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## Bringing lessons learned in Israel back to Newton County

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Counter-terrorism isn't always a violent response to extremism. It is also about building partnerships and offering alternatives that make extremism less attractive.

So, when Captain Sammy Banks of the Newton County Sheriff's Office talks about the counter-terrorist class he took in August, he is talking more about learning how diverse and multicultural communities have learned to live in harmony together and bringing those strategies home to Newton County.

Banks was a member of a delegation of law enforcement agents who participated in the 24th annual peer-to-peer public safety training program organized by the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE). Fifteen Georgia delegates were joined by law enforcement leaders from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Police Department in New York, and police departments in Alabama and Washington.

The counter terrorism training was offered by the Israeli police. Accompanying the law enforcement agents was Dr. Robert Friedmann, professor emeritus of criminal justice at the Andrew Young School of Policy, Georgia State University. Friedmann, Banks said, speaks Hebrew fluently and escorted the delegation. Training was held throughout the county, including the cities Haifa and Jerusalem. "We saw how [the Israelis] secure their borders and their shipping industry. They live under the threat of attack every day.

"Israel has been dealing with [terrorism] since the beginning of the country and they are the ones who have experienced it since the onset," Banks said. "They have the most up-to-date in the latest technologies and techniques in how they interact with the communities, different religions, different races.

"They live together as a close-knit community," he said. "It's not all terrorism. It's how a crime is being handled in the community. We look and compare what they're doing ... what they're experience, and what we're experiencing here."

### **Relevant to Newton County**

Banks said, the training lets participants look at what techniques and responses are being used in Israel and whether or not they can be adapted for us in Newton County.

"Israel's police have developed an effective unity of effort with great cooperation and communication, and by doing so they are able to work very closely and effectively with very diverse communities and provide great public safety. "That really translates well into Newton County, as we are an extremely diverse community, from religion to race to economics."

Banks said communities throughout Israel opened their doors to the GILEE participants. "They shared their experiences, their techniques. It was two weeks of extensive training. We were told we would hit the ground running and we did -- we were constantly on the move the two weeks they were there."

Contrary to common perceptions of Jerusalem, Banks said, it is a beautiful city.

"With what is going on in that part of the world, they are in fear every day. In law enforcement, they were able to share with us how they handle the threats against their community every day," Banks said.

The focal point of the Israeli police has been to work closely and effectively with diverse communities, Banks said.

"Jerusalem is a super close community. The different churches, mosques and synagogues are close together and they [the people] are able to live productive lives every day.

It was the first time Banks had visited Israel. He said he was surprised by Jerusalem's beauty. "With what I've heard in the past and what you see on T.V., you only see a small section of Jerusalem," Banks said. "They don't give you a full view of the country. Once you arrive there, it's shocking. [There are] certain parts of the cities you could be confused by and think you were in downtown Atlanta."

While in the capital city, they were able to visit the Wailing Water and visit the place where Jesus was bathed. "We didn't stay in one area all the time. We had a large agenda in order to complete the task and we had in two weeks. We were pretty much on the go for two weeks."

At each scheduled stop, they took part in training with local police, exchanged ideas and saw how they interacted with their local communities.

"The police and communities around Israel opened their doors to us and were so open and welcoming and willing to share with us their practices, their challenges and how to overcome them," he said. "For the two-week intensive program, we were immersed in the country - their challenges, history and public safety – and saw how all that relates to form a comprehensive system which keeps their nation safe."

One of the things that impressed Banks about his experience was seeing how the Israel people work together. He believes part of that is because young people give a couple of years of service to their country, usually in administrative field. It created a positive environment, Banks said, with young people being involved in their communities.

### **Defining community policing**

Community policing is getting out of the office, out of the car and working with homeowners, neighbors and the churches, building tighter bonds with the communities, Banks said. "That's what we're doing here. We spoke to a lot of community policing officers who live in those [Israeli] communities. They go to the churches, go to the religious meetings they have, meet with religious groups and try to find out what the problem is."

According to Banks, the training in Israel dovetails into the emphasis on community policing talked about by the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing." The report also calls for constant training.

"There is so much going on in law enforcement today. We are sensitive, we do care and we're human. We do make mistakes. Our sole purpose is to provide the best care to keep the community safe," Banks said. "It's not about counter-terrorism; we were just making sure we can put everything place in case ... that's all we care about. "

Sheriff Ezell Brown is also a graduate of the GILEE program, Banks said. Together they will share what they learned with the command staff and take a look at the similarities and differences in techniques used.

"With the knowledge gained, it was important to come back home and see how it could be applied locally," Banks said.

"Looking at how they train, we can see where we need to go," he said. "Going beyond conversations and participating in community engagement meetings and partnerships to solve problems is one way I see those lessons being applied.

"The experience reinforced to me that a unified Newton County is a stronger and safer one. If we continue our own efforts of community policing and increase our communications, I think we will be more successful."

He said the county has already made great strides, especially with community policing, but those efforts can be enhanced further.