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## RICHMOND BALLET TO INITIATE *MINDS IN MOTION* PROGRAM IN ISRAEL



*Minds In Motion* End-of-the-Year Performance, 2008. Richmond Ballet, All rights reserved.

**RICHMOND** - Richmond Ballet is pleased to announce that Education Director Brett Bonda will travel to Israel at the beginning of 2010 to conduct a two-week *Minds In Motion* residency at the Emek Hefer Regional School in Israel. In turn, some of the Israeli students who participate in the Emek Hefer residency will travel to Richmond in May 2010 to perform in the year-end *Minds In Motion* performances at the Arthur Ashe Center. This is the first project of its kind for the Ballet's acclaimed outreach program. The international aspect of the exchange, which will bring Israeli children to participate with children from Richmond's diverse communities, will raise the educational impact of this program to a new level. The

*Minds In Motion* program exchange will provide a unique opportunity for the children to learn about other cultures and tolerance.

Now celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> year, Richmond Ballet *Minds In Motion* teaches fourth-grade students discipline, dedication and self-awareness by leading them through a series of choreographic movements that must be memorized and expanded upon in each class session. All students, including those with physical disabilities, participate in the program, which requires no special clothing, shoes or equipment. *Minds In Motion (MIM)* has expanded beyond the Richmond area in recent years to include year-long satellite programs in Charlottesville, Martinsville and Roanoke. In addition, two-week residencies are taught at elementary schools throughout the Commonwealth.

The Israel program is a joint partnership between Richmond Ballet, the Virginia Israel Advisory Board and the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond. The trip is being coordinated by Virginia Israel Advisory Board Executive Director Ralph Robbins. Mr. Robbins has worked closely in recent years with Dr. Kenneth Zaslav of Advanced Orthopaedics on a number of business exchange efforts between Virginia and Israel. Dr. Zaslav serves on the Virginia Israel Advisory Board and is also past president of the Richmond Ballet Board of Trustees. A little over a year ago, Mr. Robbins and Dr. Zaslav began to discuss the possibility of artistic exchange programs. After meeting with Mr. Bonda and discussing several options, they decided that the *Minds In Motion* residency in Emek Hefer would be an excellent fit for the two communities.

An agricultural region with a population of approximately 35,000, Emek Hefer is the Richmond Jewish Community's "sister city" in Israel. Under the auspices of the Jewish Agency For Israel's Partnership 2000, a living bridge has been created between the two communities. Partnership 2000 is a program of the Jewish Agency for Israel that seeks to broaden and deepen Diaspora Jewry's connection with the people of Israel through collaborative programs and exchanges.

Bonda notes that Emek Hefer and Richmond have something else in common. "Each year, *Minds In Motion*" focuses on a theme that can be tied to the fourth-grade curriculum," says Bonda. "This year, we're focusing on the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and the efforts of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to protect and restore it. Coincidentally, the restoration of the Emek Hefer region's Alexander River has been a major focus of that community in recent years, and the cleanup efforts have won international awards.

Governor Tim Kaine and First Lady Anne Holton, who made a visit to Israel last year, have expressed support for the developing partnership between Richmond and Emek Hefer, and they are particularly enthusiastic about the *Minds In Motion* exchange. "Our daughter has participated in various aspects of the *Minds In Motion* program for the past five years," says Governor Kaine, "so we have witnessed first-hand the positive impact of this outstanding educational initiative."

Bonda will be accompanied to Israel by longtime *MIM* Teaching Artist Katherine Smothers. While there, they will not only work with Emek Hefer students but will also begin training one or more teachers at the school in the *Minds In Motion* methodology so that the program can continue after they return to Richmond. The "dance-teacher-in-training" will also accompany the Emek Hefer students who are selected to travel to Richmond for the year-end performance.

At the end of the two-week residency, the participating students will present an in-school performance for their fellow students at Emek Hefer and an after-school performance for parents and other invited guests. The list of potential invitees includes the Israeli Minister of Education, the US Ambassador to Israel, and leaders of funding organizations who could be potential supporters of the program, such as the Tel Aviv Fund, Hadassah and Naamat.

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*Richmond Ballet, The State Ballet of Virginia, is dedicated to the education, promotion, preservation and continuing evolution of the art form of ballet. Richmond Ballet strives to keep meaningful works of dance alive and to produce and foster new works that remain true to these values. Now in its 26th professional season, Richmond Ballet's mission is to "awaken and uplift the human spirit, both for audiences and artists."*

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**Press photos available upon request**

