



# HANDS OF PEACE



March 2008  
1000 Elm Street, Glenview IL 60025

[www.hands-of-peace.org](http://www.hands-of-peace.org)  
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## From our Executive Director...

Happy Spring to All!

And if spring is here, then summer can't be far behind, which means that preparations for the Hands of Peace 2008 Summer Program are well underway! Staff and volunteers both in the U.S and in Israel/Palestine are very busy recruiting the 2008 Hands, signing up host families, planning the details of the summer program, raising the money needed to fund the program, and working on the many other parts of this organization that are vital to its success. We can always use more helping Hands—as always, please contact me, or anyone at HOP, if you would like to help in any way.

As some of you might know, I recently returned from a trip to Israel and Palestine. I met up with Program Director Ashley Bates, who had been visiting friends from her Peace Corps days in Jordan, and together we spent a week meeting with staff members, connecting with representatives from other organizations doing similar work, helping to interview 2008 Summer Program applicants, and spending time with Hands, XLs and HOP supporters from past years too. Our trip culminated in a Hands of Peace "Town Hall" meeting held in Jerusalem on Friday, February 29<sup>th</sup>.

The Town Hall meeting brought together new and old staff members, Hands from many different years, and some very eloquent and moving speakers from the Parents Circle/Bereaved Families Forum (PC/BFF). The PC/BFF is a group of Israeli and Palestinian people who have all lost loved ones in the conflict but who are dedicated to working toward peaceful coexistence. Their goal is that, one day, there will be no more bereaved families from either side of the conflict because the violence will have ended. Given that these remarkable people have been dealt the cruelest blow by the conflict and yet continue to strive toward an end to violence, their message was inspiring and important for all of us to hear.

Also inspiring and important was the opportunity to engage in an open "Town Hall" discussion with those attending the gathering. The discussion topics ranged from the state of HOP as an organization in general to the specifics of the follow-up program, and we spent a lot of time talking about what kinds of changes HOP might need to make as the organization continues to evolve and respond to the needs of the young adults who participate. All in all, it was very clear that, although the work of HOP is difficult, emotional and challenging for Hands, staff and volunteers alike, Hands of Peace has positively and profoundly impacted the lives of people all over the world, and has influenced many to incorporate peace-building into their lives. As we all hear the news of more violence in the region, may we all remember the importance of this work, and may we all look forward to touching the lives of a whole new group of young people—the 2008 Hands, who will be landing at O'Hare before we know it!

Shalom, Salaam, Peace,  
Julie Kanak  
Executive Director

## Stand Up For Peace

by Maggie Cain

*HOP Newsletter Editor*

A Jewish-American and a Palestinian-American walk into a bar.... or, rather, onto the stage of Oakton Community College's Footlik Theatre. February 9, Scott Blakeman and Dean Obeidallah treated an audience of Hands of Peace supporters to their show: Stand Up for Peace: The Two Comedian Solution for Middle East Peace.

Amidst political swipes goodhearted complaining about their families that lots of comedians do, they talked about what it's like to be Jewish-American and Palestinian-American today. Jokes were grounded in their knowledge of current events and politics, and in their lives with well-meaning, overbearing friends and families. After introductions and a little two-comedian banter, Scott



*Dean Obeidallah and Scott Blakeman with HOP participants*

left the stage and Dean began to talk about his Palestinian dad and Sicilian mother. "My town in New Jersey had two ethnic groups: Italians and my father." He related his collection of dumb things people say when they find out he's Arab, "Oh, you're an Arab! I love Hummus!" and the serious yet humorous plight of an Arab trying to get through airport security, post 9/11.

Scott returned to talk about a dilemma or two of his life as a Jewish-American – what kind of glass or light bulb should be smashed at a Jewish wedding? Certainly not a 3-way!

Audience members particularly enjoyed the question and answer period the comedians hosted, after their individual acts. Scott and Dean offered recent polling data from the West Bank and Gaza to open the discussion, and entertained even sticky questions with candor and respect. Relating their jokes to current events made their comedy especially relevant. The two actors working together on stage reinforced the notion of unity among different groups.

After the show, audience members got the chance to meet the comedians and mingle with each other over a beautiful cake from Three Tarts Cafe.

## Please welcome our new staff

Please welcome our new Program Director, **Ashley Bates**. She will be in charge of this year's HOP Summer Program and feels honored by the opportunity to build upon the tireless work of her predecessors.

Ashley majored in Political Science at Amherst College and spent five summers directing swimming and teambuilding programs at camps for at-risk youth. After graduation, Ashley served for 2 ½ years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Jordan, where she taught daily classes, formed a girls' marathon running team, and collaborated with local partners to pilot community problem-solving camps and workshops. This community problem-solving program still continues today; it is led by local university students and uses drama and teambuilding games to forge discussions of difficult societal challenges.



Last month, Ashley returned from a two-week trip to Israel and the West Bank, where she listened to the stories and insights of HOP staff and participants and enjoyed the generous hospitality shared by Palestinian and Israeli culture. Ashley believes that Hands of Peace can help future leaders develop skills in critical thinking, self-reflection, and respectful dialogue—skills that are essential to carving niches of peaceful coexistence into the world's most intractable conflict.

In addition to her work with HOP, Ashley is completing the manuscript for "Dead Sea Fishing", a memoir about her Peace Corps journey that highlights stories of cross-cultural dialogue. In September, Ashley hopes to begin graduate school studies of International Journalism; her writing will focus on issues of cross-cultural communication, women's empowerment, and democratization.



*Hoda Barakat with sister Haya*

Our new Palestinian Coordinator, **Hoda Barakat**, lives in Nablus, Palestine. As Palestinian Coordinator, she will be in charge of arranging follow-up meetings and activities, recruiting new Hands and acting as the Palestinian liaison with folks here in Chicago.

Hoda just finished her B.A. in Engineering and works in Ramalla. She was born in Ohio and moved to Saudi Arabia when she was six years old, and later moved to Jordan and then to Palestine at age 14. "In spite of all what's happening here in Palestine I will not rather to be anywhere else," she says.

"I got very interested in HOP after my sister Haya, former Participant and XL, joined the program and got out with such a great experience." She thinks that more kids should benefit from such a program.

She says she has great respect for everyone who has worked with Hands of Peace. She's an avid swimmer and hopes someday to go Sky Diving!

## Honors

HOP Board Member Rabbi Brant Rosen of Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation in Evanston, was honored at the Interfaith Action of Evanston's annual Vision Keepers Dinner and Fundraiser on Sunday, February 24. IAE's mission is to bring together communities of faith and spirit to serve people who are hungry and homeless, and to express shared values through action and interfaith dialogue. Congratulations, Rabbi Rosen.



## Task Force

In order to keep Hands of Peace evolving and growing, the Board of Directors has created a Task Force which is charged with identifying various issues that need improvement and making recommendations on how these issues might be resolved. Joel Carp (Board member), Jim Tatsuda, (Operations Committee member) and Ismail Hummos (a Task Force member from the Palestinian Community) lead the Task Force, and several other representatives from the staff, volunteers and leadership have been engaged to assist in these efforts. Since January, members of the Task Force have held several conference call meetings and have already made steps to define important issues and suggest solutions. Stay tuned for more progress.

### Upcoming Events

**July 13 - 29, 2008 - Hands of Peace Program**

**Interested in participating as a student,  
host family or volunteer?**

More information on our website:

[www.hands-of-peace.org](http://www.hands-of-peace.org)

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