

MDA keeps pumping out progress

Underground blood bank the latest life-saving innovation

By **Matthew Robinson**
Magen David Adom

TEL AVIV, Israel – Since before the founding of the Jewish state, the men and women of Israel’s emergency medical response organization Magen David Adom have worked together with all communities in Israel to save lives with the latest in medical care and human compassion.

Since 1930, MDA has been at the forefront of medical technology, developing advances that have saved countless lives all over the world. As Israel’s national ambulance, blood services and disaster relief organization, MDA serves as emergency medical first responders to the state’s more than 8.5 million people. MDA also provides 100 percent of the blood to the Israel Defense Forces and works in partnership with the IDF to ensure lives of wounded soldiers are saved in emergencies.

While MDA is now well known around the world as a leading lifesaving organization, among MDA’s first triumphs was the creation of its blood bank and the launching of a volunteer blood donor organization in 1936. In 1950, the Magen David Adom Law officially recognized MDA as Israel’s national rescue service

and made special mention of the blood services, as well.

As the blood bank was one of MDA’s first official developments, it may not be a surprise that one of their latest and most groundbreaking (literally) initiatives is an underground blood bank. Located 50 feet underground in a neighborhood about 10 miles outside of Tel Aviv that is distinctly mixed in terms of population, the six-story, 5,000-square-meter, \$130 million MDA medical facility will service the nation’s medical and military needs and offers the world a new model for safeguarding vital materials even in times of war, terror or natural disaster.

“The new blood services center will enable MDA to better respond to the increasing needs of both the civilian and military systems regarding blood and blood components,” explained Dr. Eilat Shinar, MDA blood services director and renowned hematologist, in a recent interview. She touted both the facility’s increased laboratory space in which to conduct research and new technologies that will “improve blood quality and safety” and allow Shinar and her colleagues to work uninterrupted, regardless of what is going on aboveground.

Scheduled to open in 2020, the facility is set to be called the Marcus



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National Blood Services Center, after Home Depot co-founder Bernie Marcus’s Marcus Foundation. In addition to storing lifesaving blood and other materials, the lower floors will also serve as a bomb shelter to protect the medical team and others during the frequent emergencies that the Jewish state is made to endure. In addition to blood separation by centrifugation, blood type testing, testing for infectious diseases, and freezing filtration and labeling, the facility will also feature a quality control lab that will oversee all activities.

Though MDA’s current blood supply hovers around 280,000 units – of which 250,000 are sent to hospitals around the country and to the Israeli Defense Forces as needed – Shinar admits the current facility in

which the blood is stored is “not safe enough,” and that it could be tainted or destroyed in a concentrated attack. Shinar has been making such claims for many years; she is gratified to see the progress the new facility is making.

“We realized that if we wanted to prevent a major health crisis in Israel,” Shinar said, “we [had to] build an improved and highly secured blood bank.”

Shinar also notes that, during the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict known as Operation Protective Edge, MDA Director General Eli Bin ordered Israel’s blood supply to be moved to an underground shelter, as many Israeli cities came under heavy rocket fire. The success of that operation only proved the need for and encouraged the development of a permanent

underground facility. Also, as Israel’s population continues to grow, it is even more vital to have a sufficient and safe blood supply that covers all blood types present in the nation’s diverse population, which is expected to top 20 million in the next generation.

“We are fully aware that we need a bigger place,” Shinar says, noting MDA will continue to maintain the current facility as a backup.

That is why MDA needs your support. It is truly the lifeblood of the Jewish State.

To learn more about the National Blood Services Center and MDA’s lifesaving work in Israel, please contact Monique Martin, New England area director, at mmartin@afmda.org or 781-489-5166.