

Enhancing 'tikkun olam'

The CER Prize for Tech and Innovation celebrates forces for good



AWARD WINNERS Veronica Celis Vergara and Nina Patrick, along with past winners at this week's ceremony. (Eli Itkin)



VELETTA, MALTA provided a perfect backdrop to the The CER Prize for Tech and Innovation ceremony. (Eli Itkin)

French Jews that the last one to leave should turn out the light," he said. "But that isn't true anymore." He said there are about 1.2 million Jews still in Europe.

THE AWARDS ceremony was preceded by a conference, hosted by the government of Malta, on tech investment opportunities there.

According to Yisrael Ohayon, the vice president of the Jewish community of Malta, there are 60 local Jews, along with about 100 Israelis, Americans and Europeans, living in the tiny island, which has just 516,000 inhabitants.

But the Jewish presence in Malta goes back almost 2,000 years. Some of the catacombs in the city of Rabat from the fourth and fifth centuries CE are marked with a menorah to distinguish them from Christian tombs.

Next to Rabat is Mdina, the old capital city, which had a Jewish quarter. In 1285 Jewish mystic Avraham Abulafia, who was expelled by the Jewish community of Palermo, settled on the island of Comino, where he wrote either one or two well-known kabbalistic works. Today only two people live on Comino, although it is open to tourists.

Ohayon said there is a synagogue in Valetta, the capital of Malta, and services are

held weekly. There are both Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews who attend, he said, and they use tunes from both traditions. While they used to have a kosher butcher visit at least once a year to butcher kosher chickens, now they plan to open a kosher restaurant for locals and tourists.

"Whoever wants to keep kosher in Malta, it's not a problem," he said. "We do have some Orthodox people here."

The government wants to encourage both Israeli tourism and Israeli investment. Silvio Schembri, minister for economy, EU funds and lands, said: "Whether for tourism, business, or investment, we invite the Jewish community, including our friends from Israel, to consider Malta as your next destination. We will welcome you with open arms."

He said that he would like to see Malta and Israel develop closer ties. There are already direct flights between Israel and Malta, and there is potential for more tourism cooperation.

"It's been the government's long-term vision to primarily build stronger political and economic ties with Israel who we consider as a natural partner, particularly in the sphere of joint technological research, economic investments and tourism," he said.



RABBI PINCHAS Goldschmidt, president of the CER, (left) and Yisrael Ohayon, vice president of the Malta Jewish community. (Eli Itkin)

"Our ultimate goal is two-pronged – a socioeconomic approach which will yield a multitude of benefits. We intend to not only attract foreign investment and create jobs within the sector but also aim to ensure that the benefits brought about by this wave of innovation reaches more segments of Maltese society as it goes about its daily life, be it within the education or health sphere or interaction with government departments."

In 2019 Malta had more than 3.5 million tourists, and the government would like to exceed that number.

Malta offers tech start-ups that move to the country a corporate tax rate of 5%, and to all business owners who come an easy route to residency. The government is also encouraging digital nomads to come to Malta to work.

Like any conference, a lot of networking was done around food. Dolce K kosher brought

the chef and the mashgiach (kashrut supervisor) to Malta from Rome, allowing the guests to feast on kosher dairy pasta and fish.

At the awards ceremony, the CER had a surprise for all of the winners. They were being invited to visit Israel to meet with tech start-ups. The winners, many of them young, were clearly thrilled.

Maltese government officials said they would also send a trade delegation on the same trip.

EDUCATIONAL AFFAIRS

• By LINDA GRADSTEIN

VALETTA, Malta – An app that can trace charitable donations in real time, insurance for small-scale farmers in Africa, and a home-based urine test that can detect urinary tract infections.

These are just some of the projects that won cash prizes in a contest, hosted by the Conference of European Rabbis, that aimed to support projects that help *tikkun olam*, or “repairing the world.”

“Our religion may be ancient – even eternal – but it has always survived, and so often thrived, because it has faith in the future,” Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the CER, said at the awards ceremony in Malta. “The CER Prize for Tech and Innovation is our way of celebrating the best in technology where it is a force for good.”

“Malta, with its fascinating history and forward-looking, tech-driven economy, made an ideal location to present it.

“I congratulate the winners, Veronica and Nina, as well as all the runners-up, and look forward to an ongoing partnership with the government of Malta.”

Veronica is Veronica Celis Vergara, founder of Norway-based EnlightAID, which is a financial technology which shows when, where, and on what donations are spent, in real time, boosting transparency in the charitable sector. She won the prize for 2020, but it was announced only this week, as the prize ceremony had been canceled for the past three years because of COVID.

Nina is Nina Patrick, the founder of Memido which is based in Germany and is a technology that uses urine testing cards and an app to translate results into science-backed advice on hydration, nutrition, immunity, liver and kidney health.

Veronica and Nina each won a prize of €26,000 to invest in their products. The number 26 is significant in Judaism because it has the

numerical value of the word for God. Those in second and third place each took home a prize of €18,000. Eighteen is the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word for “life.” Introducing the prizes, Goldschmidt explained that God’s purpose is for us to bring godliness into the world and to save life, and that the technologies being celebrated by the CER Prize do just that.

The winning companies were chosen from among hundreds that applied for the prize.

Goldschmidt was the chief rabbi of Moscow for almost 30 years. He left soon after the Russo-Ukrainian war began, when he was pressured to publicly support the Russian invasion of Ukraine and refused to do so.

“We are in the middle of World War III,” he told *The Jerusalem Post* in an interview. “There has been no combat yet between NATO and Russia, but it is war on a political and economic level. We must provide for the safety of the Jewish community wherever they are – in Russia, Ukraine or anywhere else.”

He also said that Europe has come to realize that terrorism and antisemitism are dangerous for everyone, not just for Jews.

“It started with the Jews in Toulouse, Copenhagen and Brussels,” he said referring to several recent terrorist attacks in Europe aimed at Jewish institutions. “But it continued to become a problem for all of Europe, and now Europe has a strategy to combat antisemitism.”

He said that American Jews thought they were immune from antisemitism, but that has proven not to be true.

He said that between 70,000 and 90,000 Jews have emigrated from France, home to Europe’s largest Jewish community, in recent years. At the same time, there has been a renaissance of Jewish life in France, with new synagogues and community centers.

“We used to say about