

SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

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OUR VIEW

From troubled lands, a peacemaking respite

On the Israeli-Palestinian front, diplomats may doubletalk, and militants may terrorize each others' populations, but here in Santa Fe once again, we'll be seeing a comparatively modest, yet highly promising, effort toward peace in that beleaguered region.

Today, 16 young Palestinian and Israeli women, Jewish, Muslim and Christian, head for a camp in the boonies outside of town. They'll be joined for three weeks by four veterans of previous camps, serving as junior counselors, along with what by now is a veteran staff.

This is the 13th such camp in the past nine years — and that alone speaks well for the sponsoring organization, Creativity for Peace. Such continuity in bringing teens from warring camps half a world away to meet, talk and enjoy each others' company was an iffy notion when a cool group of Santa Feans came up with it.

By now, they've got it down to a pleasant routine: Dialogue sessions, led by facilitators from both sides of the line, are aimed at compassionate listening, nonviolent communication and other skills in face-to-face diplomacy. But they won't be dealing in strictly abstract notions: Many of these kids have seen suffering and sudden death at close hand. To hold civil conversations with counterparts across walls and fences breached so often by bullets and bombs is challenging, to say the least.

By way of breaks in often-difficult dialogue, there are art sessions of several kinds and a visit from the Wildlife Center, as well as field trips to the ropes course at Santa Fe Mountain Center, a circus workshop with Wise Fool New Mexico and dinner and a dress rehearsal at the Santa Fe Opera.

On Aug. 2, the community has an opportunity to meet the 20 participants during a "Feast for Peace" at the Santa Fe Women's Club on Old Pecos Trail. For more about that great event, email info@creativityforpeace.com.

This is another one of those miracles, large and small, that seem to break out with great regularity in Santa Fe. Creativity for Peace developed a mission of nurturing understanding and leadership among the young women of that often-tragic region. Its founders hope the campers will go back home with new perspectives on what so often are stereotypes of each other.

There are follow-up gatherings to keep 178 former campers in touch, and there are also scholarships and other educational opportunities.

This has become a year-round effort on the part of co-founders Rachel Kaufman and Debra Sugerman, executive director Dottie Indyke and a highly talented international staff — and for 100 or so volunteers who set up and take down the camp, tote luggage from the Sunport and back, drive cars and vans, do laundry, fix meals and take the youngsters shopping. The nine-member board of directors are an equally active lot.

Our sincerest salutes to all who are making Creativity for Peace the hope-inspiring — and high-achieving — outfit it is, and we wish them and their guests a great camp!