
Not your average knight

*Peacemaker emerges in the form
of a Long Beach resident*

BY JESSE SHERER

Why is this
knight different
than other
knights?

Gary Krupp, a Long Beach resident, boasts an impressive achievement on his resume: he is only one of seven Jews to receive the papal honor of Knight Commander in the Order of St. Gregory the Great. Yes, that's right, he is a knight, knighted by Pope John Paul II.

Krupp sees this honor as a way to bridge the gap between Jewish and Catholic relations.

"I thought I should use it to do something useful," he said. "We must learn to appreciate the similarities and cherish our differences when it comes to the two religions."

It was from this desire that his organization, Pave the Way Foundation, founded in 2003, was born. The mission statement reads: "Embrace our similarities, savour our differences."

Dedicated to bridging the gap of interfaith relations and inform-
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ing each side about the historical developments that have been made to better the relationship, Pave the Way will sponsor a dynamic conference to be held November 7 at the Wantagh Jewish Center.

The event will feature Ambassador Oded Ben-Hur, Israeli ambassador to the Vatican; Father David Jaeger, legal representative for the Franciscan custody of the Holy Land; Most Reverend William F. Murphy Bishop of Rockville Centre; and Rabbi Jack Bemporad, director of the Center for Inter-Religious Understanding.

The event, which is expected to attract 1500 people, is co-sponsored by the SouthEast Nassau Synagogue Enterprise (SENSE), a collaborative effort between seven synagogues, formed to generate more interest in their respective areas by prospective residents.

Titled "Jews, Catholics, Israel & the Vatican Building Bridges," the event will focus primarily on the 10th anniversary of the formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the Holy See.

SENSE was approached because of the longstanding friendship between their president Barry Shorten and Krupp, as well as SENSE's desire to hold a large-scale program.

"This year marks the 10th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the Vatican," said Shorten. "I find it important to speak to Jews and Catholics on the historical relationships, and in particular of historical developments."

Krupp can still remember that July day in 2000 when he was notified of the honor and which planted the seed of his organization.

"An Archbishop called from Rome," said Krupp. "My reaction was that this is amazing. The other people who have been honored were all world renowned people, I'm just some guy from Long Beach."



Long Beach resident Commander Gary Krupp in full papal regalia.

Founded in 1831 by Pope Gregory XVI to recognize great charity to the church, the award was bestowed on Krupp after he was able to recruit medical equipment companies to donate \$15 million dollars worth of equipment to the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza Hospital in Italy. He still has the message of his impending knighthood on his answering machine.

The ceremony was performed in West Hempstead by the U.N. Ambassador from the Vatican. The honor made Krupp a member of the papal household complete with a citation, traditional uniform, and a "knightly" sword. The honor brings with it the title of Sir or Commander, and imbues him with ceremonial responsibilities. Krupp had to receive special permission by the U.S. Congress in order to accept the award.

Pave the Way has been active in several projects. It is attempting to get Maimonides manuscripts returned by the Vatican to Jewish scholars and The Cenacle Shrine of the Upper Room, located in Jerusalem, returned to the church by its current occupier Hebrew University.

Both are designed to create a relation of goodwill between the two religious sides.

Krupp sees many of these goodwill gestures as a way to thank Pope John Paul for the work he has done in furthering Jewish-Vatican relations and as a way to ensure that the next Pope will approach relations with the same mindset.

"History can be an enemy but we need to create friendships from this day forward," said Krupp.

According to Krupp Catholics do not realize anti-Semitic commentary is a sin and must be confessed, and that it is now against all church policy to try to convert Jews.

On the other side Krupp says Jews do not realize how valuable the Vatican and Italy are as friends of the Jews. He sees Italy as the only true friend of Israel within the European Union.

"As Jews we need Roman Catholics on our side," said Krupp. "They are large condemners of anti-Semitism. I want Catholics to learn about Judaism and vice versa."

The administration of Pave the Way has not been easy for Krupp, who runs the organization with his wife and a board of advisors. He receives little aid from other organizations and has had to actually sell personal assets and possessions in order to keep the foundation going.

"I've known Gary for 30 years," said Rabbi Barry Dov Schwartz, spiritual leader of Temple B'nai Sholom in Rockville Centre and a member of the advisory board. "He has always demonstrated a deep love for Israel and a desire to bridge the chasm between Judaism and Christianity."

"Why is this knight different than other knights? It is because of his total involvement and commitment to fulfill the world of tikkun olam. He has dreams and does not accept anything other than success."

Said Krupp, "Only the unified voice of all religions can fight extremism."