

# TJP

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Almost 250 people filled a JCC auditorium to commemorate the congregation's anniversary, p.14

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# North Texas welcomes BBYO IC



Submitted photos  
ABOVE: Delegates from last year's North Texas region traveled to Baltimore to participate in the last international convention.

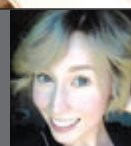
FAR LEFT: Cornell Brooks, president and CEO of the NAACP, was a featured speaker and recipient of the STAND UP award.

LEFT: Teens from all over will gather for leadership meetings at international conventions.

## International convention sets sights on Metroplex, p.2

## MISSING STUDENT'S REMAINS FOUND

Zuzu Verk's boyfriend arrested, facing felony charges in her disappearance, p.23



• Shabbat begins:  
5:50 p.m. Friday, Feb. 10  
• Shabbat ends:  
7:00 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 11



# Mixing education, business to help schools

Solomon using varied experience to help Texas school boards

By Aaron Greenberg  
Special to the TJP

PLANO — Dr. Yoram Solomon half-jokes about the two lines he wants on his tombstone: “He inspired me,” and “The first man to be killed in a radio-controlled airplane.”

He smiles while talking about the second line.

“That line is negotiable. The first line is the important one,” Solomon said.

He’s had success in the business world, innovating and helping others to innovate, currently through his company, Large Scale Creativity, which works with major corporations.

More recently, Solomon has been making waves as a member of the Plano ISD school board.

Now, he’s starting a new chapter, combining his business philosophy and educational leadership experience to help school boards throughout Texas.

The Israeli-born author, speaker, consultant, and former technology executive was certified in December by the Texas Education Agency as a presenter of training for school boards in the state. Last month, he kicked off School Board Academy, offering workshops to build team dynamics for elected school officials.

“When you think of what I do on the school board and with other school boards and with Large Scale Creativity and my speaking engagements, there’s a lot of elements on the same thing — ‘he inspired me,’” Solomon said.

Solomon knows a school board is not a corporate board, but having served on both, he’s learned



Submitted photo

**The Israeli-born author, speaker, consultant, and former technology executive is certified as a presenter of training for school boards in Texas.**

about team dynamics in a way that some elected officials haven’t.

“You are not hired, but elected,” he cautions school board members. “You can say ‘we understand the challenges.’ But how can we be creative and effective?”

At the core of that, Solomon believes, is the ability to engage in debate in a constructive way — something he feels is largely lacking in American society.

Americans, he said, tend to turn disagreements into “destructive, emotional conflict or conflict

avoidance.”

“What is it that makes Israelis hold a conflict that doesn’t become destructive? One word — trust.”

Over the years he has been an R&D manager, vice president and general manager for companies, including senior director of Technology Strategy & Industry Relations at Texas Instruments, and founded an electronics startup in Israel. He spearheaded the development of USB 3 and helped create standards for Wi-Fi.

Much of his understanding of teamwork and creative success comes through studies he undertook to get an edge in business.

“People say ‘What are you a doctor of?’ Creativity,” Solomon said. “That’s what I studied. Your research is what defines you.”

For his dissertation, he researched employee creativity. Driven by the lessons of what builds and what hurts innovation in business — his latest book is called *Un-Kill Creativity* — Solomon brings that passion to education, as well.

“I argue things. I don’t let things get undiscussed,” Solomon said.

One example was the religious holiday policy in Plano schools, where the board adopted new recommendations last month regarding major school events on

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Passover.

He has also challenged the

see **SCHOOLS**, p.20

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# SCHOOLS

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way the board cited college enrollment as a measure of success for graduates.

“College has to serve a purpose,” Solomon said. “I think a bigger thing is to help kids figure out who they are, what they want to be, than to shove them into college.”

The goal isn’t to make enemies, but provoke discussion.

“One thing they realized, I don’t just take ‘no’ for an answer,” Solomon said. “It better be very pragmatic and real, not ‘that’s how we’ve been doing things for years.’”

Playing the thorn in the side may have aggravated fellow board members at first, but they’ve started to appreciate Solomon’s role.

“Every time the board told me that ‘you surprised us with what you said,’ I remind them I highlight four values and everything goes by those values. They are on my website,” Solomon said. “Every decision, every vote, is decided by those four.”

The first of those values is narrowing the achievement gap — which he defines not as the gap between students, but between each student’s performance and potential.

Second is to “raise a generation that is patriotic, ethical, and gives more than it takes.” He points to the example of Casey Joyce, an Army Ranger from Plano killed in the Black Hawk Down incident in 1993.

Third, he wants to leave the district “in a better shape” than when he was elected.

And finally, he points out he wasn’t invited by the other trustees to the board, but “sent by 3,797 voters.”

The School Board Academy website also includes testimonials from a pair of his Plano colleagues.

“Since Yoram joined our board, he brought his direct, no-nonsense, data-based and emotion-free approach to dealing with issues,” it quotes Carolyn Moebius. “We don’t all agree on everything, but we now feel more comfortable disagreeing, and more effective in making decisions.”

Solomon says since he was elected in May 2015, he has seen change, with board members not just hearing him, but listening to understand.

He doesn’t see negotiations or debate as a zero-sum game, whether on the school board or corporate board.

In January, he gave a lecture on winning negotiations, and had attendees do roleplaying. Keith Reynolds, co-founder and CEO of Spoke Media, was annoyed about the exercise.

“Though I thought it was remarkably stupid and an utter waste of time as we were



Submitted photo  
Yoram Solomon with his wife Anat and daughters

doing it, when you revealed the true point of the exercise (understanding your opposite number’s motivations), I immediately realized how stupid I had been,” Reynolds told Solomon.

Being vulnerable is a key part of trust, Solomon said, including being willing to admit being wrong and taking criticism.

