





“I was surprised to find out it was very similar,” Allen said. He found he had much in common with the Israeli officers, but his counterparts have a “heightened awareness of acts of terrorism.”

Police in Israel deal with lack of public trust, an issue familiar to U.S. law enforcement officers, especially in recent years with the rise of highly publicized officer-involved fatal incidents. Both countries, including agencies in Clayton County, are working to ensure their police forces are representative of the people they serve. In addition, Allen and Armstrong said their departments are implementing community outreach programs to better the relationship between citizens and officers.

Armstrong said he was impressed by the leadership and training programs the Israel Police had developed. It’s something he’d like to implement in his own department to benefit Forest Park officers and improve officer retention.

“That’s one of the struggles with police work, period,” Armstrong said. “We all struggle with the same thing.”

Allen said he’d like Georgia officers to undergo more rigorous training, a change he hopes the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police will initiate across the state within the next few years. For Jonesboro in particular, Allen said he brought back from Israel a renewed commitment to increased visibility and community partnership.



In addition to existing neighborhood watch programs and community classes, he’s considering a Police Explorer program to “bridge the gap” between Jonesboro youth and police officers. He’s also benefited from the relationships forged with fellow Georgia officers on the trip, including Gwinnett Police Chief Butch Ayers. Ayers has since helped Allen to develop the Jonesboro Police Department’s first K-9 unit.



“It’s kind of like going to boot camp or summer camp, where you go for a short period of time and you just somehow bond, and you’re bonded for life,” Allen said of his new professional contacts. This is true of the two Clayton County officers, who met and were roommates on the trip.

“One of the things we’ve learned in law enforcement is that we’re a lot more effective when we share information and share ideas,” said Armstrong. “Nobody has all the answers, nobody has seen everything. So if you can put a bunch of people in the room from all different places and they all bring their experiences together, it helps everybody.”

For both officers, the trip was not only beneficial professionally but fulfilling personally, as both described their awe in taking in the historical and religious significance of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Allen spoke highly of the Israeli people and culture, though he doesn’t quite agree with they way they take their Diet Coke. He prefers his chilled with lots of ice, he said.

Differences in soda drinking temperatures aside, Allen and Armstrong said they felt a strong camaraderie with the police officers in Israel and considered their time with the GILEE program highly valuable. Both would recommend the trip.

“It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Allen said.