. to Israel along with an additional \$3.1m. in general security assistance.

Sherman said the funds were necessary “at a time where Israel faces unprecedented threats from Iran, Syria, Hizbollah, Hamas and ISIS.”

Sherman too thanked Magen David Adom, noting that while he and his colleagues were able to sit safely in Washington, “those who are on the front lines are the real heroes: the paramedics who deal with those injured by the rockets not stopped by Iron Dome. We have a chance here tonight to honor an outstanding organization.”



At the Friends of Magen David Adom gala, MDA medic Oren Wachs (left) hugs the man he saved — Jehum Berman, and MDA medic Einav Auslan embraces Avinoam Levy, father of Yarin who was saved by Auslan and Neomi Zvi. (Orly Halevy)

Sherman presented MDA with an award to be hung in the underground blood center when it is established, along with an American flag that had flown over the Capitol.

The night also honored actress Gina Edwards with the Next Generation Award, Holocaust survivor and philanthropist David Wiener with the Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by Beverly Hilton owner Beny Alagem, and dentist **Dr. Bill Dorfman** with the Humanitarian of the Year Award.

The highlight of the evening, however, was the honoring of the MDA first responders from Operation Protective Edge alongside two of the people they saved.

A short, but emotionally powerful film was screened with interviews with 16-year-old Yarin Levy, who was almost killed when a rocket exploded near him as he ran to a shelter in Ashkelon, and Jehan Berman, who was at his son's third birthday party in Kibbutz Nir Oz when a mortar hit the kindergarten.

'I always feel like family when I come to these things'

The film also included interviews with the medics who saved them. Einav Auslin and Neomi Zvi, Israel's first full-time MDA female paramedic, rushed to Levy's aid, and Oren Wacht, one of MDA's 13,000 volunteer medics was on hand for Berman.

When Levy and Berman were brought on stage with their families to thunderous applause, to their surprise they were met by the three MDA medics who had also been flown in for the event.

Embracing the powerful moment, Leno said, "I grew up in an Italian family, with a lot of love, and that's also what I love about the Jewish people. I always feel like family when I come to these things."

Leno then pledged \$10,000 to Magen David Adom, before returning to his usual witty banter and declaring, "We need more non-Jews to donate!"

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/mda-honors-protective-edge-medics-at-beverly-hills-gala/>