

Shape Park, Kfar Saba:

Physical training becomes part of the scenery

At the heart of a park that sprawls along Kfar Saba's Green Neighborhood (HaShchuna HaYeruka), a physical training track was set up, with 15 training points. Inspiration: The ZURICH Vitaparcours built in Switzerland by the ZURICH insurance company to promote a healthy lifestyle. Purpose: Bringing the concept to Israel. Initiator: Gideon Guth, Basel-born, currently a Kfar Saba resident. Added value: A living memorial to his good friend, the late Steven Karger, a Swiss sportsman who died prematurely



Gideon Guth

“I'll meet you on 45 Engel Street in Kfar Saba's Green Neighborhood. The physical training track we have opened in the neighborhood park starts there”, said Gideon Guth. Indeed, one cannot miss the starting point of the circular physical training track set up in the park: A bright turquoise metal figure installed at the starting line, tells the story of the track. Attached to it is a plaque that commemorates the late Steven Karger, beloved friend of Gideon Guth, who died prematurely of brain cancer aged 49.

“Steven was an enthusiastic trainer and put great efforts into advancing volunteer initiatives related to sport. I was looking for a way to commemorate him in Israel and remembered the physical training tracks in nature built by ZURICH Company in different Swiss cities' to encourage people to train. I am well acquainted with them, as are many Swiss people devoted to physical training, who use them and enjoy the opportunity to train in nature. I felt this was the right way to commemorate him - in a live, vigorous enterprise that would be primarily built for the community”.

In his search for partners with whom he could jointly realize his idea, he was delighted to learn that the municipality of Kfar Saba, where he has been living since his aliyah, was attentive to his innovative idea. In funding the project, his devoted partners were Steven's parents, Yvette and Dr. Thomas Karger. Guth also involved in the project the own company, Istra Trade Link, which offers services and assistance in matters regarding international marketing. The company is in charge of the





From right to the left: H.E. Mr. Jean-Daniel Ruch, The Swiss Ambassador to Israel; Mr. Zvika Zarfati, The Mayor of Kfar Saba (at that time); Mr. Guido Guth, Initiator; Mr. Shay Karger, Son of Steven Karger

track's activity, and enhancing its surrounding landscape.



Gideon Guth, 59, was born in Basel and moved to Israel with his wife and two children ("the third is already a Sabra") when he was 31. "I come from a Zionist family", he says. "My grandfather was president of the Basel Jewish Community, and was very active rescuing Jews during the Holocaust. Zionism and community work surrounded me as I grew up, and I decided to put those values into practice, and move to Israel despite the comfortable and extremely calm life in Switzerland.

← project's execution and participates in the funding. "I dreamt about setting up in Israel a physical training track in nature, and succeeded in realizing my dream. I now look forward for two things to happen: First, that this unusual track would actually become an inseparable part of the park, and will be used by people of all ages. It is open for public use free of charge, 24/7 all year round, and it is suitable for all. We are now working to organize training groups in cooperation with the city authorities, and I believe that the number of participants will keep increasing. At the moment, six weekly training sessions are available on the track, and about 150 people of various ages benefit from them.

The second thing I am hoping for is finding a business partner whose business and social agenda is consistent with promoting a healthy lifestyle. The track must be continuously maintained and tended to, and a devoted sponsor - who will be duly announced publicly, of course - would be able to assist us in further developing the

He is a mechanical engineer by profession, and also holds a degree in economics. After a successful career in marketing opposite Switzerland for an Israeli hi-tech company, he decided to establish a business of his own, and assist companies who wish to operate on both ends of the Israel-Switzerland axis. Translation is an inseparable part of the work, and Guth has also developed this field, offering business translation services in a number of languages. He works with thirty countries, has a branch in the Far East (China and Japan), and keeps about 150 translators



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← busy. Guth has been a member of the Israel-Switzerland Chamber of Commerce for about 25 years.

“As you see, the company I established has nothing to do with sports or physical training”, he says with a smile. “But the operation I run has definitely helped me realize my vision about a physical training track in nature. In Switzerland, one sees such tracks in many places.

It all began with a 1968 community initiative of ZURICH Company. The company hired experts from the physical training field, to help it develop a track with training installations that enable specific training at different points, with instruction posters for the trainer over the entire track.

Exercise focuses on power, endurance and flexibility. Whoever follows the track is sure to undergo intensive training that is physiologically sound and affects all the muscles in a balanced way.

Within ten years, 500 tracks were built in Switzerland, and currently there are thousands of them, including in other European countries such as Germany, France, Italy, as well as in the United States.

“Behind the success of the tracks is the broad business backing that ZURICH Co. constantly provides the initiative,” Gideon emphasizes. “It considers the track a means to promote a healthy lifestyle, that naturally reduces the incidence of poor health or of health-related occurrences that require activating an insurance policy. This is a classical win-win situation, which is extremely valuable to the individual and the community”.

