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CELEBRATE ISRAEL

YOUR GUIDE TO THE 2015 PARADE

PARADE, PARTY & PRIDE

A street festival adds to the fun at this year's Celebrate Israel extravaganza

By ERIKA PRAEFER

THIS Sunday, the streets of Manhattan will be turning blue and white for the 51st annual Celebrate Israel Parade, one of the largest parades in New York City.

This year, once the 25 floats, 15 bands, 200 organizations and 40,000 marchers have wound up at 74th Street, the party will be just getting started.

For the first time, the Celebrate Israel Parade will be followed by the Celebrate Israel Festival, with all the fixings to showcase and celebrate the flavor and spirit of



The Parade is the biggest celebration of the Jewish state outside of Israel.

the Jewish American community.

The event will be presented by the Israeli American Council (IAC), a group founded in 2007 to strengthen the future and address the needs of the 500,000 to 800,000 Israeli-American citizens in the US.

"This is our first exciting year of producing the historical event in New York," says Yehudit Feinstein-Mentesh, the New York regional director for IAC.

Set to take place at Pier 94 at 55th St. and 12th Ave. at 2 p.m., "We hope families and kids finish marching and then continue the celebration at the pier, which will be divided up into distinct themed areas," says

Feinstein-Mentesh.

For those famished from walking in the parade, check out the Shuk Mahane Yehuda. Food trucks offering kosher



Indian, Asian and Mediterranean food will be onsite, as well as vendors from restaurant establishments from the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn. Schnitzel-, Gan Asia, Rita's Water Ices, Pitopia and Grill on Wheels are just a few of those slated to hold down the food court.

Within the children's area, "We have a special headliner, Rinat Gabay, a superstar in Israel," says Feinstein-Mentesh.

Additional highlights for the little ones include a drum circle with Israeli drummers, a

WHEN
Sunday
11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

WHERE
Fifth Avenue, starting
at 57th St., ending
at 74th St.

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MILES OF SMILES

Mitzvah Clowns will bring their blend of fun and frolics to the parade

WITH a smile on his face, Ari Hiller, 16, describes how much he loves his hobby of dressing up as a clown. He performs magic tricks for seniors in assisted living facilities, delighting in taking their packets of Splenda and making them vanish.

"My favorite thing is right afterward, when you are coming out of a senior's room — you remember the smile they had," says the high school sophomore from Teaneck, NJ.

Ari is part of a cadre of

some 500 clowns performing good deeds, or mitzvahs, by visiting the elderly and kids with special needs in the tri-state area. Called Mitzvah Clowns, they are the brainchild of Daniel Rothner, a former middle school teacher who came up with the idea in 2010.

"It's the most empowering thing in the world, a phenomenal ride," says Rothner, a married father of four whose whole family participates in mitzvah clowning. "When anyone does service, not only are

you benefiting others, you are benefiting yourself."

Several dozen Mitzvah Clowns — from sixth graders to seniors — will head up the Celebrate Israel Parade to rev up spectators. "We'll get them energized," says Rothner. "It's a highlight of the year and we're grateful to be a part of it."

Ari and his younger brother Eitan, 12, recently visited Mitzi Krampf, an 88-year-old resident of The Jewish Home at Rockleigh in NJ. "I'm delighted to see them," she says. "I am

already a happier person."

At Eitan's November 3 bar mitzvah, he will help train 40 friends to become clowns and entertain residents. The training includes making balloon animals and interacting with the seniors. It's better than having a party, he says.

"I love making people smile, it makes me happy. The world always needs more clowns," he adds.

— Diane Herbst

For details on Mitzvah Clowning, email daniel@areyvut.org.



Mitzi Krampf, 88, a resident of The Jewish Home at Rockleigh, NJ, loves her visits from Mitzvah Clowns Ari Hiller (right) and his brother, Eitan. "They're adorable," she says.

Stefano Govanini