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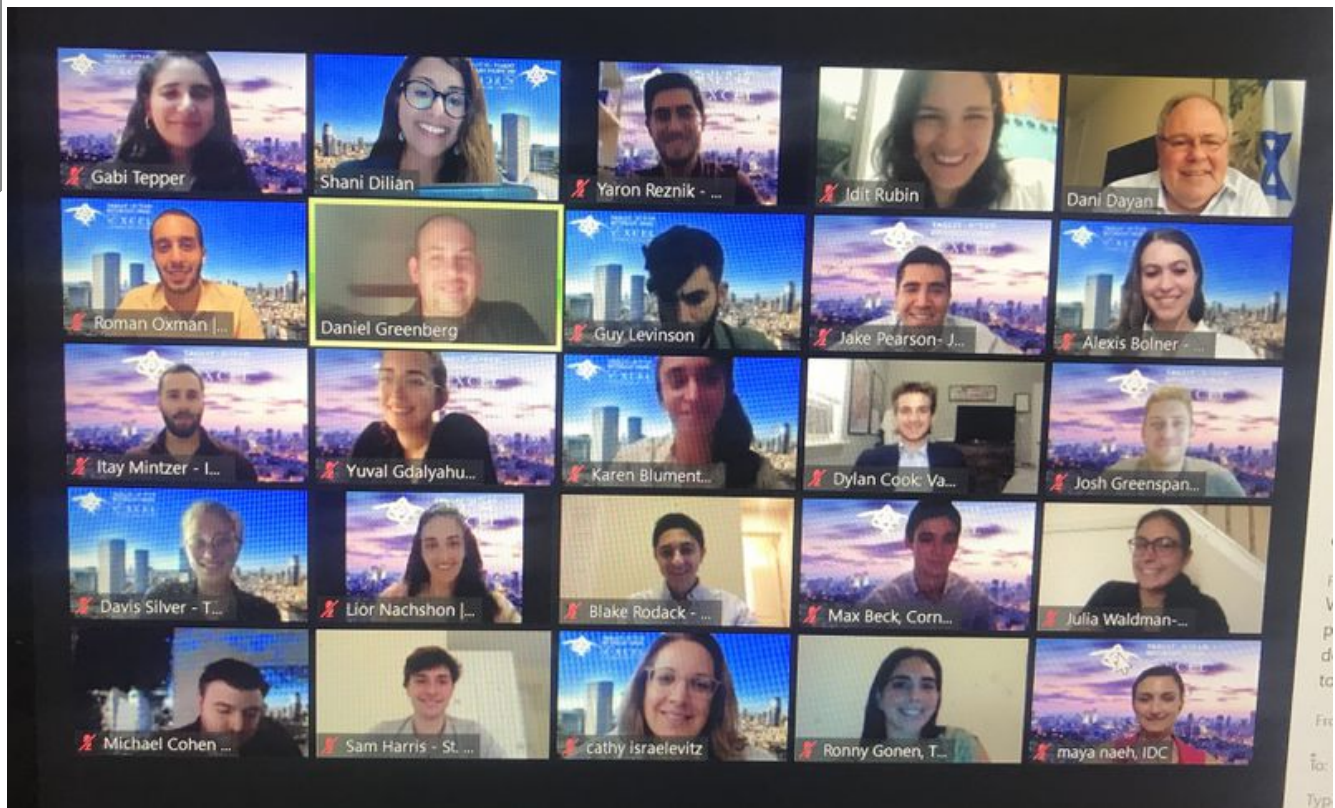
PALM BEACH JEWISH NEWS JEWISH JOURNAL

South Floridians learn about Israeli entrepreneurship through virtual program

By **SERGIO CARMONA**
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL | JUL 21, 2020



FEEDBACK



Birthright Israel Excel Fellows, including those from South Florida, participate in a Zoom speaker event. (Jane

Under normal circumstances, more than 50 young Jewish adults travel to Israel for 10 weeks during the summer to participate in Birthright Israel’s accelerator/internship program.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic propelled Birthright Israel Excel, founded in 2010, to migrate to a virtual experience this year for the participants, who are known as Fellows and are selected from thousands of applicants. The program is geared toward individuals who are interested in making an impact in business, technology, entrepreneurship, the Jewish community and Israel.

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Among this year's Fellows are five young adults from South Florida. They are Joshua Greenspan of Miami Beach, who recently graduated from the University of Florida; Josh Pardo of Miami, a senior at Duke University; Hayley Sussman of Boca Raton, a junior at the University of Pennsylvania; Blake Rodack of Bal Harbour, a junior at the University of Miami; and Jake Pearson of Key Biscayne, who attends Johns Hopkins University.

"The program has been really amazing," Greenspan said. "We have a lot of speakers who are entrepreneurs and professionals in their field, so I've learned a lot by doing a lot of challenges, coming up with different startup ideas and working with peers from both the United States and Israel."

The Fellows feel that they have been able to learn a lot about Israeli culture by participating in this program virtually.

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"We've spoken to several executives from Israeli companies," Rodack said. "They have given us a great perspective in terms of how Israeli businesses work and that it's way different over there compared to anywhere else in the world."

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Rodack continued, "Despite not being in Israel, they have provided us with a nice view on how things work."

Sussman said, "I think the the takeaway is that even virtually, all these entrepreneurs and leaders in the high-tech industry are still willing to engage with us.

"This shows that this community is willing to help out the younger generation," she continued.

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Pardo said, "We're learning from incredible people and these are experts from across all industries."

"I'm also learning about Israel as a country, not only economically, but also religiously and in other different aspects, so this program gives you a whole spectrum to it," Pardo added. "The experts tell you what's going on currently in Israel and how that's shaping the current global environment with COVID and everything else."

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Throughout the summer program, 41 Fellows have participated in remote internships secured by Excel at 27 companies. Ten others have taken part in the program's ventures track, where they are working to develop a startup concept with strategic professional guidance.

Idit Rubin, the program's executive director, said, "Now more than ever, Birthright Excel provides a platform to build strong professional bridges between Israel and talented young professionals from around the world."

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“While we’re sad that we haven’t been able to welcome our Fellows to Israel in-person yet, we’re thrilled we were able to migrate our program online during a time when so many others had to cancel their plans,” Rubin said. “As the future of work becomes even more digitally focused, we’re sure that this remote experience will help better prepare all of our Fellows for the bright

futures that lay ahead of them.”

The last day of internships is Aug. 5, while the closing seminar for the Excel program is Aug. 6.

The program is monitoring the health situation in Israel closely with the hope that it can bring the 2020 Fellows there for a short visit in the coming months to interact in person with their Israeli peers.

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