Much of this he learned growing up in Israel, and has seen in other Israeli-Americans.

“I was sitting in an Einstein Brothers. Two Israeli brothers were arguing and raising their voices. People were stepping away,” Solomon said. “But the words were professional and they could bring it to a very engaged conflict without it becoming personal. I hardly see Americans get to that level without it becoming destructive.”

Part of that is due to growing up in a small country surrounded by existential threats. And, of course, that is accelerated with compulsive service in the military.

Like Israel, Silicon Valley is seen as a hub of innovation. That’s why Solomon moved there with his then-pregnant wife in 1998.

The dynamics are different than in Israel, but with so many startups in such an expensive place, there is also fear of the cost of failure, he said.

The son of a clockmaker near Tel Aviv, Solomon studied electronics at a technical school. One day while browsing the school library, a title featuring the word “microprocessors” caught his eye. The book was by Intel. He was hooked, and followed a career in technology.

While working on R&D for a company, he developed a product whose specifications drew great interest from potential customers in the U.S. When sales didn’t match promises, he discovered the reason was something he

hadn’t thought of — the cost of switching systems.

One customer bought 100 units and installed just one — even though he loved it. The reason was that his installers were truck drivers, and the time and cost proved too much to be worth their while.

“It taught me that the most important part of business is empathy,” Solomon said. “It is understanding the other person, your customer, your competition, what’s driving them. That, to me, was a pivotal point in my career, from developing systems to understanding people.”

Solomon spent five years in California, first with Voyager Technologies. He helped turn the company around, and negotiated a sale for \$21.9 million to PCTEL, where he served as vice president of Advanced Communications. Next up came a position with Texas Instruments, which eventually offered him a job at corporate headquarters, bringing him to the Metroplex to run an \$80 million business unit.

In time he was promoted, and worked on a number of industry-wide and cooperative efforts, as well as devising strategy and overseeing product development prioritization. It was with TI that he developed USB 3 — despite his bosses’ opposition, saying nobody had asked for it.

He also wrote his first book, *Bowling with a Crystal Ball*, forecasting technology trends using specific targets.

The school system played a big role in determining where the family would settle.

“When we came here, our daughters were 4 and 2. We had to start thinking about schools,” Solomon said. “We looked, and the best school district in the area was Plano.”

One of the best elementary schools was

near their home, but the middle school was in Richardson. Wanting the girls closer, he slept outside the administration building before they opened for transfer requests.

Solomon was always interested in education, and some of his nine patents are related to educational technology. One he’s especially proud of is penveu, developed for Interphase, a Plano-based company that recruited him in 2008.

In 2009, he was asked to develop and teach a course at the University of Texas-Dallas on tech forecasting. Solomon was struck by what one student said, that he was only in college because it was what you do after high school. Troubled by this, Solomon felt it required intervening well before college. In 2013, he ran for the school board, but lost by 6 percent in a three-way race.

“An Israeli friend who lives in Plano put his arm on my shoulder, said ‘I didn’t want to tell you before, but Collin County is a very conservative place,’” Solomon said. ““There is no way they’ll let an Israeli on the school board.”

He went through the Leadership Plano program, became a member of the Plano Youth Leadership board, and became a civil air patrol aerospace educational officer. In 2015, he won a three-way race.

Solomon notes that many Israeli-Americans don’t get involved in community leadership, especially in congregations, because it is a very different dynamic than in Israel. The concept of membership to keep a congregation going doesn’t apply there.

He, however, has found civic life as engaging as business, and his wife teaches at Temple Emanu-El.

In 2015, Solomon created his own consulting and speaking company. He has worked with VCE, AT&T, and more.

“What do I want to do when I retire? It boiled down to one word — inspire,” he said.

“I thought to myself, if you inspire them speaking and writing, both of which generate income, why do I have to wait for an arbitrary date? Why not now?”

When it comes to inspiration, he’s equally happy offering it to Fortune 500 companies or fifth-graders, so Solomon goes to as many education-related events as he can in Plano, including numerous career days. He also spoke recently at a Southwest Jewish Congress event about Israeli innovation.

In addition to his five books, he’s got a regular column with **Inc.**, and he’s been named a top-40 innovation blogger by the magazine two years in a row.

It all comes back to three words he definitely wants on his tombstone, “he inspired me.” As for the radio-controlled airplane, time will tell.

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# TREES

continued from p.17

1930s, the municipality of Tel Aviv presented a plan to uproot the trees in order to widen and straighten the road. Many local residents vigorously opposed the idea — therefore the trees remain for us to enjoy and help us visualize an earlier version of the

land, before it was a city.

## Netter’s banyan tree

Just north of Holon, the Mikveh Israel Agricultural School sits like a peaceful green oasis within the greater Tel Aviv metropolitan area. The school was established in 1870 and nurtured the first generations of Israeli agriculturalists. Perhaps not surprisingly, the school’s grounds

and extensive botanical garden boast a plethora of impressive trees.

But a visitor’s first stop should be the magnificent banyan tree located near the school’s synagogue. The tree was planted in 1888 by Charles Netter, the school’s founder and first headmaster. This fascinating tree is a forest all to itself — thick aerial roots have formed alternate trunks in an ever-widening

circle that today encompasses approximately a quarter of an acre. Over the years, cuttings were taken from the tree — and so it is also the parent of many other beautiful banyan trees located throughout the country.

So next time you visit Israel and pass by a gnarled, ancient tree, take a moment to reflect on the story behind it. Maybe the

tree was planted by early Jewish colonists working for the Turkish authorities, or maybe it has outlived centuries-old towns or villages that once existed on the spot. Or perhaps it served as a landmark in an otherwise barren countryside — one that’s now crowded with buildings and automobiles. Every tree has a story. You just have to ask.