



## Kia Community Service Award

### RABBI DOVID HAZDAN

Any of the thousands of people whose lives have been touched by Rabbi Dovid Hazdan, know that he is a humble man – with boundless wisdom, an insatiable drive and passion for what he wants to contribute to the Jewish community and beyond. And of the successes he has achieved.

Born in Warmbaths, Hazdan spent most of his early years in Joburg. He was schooled mostly as a pioneering student at Yeshiva College and matriculating at Torat Emet.

“I wanted to pursue my studies – but I didn’t know if I would want to be a Rabbi,” he says. But he believed that his “most important mission would be investing in a community, somewhere in the world, as a shaliach of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.”

At the tender age of 16, he went to study for three years at Yeshiva Kfar Chabad in Israel, three more at a Chabad Yeshiva in Connecticut and, finally, two years at Central Yeshiva 770 at Chabad headquarters in Brooklyn, where he received his Smicha in 1981.

In 1982 Rabbi Hazdan married Feige, a Canadian/American. He was looking at various offers, he says, “when the Rebbe directed us to come to South Africa. He clearly believed in a positive future for South African Jewry”. He was brought back to SA by the Lubavitch Foundation to become Principal of Torah Academy Boys High (TA) in 1983. The school had just 15 students. “TA became a precious jewel in my life,” he says. Today he is Dean and the school has 550 students. “I feel privileged to be involved with children and helping give them the seeds of their life.” He had found his calling.

Rabbi Hazdan’s CycAlive project has been a wildly successful project. “CycAlive was born from an idea of the Torah Academy Grade-11 students in 1998,” he says, who came up with a suggestion for a fundraiser with a difference – to cycle to Durban! The first CycAlive in 1998 was a six-day relay cycle event involving 20 kids, adults and support vehicles. The bulk of the funds raised went to building computer rooms for the Soweto schools. CycAlive was embraced by the Nelson Mandela Foundation and is highlighted on their website as a major Mandela Day event.

By 2013, the event had 35 students from the three schools and six from Israel. The 2014 event will be even bigger. The biggest significance of CycAlive, says Hazdan, is the interaction between

the participants. At first, Soweto students may find it strange to see TA students riding with tsets flying in the wind. But, he says, what resonates is the ability to be able to be proud of your individuality and realising that it does not threaten our diversity. R. Hazdan has personally participated in every event, although he admits that today he spends less time in the saddle.

Rabbi Hazdan’s Great Park Synagogue chapter started in 1989 when he was approached to assist as Rabbi. For five years this entailed a 5km walk from Observatory, where he lived. “The community in the area had an illustrious past, but a very precarious future,” he explains. “Everyone thought I was mad becoming involved with an old aged home.” Most Shuls in Yeoville and Berea were closing down. But at Great Park in Joubert Park a corps of die-hard members, led by Cyril Goldstein, were determined to “replant the community and create a future for it.”

Great Park closed in 1994 and R. Hazdan began a small 120-seat Shtiebl shul at his new Oaklands home. On big Yomim Tovim they hired the TAC. It took five years of approvals and fundraising but in 2000 they opened the magnificent new Great Park campus – despite huge opposition as to the relevance for a new Shul, says Hazdan. There was. And today they have 750 members as well as one of the, if not the most, active Shul campuses in the country.

“In the first five years of my association with The Great Synagogue I had a magnificent building without a significant community; for the next five years we had a rejuvenated community without a proper building,” he says, and suddenly they had the marriage of both. Hazdan gives much of the credit to Great Park chair Clive Blechman, “who has contributed so much to our new Shul.”

The walls of the new Shul, styled on the old Great Park, include the foundation stone of the first Shul built in Joburg in 1888, Shar Hashamayim. Pieces of many other Shuls are built in too. The walls contain portraits of the earliest leaders of 19th Century SA Jewry.

Great Park’s Lag Ba’omer SHMOOZA event today attracts over 3,500 people from 50 organisations and communities and results in donations of thousands of blankets and winter jackets through Afrika Tikkun.

Last year GPS opened a magnificent Spa-like Mikvah which presently services over 80 families and has become a preferred venue for brides and is used as an educational resource.

Dovid and Feige Hazdan have four children, three girls and a boy, and four grandchildren, three boys and a girl.

Read much more about Rabbi Hazdan on [sajr.co.za/achievers](http://sajr.co.za/achievers).