The idea of this initiative came to Guth in tragic



circumstances: The death of his good friend Steven Karger, who was diagnosed with brain cancer and died within six months in 2008. “Steven was a rare person, a giver, an enthusiastic sportsman who promoted community initiatives through sport. His death was traumatic to all his friends and acquaintances. He was a publisher of medical literature. It is sad that no cure could be found for a man such as him, who had extensive knowledge in numerous medical spheres. His parents, Yvette and Dr. Thomas Karger are important contributors to Keren HaYesod, the United Israel Appeal. They are Zionists whose heart has always been with Israel, even though they reside in Basel. When I introduced my idea of commemorating their son by building a physical training track in the park, they adopted it enthusiastically and generously”.



One major hurdle that stood in the way of realizing the project was finding the right location for the track. Gideon approached the Kfar Saba municipality and found them receptive to the idea, which is first of its kind in Israel. The place that was chosen was Park 80, the park of Green Kfar Saba neighborhood, a new and well maintained neighborhood that has been attracting families looking for →



← a “green” lifestyle near the city.

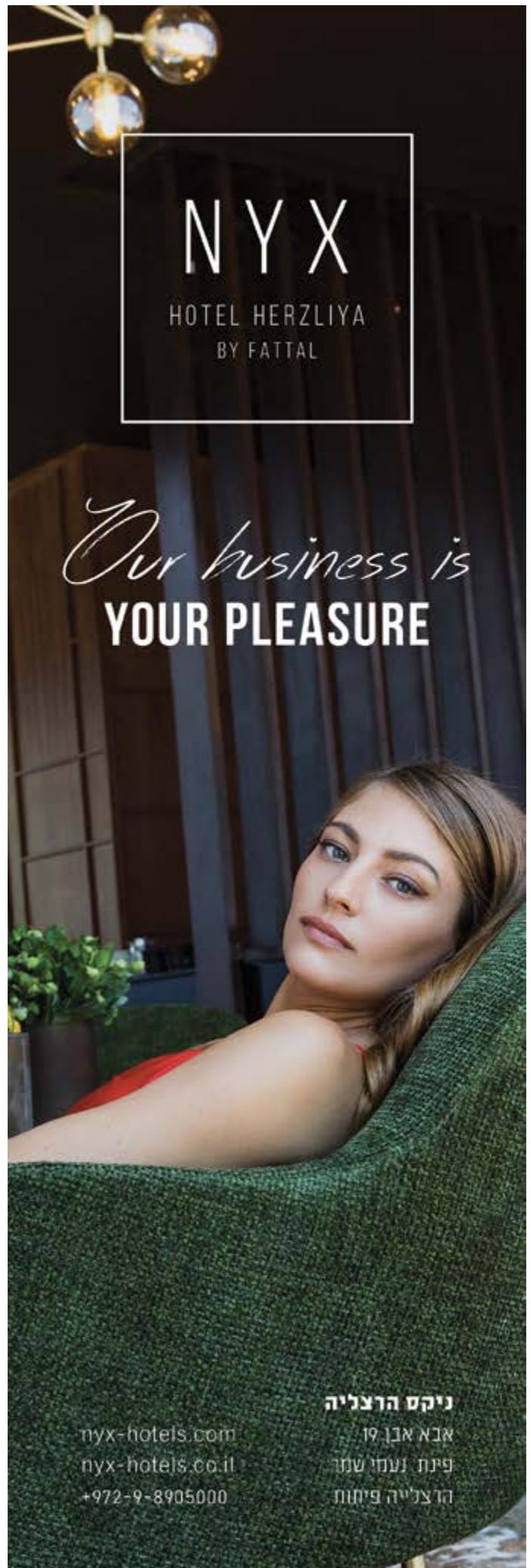
“I wanted the track to be exactly like the one I have seen in Switzerland, and received a special permission to build it from ZURICH Co., on condition that I follow closely all the original guidelines and instructions. This means that everything arrives from Switzerland, and that ZURICH controls everything - every caption, poster, wooden log of which this or that installation is made. The work was intensive, and in 2014 Mr. Andreas Baum, then the Swiss ambassador to Israel, attended its festive inauguration.

Another stage of development was completed in April 2018, when lighting was installed all along the track, courtesy of the Karger family, and trees were planted along its unshaded segments. This stage was celebrated as well in a festive event attended by Swiss ambassador Daniel Roch, Kfar Saba mayor Zvika Zarfati, the Karger family, and hundreds of guests, including the local trainers.

“The track is modeled after the Swiss tracks that run within the green vegetation that grows inside or very near every city. The situation here is a little different...” Gideon says smiling, at the sight of the naked rocky hills around the park, where segments of the track are exposed to the pitiless Israeli sun. “Much work still remains to be done, for example on plants and shading”, he says, hoping that someone will join him in attending to this community sports initiative.

“As I mentioned, we are developing in the meantime some guided activities on the track. We have groups of pensioners training here with municipal funding, and a training group for young mothers who arrive with their babies in strollers. Several professional groups have chosen to use the track to train their members, and the idea has come up to open groups for children and adults with special needs, to allow them to advance on the track at their own pace and enjoy activity in the open air for free, inside the community. The options are infinite”.

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