

Operation Embrace aids Israeli victim of terrorism

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Peggy Vaughn

Neta Zaken, a 19-year-old Israeli injured in a suicide bomber attack in Jerusalem in 2003, is visiting the Potomac area this week to speak at schools and at a fund-raiser. She is the guest of Operation Embrace, a Potomac-based nonprofit that offers financial assistance and support to the victims of terrorist attacks in Israel.

"[Zaken] is a very humble person and still very shaken," said Avivah Litan, a co-founder of the nonprofit. "Speaking in public is a challenge for her, but she'll be okay." The explosion that broke Zaken's jaw and left permanent shrapnel wounds on her face and limbs left other, unseen scars, Litan said.

"It's not like you go to the hospital and then you're over it," she said. "It's with you for a lifetime -- the fear, the psychological trauma. It's difficult to trust in life again." Roni Gagin, director of an Israeli hospital program that provides post-traumatic treatment, accompanies Zaken. Gagin will join Zaken as a speaker at the Nov. 30 dinner fund-raiser planned for the Potomac home of Ralph and Sherry Foxman.

Steven Emerson, author of the book "American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us" will also speak.

The dinner costs \$500 a plate. For reservations, call Anne Clemons at 301-275-0419 or Litan at 240-731-2031.

While in town, Zaken also plans to collaborate with mental health professionals on treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder, Litan said.

This column is for you. Send press releases, news tips and other information to Peggy Vaughn by phone to 301-280-3007, by e-mail at pvaughn@gazette.net, by fax to 301-670-7183 or by mail to 1200 Quince Orchard Blvd., Gaithersburg, MD 20878
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