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Amherst resident Matthew L. Schwartz (center, with sunglasses), age 23, made aliyah on Dec. 27 with the Nefesh B'Nefesh organization. A story about Matthew is on page 8 of this week's issue.

Amherst man makes aliyah with Nefesh B'Nefesh

By DENA WIMPFHEIMER

For Matthew L. Schwartz of Amherst, Dec. 27 will always be remembered as the day when he realized the dream of aliyah, ready to take on the challenges and welcome the opportunities that come with life in Israel.

Along with nearly 200 other olim, the 23-year-old student arrived at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport on the final 2007 flight of the Nefesh B'Nefesh organization, which has been responsible for bringing nearly 15,000 new citizens to the Jewish State since its founding in 2002.

Until recently, Schwartz has been studying linguistics at the University at Buffalo (UB) with a concentration in Arabic, a course of study that he chose with the realization that it could help him in Israel and be a contribution to the State. With the belief that he is one of the few American-born Jews with a high level of proficiency in Arabic, he hopes that using his language skills as a translator will help bridge divides between the Arab and Israeli communities.

"The fact that Israelis and Arabs don't speak the same language is an obvious obstacle that I feel has exacerbated the problems between our two peoples," he said. "If my arrival in Israel can change that situation



MATTHEW L. SCHWARTZ

even a little, I feel that my aliyah will have been well worth it."

Schwartz's parents as well as two brothers — one his twin — were sad to hear the news that he is leaving the United States but were proud that his strong Zionist upbringing led him to his decision.

In this early period after his arrival, he is living on Kibbutz Maagan Michael near Haifa where he is studying a Hebrew enrichment course.

Always active in Jewish and Israeli affairs that included a graduate internship with Hillel, the Foundation for Jewish Life on Campus,

Schwartz was the principal founder of an innovative program called ChaiLine that acted as a social services program for all faiths on his college campus. Also an active member of the Jewish Student Union at UB, Schwartz always saw recognizing diversity as a key avenue to foster partnership between different groups. "I hope that the projects I was involved with while in Buffalo will continue to have a positive impact for the student population even after I leave," he said.

Nefesh B'Nefesh, which facilitated Schwartz's aliyah — as it did for nearly 3,000 other people over the course of 2007 — says it believes bringing as diverse a selection of Jews into Israel as possible is key to the future development of the State. According to Nefesh B'Nefesh spokesman Charley Levine, new immigrants such as Schwartz represent an important resource in Israeli society. "Since our inception, we have always stressed the valuable contribution that American Jews of all backgrounds bring to the people and land of Israel. Nefesh B'Nefesh salutes the decision of young idealists like Matthew who recognize the good that can be done by choosing Israel as their new home and we look forward to helping many others make this same move in the years ahead," Levine said.