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## “BUILDING BRIDGES AT ANY AGE”

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PHOTOS PROVIDED BY CEDAR VILLAGE RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

“Every day is more amazing than the last!”

That was a shared sentiment among 30 travelers participating in a recent 10 day, interfaith, international experience to the Holy Land of Israel.

And, what made this travel expedition special?

The first of its kind, this interfaith mission to Israel of older adults has never been done before by American retirement communities!

With determination, fortitude, and perseverance as their guides, using their walkers, wheelchairs, and accompanied by staff from both retirement communities providing assistance, 8 residents from Cedar Village Retirement Community, which is affiliated with the Jewish community, in Mason (OH), and 5 residents from Otterbein Lebanon Senior Lifestyle Community, which is connected with the United Methodist Church, in Lebanon (OH), didn't let fatigue, fragility, or streets laden with steps and stones interfere with their embarking on and completing an arduous, exciting, and extraordinary journey to Israel.

“I was not sure I would be able to participate in this mission because of some health problems,” said Helen Werner, a resident of Cedar Village who was among the travel group, “but



***On their extraordinary journey, the “Building Bridges at Any Age” travelers atop Masada, an ancient Jewish fortress, with the Dead Sea in the background.***

Photo | Cedar Village Retirement Community, Mason, Ohio

all these wonderful people made it possible. I have learned so much.”

The Interfaith 2012 mission, called “Building Bridges at Any Age”, started out as a dream idea. The dream idea became reality.

The mission brought together individuals of Jewish and Christian faiths from two Greater Cincinnati retirement communities on a 6,000-mile journey from Cincinnati (OH) to Israel. The mission of the expedition: to better understand each other's faiths. The ground-breaking interfaith mission demonstrated that “age is just a number”, older adults can do (and are doing) remarkable

things, and learning and being open-minded at any age is possible!

“It was an extraordinary opportunity to connect older adults of different backgrounds and see them connect, grow and become friends.” Carol Silver Elliott, Cedar Village CEO and President, shares with AboutGreaterCincinnati.com.

Ranging in age from 63 – 89, the senior travelers actively demonstrated that age or physicality need not be a barrier to new adventures and living an enriching life.

Visiting sites significant to Christianity and Judaism, including the Western Wall in Jerusalem and the

Continued on Page 2

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## "BUILDING BRIDGES AT ANY AGE" (CONT'D)

Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the travelers prayed together at Judaism's holiest site, placed several hundred prayer notes from Ohioans in the cracks of the 2,000-year-old Western Wall, cried at Israel's Holocaust memorial, planted almond trees in the Jewish National Forest, danced on a boat crossing the lake where Jesus Christ is said to have walked on water, witnessed 10 members of their expedition being baptized in the Jordan River, and received holy communion on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

For Marjorie and Stan Zeidman, residents of Cedar Village, the trip was extra special as the couple celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary while in Israel. With their travel companions looking on, the Zeidman's renewed their wedding vows in a very moving ceremony atop Masada, an ancient Jewish fortress.

"Never have so few experienced so much in so short a time." said Jerry Ferguson, an Otterbein resident, who was among the travelers.

As you can imagine, planning and execution was key to the success of what some called a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The planning for the expedition began in 2011. Over the 8 months leading up to the culminating trip in late October 2012, the travelers engaged in pre-mission preparation that sparked conversation and discussion towards building bridges of understanding.



**Travel group members light candles on the Jewish Sabbath at the group's hotel in Jerusalem.**

Photo | Cedar Village Retirement Community, Mason, Ohio

This included monthly lunch meetings which rotated between organizations, listening to programs, reviewing aspects of the trip, reading books on Judaism and the Methodist religion, and worshipping together. In addition, the seniors engaged in fitness programs such as regular walking regimens to increase endurance to ensure travelers were as fit as possible.

"A mission like this is demanding and no easy feat to accomplish" said Carol Silver Elliott, "but it all came off without a hitch and was an extraordinary opportunity for all concerned."

Now back from their travels, the experience has forged new friendships, memories will live on, and

there is plenty to talk about and share to inspire others. The interfaith mission experience, an exercise in understanding, has come to a successful end proving "that no matter what a person's age, religious background, or personal beliefs, we all can grow, learn and broaden our horizons".

"This trip has been wonderful, fantastic, and spectacular." said Susan Levin, a Cedar Village resident and member of the incredible, groundbreaking experience to Israel.

**Interfaith mission accomplished!**

*Read the daily e-news from the group's 10 day travels at <http://www.cedarvillage.org/Involved/buildingbridges2012/mission.aspx>*

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