

By Hanan Sibel and Marty Waxman in Baltimore Jewish Times. April 21, 2017

It's hard to believe it was more than 25 years ago when a group of Baltimore's Jewish community leaders and business executives sat down to talk about how to absorb the influx of Russian Jewish immigrants to Israel. It was the late 1980s, shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, and unemployment hit double digits in the Jewish state.

Recognizing that a Maryland/Israel economic development partnership would prove beneficial to both communities, we enlisted the support of Governor William Donald Schaefer. In 1988, he enthusiastically signed a Maryland/Israel Declaration of Cooperation with Israel's Ambassador to the United States Moshe Arad, which called for both sides to collaborate in high-tech development and business cooperation.

As an outgrowth of that, the Maryland/Israel Develop Center (MIDC) was established in 1992 as a public-private partnership between Maryland's Department of Commerce, Israel's Ministry of Economy and Trade and The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore.

Looking back on that time, we don't know if any of us would have predicted how important that partnership would grow to be – how much it would economically benefit both communities. As Israel has evolved into a global technological powerhouse, many of its industries dovetail with Maryland's leading industries.

A natural strategic partner, Maryland, with its proximity to Washington, DC, its focus on defense, cybersecurity and biotechnology and its ability to harness the talented minds from organizations such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland, has made it attractive for Israeli businesses to open offices here.

When MIDC first started, our goal was to create jobs. That hasn't changed. Yet as instability continues to define the region, it's critical that Israel's economy remain strong and remain at the forefront of cutting-edge technological innovation.

That's why MIDC continues to play such an important role. Our strong relationships with the State of Maryland – we've led five Gubernatorial Trade missions to Israel – along with partnerships with the leading research institutions and high-tech institutions, allows us to maximize the resources of both communities to promote trade and investment. We now have 30 Israeli companies with offices in the state, creating jobs for Marylanders.

As Jews, we give philanthropically to Israel. And we must continue to do so. Yet it is this support of its economy that will ensure a healthy, independent Israel into the future and a growing internationally focused economy in Maryland.

For 25 years, we have counted on the support of The Associated and the State of Maryland to help us in this endeavor. Their continued recognition of our mission has ensured that we will power ahead with building more lasting relationships and continue fostering bilateral trade that benefits our community.