Israeli, Palestinian speakers spread message of peace

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AMHERST — Nonviolence proved to be a popular message Tuesday night when around 200 Valley residents packed the sanctuary at the Jewish Community of Amherst to hear four former Israeli and Palestinian combatants speak on why they advocate peaceful methods for solving the conflict.

Adi Greenfeld, a former Israeli soldier and currently an Israeli coordinator of Combatants for Peace, said she was moved by the turnout.

“It’s always nice to be reminded that we’re not alone in doing this,” she said. Combatants for Peace was started by former fighters from both Israel and the Palestinian territories who now advocate for a nonviolent resolution to the conflict. The event was organized by the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding in Amherst.

Paula Green, founder of the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, said she organized the event because she felt the community would benefit from hearing the speakers’ personal stories of how they turned away from violence. Before the speakers began, she clarified that the event was not meant to be political.

“See if you can listen without your mind moving in to debate or rebuttal,” Green told the crowd.

Greenfeld, who served her two years in the Israeli army as a clarinet player, told her story of having grown up in a relatively liberal family in Israel, but

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the school doors. It will be an adjustment, but it will be fine. It will make life easier for those who are sending their children to us with these allergies.”

Amherst is not alone in taking such action.

The Hampshire Regional School District bans nuts and nut products, too. The district has had a ban on nuts at selected schools where students with peanut allergies are enrolled, but this year extended that systemwide, said health coordinator Mary Phelan.

“We always seem to have a couple of kids who are sensitive, and now we have more than a couple of students...
Speakers urge Mideast peace

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never coming into contact with
many Palestinians in her youth.
As a result, she said she did
not feel she learned to human-
ize the people on the other side
of the conflict until she left home
and began working alongside
Palestinians at her job at a café
in Jerusalem.

“Realizing I’d been dehuman-
zizing people all my life felt like
violence in itself,” said Green-
feld, 26, the youngest of the four
speakers. “I did not feel like my
hands were clean anymore.”

She said she began working
toward differentiating herself
from the violence being committed
in Israel’s name, such as the
2008 invasion of Gaza.

Speaking through a translator,
Khdaier Najjar, the Palestinian
coordinator for the group, said
he was thrust into the conflict
when he was arrested and tor-
tured at the age of 13 after be-
ing accused of throwing stones
at soldiers. At that time, he said,
he had no political interests.
In prison, he came in contact with
other young men who educated
him on the conflict, and after he
was released began acting out
against the Israeli occupation.

He said he came to the real-
zation that there was no violent
solution to the conflict after the last
time he was arrested, in 1990.

“I am sorry for any drop of
blood — whether for Israelis or
for Palestinians — that has been
shed,” he said at the end of his
speech.

The other speakers were for-
mer Israeli Army Captain Erez
Krispin, and former Palestinian
combatant Mohammed Owe-
dah.

Rabbi Benjamin Weiner said
that while the conflict presents
a difficult conversation for the
Jewish community, the event
was ideal in that it brought
speakers from both sides of the
conflict. There is a “double-end-
ed” effort to balance Israeli pride
with recognition of the aspira-
tions and humanity of the Pales-
tinians, he said.

Community members found
the messages of the speakers
hopeful.

“In my experience, violence is
really never a solution,” said Al
Miller of Montague, a Vietnam
veteran. “Some of my cynicism
had to give way to the ideas of
hope that we really can meet
each other and find our common
ground.”

Standoff now at 8 days

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fore any negotiations on deficit
reduction or the three-year-old
health care law can take place.

Republicans “don’t get to de-
mand ransom in exchange for
doing their jobs,” Obama said.

A few hours later, Obama told a
news conference he was willing
to negotiate with Repub-
licans.