

## State &amp; Local

## Food for thought at feast of birds, bugs

Former Elizabeth man serves up exotic menu to celebrate 'tradition'

GIL HOFFMAN  
NJN Israel Correspondent

JERUSALEM — Some kids grow up wanting to save the whales. Others grow up wanting to eat them.

Jerusalem dentist Ari Greenspan, who was raised in Elizabeth, has "saved" several animals for kosher carnivores by researching and preserving the traditions which determine, say, whether swordfish is kosher or which kind of pheasant is permissible.

Greenspan hosted an 18-course dinner July 22 at the Eucalyptus Restaurant opposite Jerusalem's Old City walls.

The kosher menu included a pheasant and guinea fowl pastry as an appetizer, water buffalo, swordfish, and red deer as main courses, and fried locusts for dessert.

While the 250 participants were dining, experts lectured about the kosher attributes of each animal, often while standing next to a live example.

The goal of the meal was to pass along the *mesora*, or chain of tradition — in this case describing which animals, birds, fish, and locusts are kosher and which are not. The meal was the result of 28 years of hard work by Greenspan and his friend Ari Zivotofsky, who started researching the traditions of kosher animals when they were 18-year-olds studying ritual



Kosher maven Ari Greenspan was raised in Elizabeth.

food age, the old rabbis and ritual slaughterers who remembered those local birds and insects (the Torah lists four varieties of locusts that are permissible) were dying. So they began interviewing these holders of tradition, amassing an oral, video, and photographic record.

"It's not about an orgy of slaughtering and meat," Greenspan told *NJ Jewish News*. "It's about tradition, and part of the experience is eating the food. All of this craziness is just to teach about the *mesora*."

One of the people who helped Greenspan restore the tradition of eating pheasant was an elderly man from Fair Lawn, who recalled regularly taking pheasants to a kosher slaughterhouse in Newark, where the ritual slaughterer knew the tradition.

Greenspan got his first experience slaughtering animals in Elizabeth. He said his quest to maintain the *mesora* was inspired by Elizabeth rabbi Pinchas Teitz, who ran slaughterhouses and exposed him to practical Jewish law.

"Rabbi Teitz had a major effect on my appreciation of the complexities of kosher food production," Greenspan said. "He also

supported my practical research of Jewish law. Unlike many, he understood the practical, philosophical, and the theoretical."

Teitz's son and suc-

**A pheasant, unlucky enough to be considered kosher, is displayed for guests at the "mesora" feast.**

cessor as leader of their Orthodox community in Elizabeth, Rabbi Elazar Mayer Teitz, came to last week's meal to learn about the traditions of the animals.

"I came to watch, not to eat," Teitz said. "The food for thought was at least as good as the food for eating. I didn't eat the locusts, not because I questioned whether they were kosher but because they didn't exactly rouse my appetite." Teitz said he would be happy to host such a meal in Elizabeth.

Thursday's meal was only the second of its kind in Israel. The first happened in 2002. "*Mesora*" meals have also been held in conjunction with the Orthodox Union in New York in 2004 and in Los Angeles in 2007.

The highlight of the Jerusalem meal was a fish from the Euphrates River called the shibuta, which the Talmud says has a brain that tastes like pork. The fish, which was

brought from southeastern Turkey, had apparently not been eaten in the Holy Land since the Babylonian exile began some 2,600 years ago.

Participants also raved about the "Shiluach Haken soup," featuring an egg extracted from a slaughtered hen (such eggs are considered *fleishig*, or meat, for the purposes of kashrut). It was served inside a noodle nest in sparrow, dove, and pigeon broth. The dish commemorated the commandment of shooing away the mother bird before taking her chicks or eggs.

The swordfish remains a matter of some controversy. According to Zivotofsky, who has written extensively on the subject, the rabbinate of certain Israeli cities accepts swordfish as kosher — although many people at the feast did not eat it.

None of the "*mesora*" meals has featured a giraffe, which is ostensibly kosher but has given rise to a number of myths, including one that kosher slaughterers aren't sure where to cut its long neck.

Greenspan and Zivotofsky, who dissected giraffes that died at Israel's Safari Park, said they knew exactly where to cut their necks but there were other reasons why they had never slaughtered a giraffe. They have tried to purchase giraffes in African countries where it is neither an endangered nor protected species, but without success.

Which is probably a good thing, for man and beast: Giraffes can kill a lion with one kick, are expensive, and probably don't taste all that good, otherwise they'd show up on more menus in Africa. Then there's their sheer beauty.

Slaughtering a giraffe "would turn too many people off," Zivotofsky said. "But at some point in the future, we still would like to." ■



Rabbi Yaakov Meidan, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivat Har Etzion, attends the 18-course "*mesora*" dinner July 22 at the Eucalyptus Restaurant opposite Jerusalem's Old City walls.

Photos courtesy Ari Zivotofsky

slaughter and wanted to know how to *shecht* a pheasant.

Because a bird is kosher only if a chain of tradition exists that it has always been kosher, each community had its own customs regarding whether local birds were permitted to be eaten. The two Aris realized that in an industrial



NJN correspondent Gil Hoffman prepares to eat a locust (yes, they're kosher), but held off until a helpful waiter removed its crunchy outsides.

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## Through My Father's Eyes...

by Mark Ross

Did you know that Costa Rica has elected a Jewish vice president? Luis Liberman Ginsburg, a 63-year-old former banker won election with President Laura Chinchilla.



Mark Samuel Ross

Vice President Liberman is the son of Polish immigrants who settled in Costa Rica before the Holocaust. He says that he has visited Israel and his relatives there and that he expects Costa Rica to maintain excellent relations with the Jewish state while following a foreign policy centered on Latin America. Costa Rica has a Jewish population of an estimated 3,000 people — which, of course, is enough Jews for your shul, my shul, and the one we don't talk about.

On the other hand, it was recently reported that Estonian-born Harry Mannil died recently in Costa Rica. Mannil was on the wanted list of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which had accused him of abetting the murder of 100 civilians, mostly Jews, while serving in 1941 and '42 in the Estonian government in collaboration with Nazi Germany. Mannil was a wealthy businessman and art collector. A 2005 Estonian probe — which some claim was a whitewash — found insufficient evidence to allow extradition.

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