

# Bumpy road to a new life

By JUDY SIEGEL-ITZKOVICH/Jerusalem Post Reporter



Early settlers

THE ROAD to successful aliya is a bumpy one, but it is bumpier than usual for the American Reform Jews who plan to settle on Mt. Halutz in the Galilee next May.

The seven-kilometre path leading to the isolated hilltop settlement is a gravel road. Since everyone will have to commute to work from Mt. Halutz, the twice-daily trip over the bibles will be somewhat jarring.

The Ministry of Construction and Housing is responsible for paving the road," says Haim Sharet, former emissary of the kibbutz movement to the Reform movement in the U.S. who initiated the communal Reform settlement. "They'll do it only when people have out of their temporary caravans and into their permanent homes. But that will take at least a year to two."

In addition to this, future settlers Mr. Halutz have to climb a steep and tricky road through Dir el Acre-Safad highway to the Tefen road. Plans to construct a modern road have been sitting for two years in the national planning and building committee, and there is no word in sight.

Despite these difficulties, five families have already immigrated to the U.S., and a total of 10 will arrive in the country by mid-October. The eventual size is expected to be 120 families. The *gavira* settlement group - was organized last year, and Sharet - who continues to promote the project - writes an article that appeared in

*The Jerusalem Post* with getting it off the ground. "Ninety per cent of the people who contacted us heard about it from *The Post*," says Sharet, a member of Kibbutz Hamdiya and son of the late premier and foreign minister Moshe Sharet.

THE IMMIGRANTS who joined the group range in age from 22 to 66, with the average age 38. The settlement will be non-agricultural - residents will thus have to find work in the area. The Tefen Industrial Park will provide a good source of jobs in the future.

The project is affiliated with the

ARAVA - as a model when they decide how much religious observance and in what form, to institute at Mt. Halutz.

Polled several months ago about their religious preferences, the large majority said they would like to attend Friday night and Sabbath morning services at the *mitzpe* (look-out point). However, almost all the members said they would not feel that their rights would be violated if a neighbour worked or drove his car on the Sabbath.

Most said it was their right to do as they pleased on Shabbat and would accept all personal choices of clothing at religious services. It was unanimously decided that secularists and the observant could work together in the community on all delicate questions.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform) has established a fund to provide second-mortgages for settlers in Mt. Halutz. According to Sharet, the cost of building one's own home is about twice the amount of the government mortgage available to settlers. And so, a second mortgage is needed by those who cannot make up the difference.

The American Reform Zionists' Association - Arza - headed by Rabbi Eric Yoffie, has provided material help to the settlers, and subsidized several meetings of potential members. The fourth assembly will be held the last weekend of October at the Jackson Hotel in New York. All members of the settlement group must commit

themselves to immigrate within three years or they may not take part in the conferences.

Bram Fine, an architect from Illinois who recently arrived in Israel with his family, met Sharet at a social gathering and quickly became interested in the Galilee project. He also prepared a schematic drawing of the site of the settlement.

Married to an Israeli, Fine had been thinking of coming to live in Israel and "the idea of Mr. Halutz appealed to me." Now that he is here, he is devoting most of his time to learning Hebrew.

Fine hopes to work as an architect in the Galilee. If the success of the families who followed him are any indication, he too, will succeed. All of them, including a biology teacher, an accountant and a pediatrician, have jobs lined up. Oded Lewensohn, 26, has just been named the new aliya emissary to the Reform movement, and is leaving for New York. He was not active in Reform Judaism in Israel, but learned about it quickly.

Familiar with Israel and the difficulties in integration (his mother immigrated from the U.S. soon after the state was founded), Lewensohn says he will tell potential settlers of the hardships. So those who do decide to settle on the Galilee hilltop will be highly motivated and serious and unlikely to give up easily.

Lewensohn will be working at the New York hq. of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021 - Tel. (212) 2490100.