

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Begins Three-Day Visit to Israel, Attends Grand Opening Ceremony of Ra'anana Symphonette

New Jersey Gov. Christie Whitman today kicked off a three-day visit to Israel by helping herald the grand opening of the new amphitheater of the Ra'anana Symphonette.

Owned by the City of Ra'anana, the amphitheater will be home to the symphonette and will host other concerts, performances and cultural events.

Fifty-six professional musicians comprise the symphonette, which was founded seven years ago by volunteers who wanted to provide career opportunities to immigrant musicians arriving in Israel. Most of the members are recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

"It is a delight to see the Ra'anana Symphonette perform once again, and also to be part of this grand opening," Gov. Whitman said.

"This symphony not only provides beautiful music to so many people in the Ra'anana area, but it represents a unique way of assisting newcomers to a community," Gov. Whitman said. "Both their music and their existence is an inspiration."

The Ra'anana Symphonette last year traveled to New Jersey to make its American debut at the Performance Arts Center in Newark in honor of Israel's 50th anniversary.

Ra'anana, with a population of 60,000, was founded in 1922 by American Zionist pioneers from New York. Gov. Whitman said Ra'anana has prospered in part because of the close relationship it has had with New Jersey.

"When I came to Ra'anana in November of 1996, I found a town carved out of the desert that received the help and support of New Jerseyans from the Metro West Foundation," the Governor said. "Today, I'm pleased to see that Ra'anana continues to grow and prosper."

Whitman said the memorandum of understanding between New Jersey and Israel, signed during her 1996 trade mission, commits the New Jersey-Israel trade office to close ties. That agreement, the Governor said, also helped Ra'anana grow.

Tomorrow, Gov. Whitman will travel to Jordan. On Thursday, she will receive the prestigious Friend of Zion award from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a ceremony at the K'nesset. The award is presented by the Jerusalem Fund of Aish HaTorah. Earlier that day, Gov. Whitman will participate in a memorial service at Yad Vashem with former British Prime Minister Lady Margaret Thatcher.