

SUN-GAZETTE

2 receive awards at annual dinner

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David F. Troisi, editor of the Williamsport Sun-Gazette, and **Jennifer D. Wilson**, president and CEO of the First Community Foundation of Pennsylvania, were honored with Israel Unity Awards at the annual Central Pennsylvania State of Israel Bonds award dinner Sunday night.

In presenting the award to Troisi, **Bernard A. Oravec**, publisher of the Williamsport Sun-Gazette, noted Troisi's 42-year history at his hometown newspaper, culminating with his promotion to editor in 1994.

"As publisher of the newspaper, I'm very fortunate to work with an editor such as David Troisi," Oravec said. "David is a man I can always count on to perform his duties in a professional manner and to always represent the Sun-Gazette with grace and dignity. His love of the community is apparent in every editorial that he writes, opting to challenge the best in us rather than to simply opine about an issue."

Oravec said that countless editors have graced the pages of the Sun-Gazette in the 215 years that it's been in business, but that Troisi is a man for these times. He noted that the liberties that Americans enjoy are the exception and not the rule in the world. He said that some of our basic freedoms are unheard of elsewhere, particularly our right to freely assemble and speak out against our elected officials, which is constitutionally protected from persecution.

"If we are not vigilant, any of our liberties could be lost at any time," he said.

In addressing the issues facing Israel in the Middle East, Oravec said that Israel is the world's best hope for freedom and democracy in that region. "It must be supported and defended at all costs," he added. A primary safeguard of our freedoms is a free and independent press, Oravec said.

"The role of the community newspaper is to keep the citizens well informed in order for democracy to work effectively," he said. "Even in our local communities, the small towns and hamlets, the newspaper must respect the fact that it may be the only shining light exposing the world of darkness. David Troisi clearly understands and respects this fact."

"His time as editor of the Sun-Gazette has made it a better newspaper. His participation in our community has made it a better community," Oravec said.

In accepting the award, Troisi said that he was very humbled. He said that it was his ultimate privilege to have the chance to be the editor of his hometown newspaper. He too stressed the sacred right of freedom of speech that Americans have. He expressed concern about how freedom of speech is exercised in some of the larger news outlets.

"We are facilitators of a sacred creed and as such, we have a responsibility to do so with balance and fairness. I am personally

embarrassed to hear the words fake and news coupled together; it breaks my heart,” he said.

“People come to us to be informed. We have a responsibility to do that with objectivity,” Troisi said.

Dr. Davie Jane Gilmore, president of the Pennsylvania College of Technology, presented the award to Wilson. She called her a woman with many talents and passions.

She talked about the work that Wilson does with the First Community Foundation and how the numbers tell the story. She detailed the amount of money that the foundation has received in donations as well as the number of donors and scholarships that the foundation has given to students. Gilmore also noted Wilson’s work with the newly established Philanthropy Center.

“This is a woman with a mission,” she said. “We are fortunate to have her in our community providing leadership and the vision to make us a powerful community.”

“She gives of her time and her treasures. She epitomizes tenacity, vision and passion and our community is better for this inspirational woman,” Gilmore said.

Wilson too said that she was humbled to be joining the list of past recipients whose specific contributions have shaped the place that she calls her home.

“While I am honored, I stand before you as a representative of our community foundation,” she said.

She thanked her family and friends for their support and noted the importance of her faith.

“My faith has been a guiding force in my life,” she said, “and I am grateful to God for the many blessings that he has bestowed upon me.”

Following the awards, State Representative Jeff Wheeland presented the recipients with citations from the State House of Representatives and the State Senate.

Featured speaker for the event was **Ambassador Ido Aharoni**, who serves as a global distinguished professor of New York University’s School of International Relations in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

At the beginning of the evening, Rabbi Joel Kessler had lit a candle to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day, which began at sundown Sunday and lasts until sundown today.

In his address to the group, Aharoni said that many people make the mistake of thinking that Israel was created as a result of the Holocaust.

“Detractors say Israel is a direct result of the Holocaust. It’s true that the Holocaust was the main catalyst, but make no mistake, the state of Israel was in the making decades before the Holocaust,” he said.

Aharoni detailed the beginning of the nation which has celebrated its 69th birthday. He told of how at the beginning of his country there was little support for establishing Israel.

“We did not have the support of the United States, the Soviet Union or Great Britain,” he said. “The only support was our brothers and sisters across the sea, members of the Jewish community and Christians.”

He further listed reasons that people should hope in Israel. Aharoni noted that in the Bible, Israel was seen as the land of milk and honey. In

recent times, huge deposits of natural gas, making it self-sufficient in energy.

Another reason he noted to be optimistic of Israel is their investment in desalinization plants to pump water out of the Mediterranean to supply much needed water to the country.

“Today, Israel is 100 percent independent when it comes to water,” he said.

He noted that Israel actually sells water and has been donating it to Jordan to help with the Syrian refugee crisis in that country.

One of the greatest investments Israel has made is in the area of human creativity and knowledge, making it a knowledge-based society.

He urged the audience to invest in Israel.

“When you invest in Israel, you are not only investing in a country, but an idea that is 100 percent compatible with everything that you believe in. The only country in the Middle East where you can safely practice your religion, whatever that may be, the only country in the Middle East where the Christian religion is not only safe but growing, the only country in the Middle East where you can be safely gay, safely opinionated. Try being opinionated in Gaza, you will not survive the weekend,” he added.

“When you make that investment, you will be investing in your own future, not just Israel’s,” he said.