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Jew, Palestinian to describe Israeli town of peace Mayor, school official are from Oasis of Peace, begun by Catholic priest in 1972.

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By Jim Read, *Staff writer*

Representatives of a community founded to show that Israelis and Palestinians can live together in peace will visit DeWitt and Syracuse next week.

The visit is part of the annual speaking tour sponsored by American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, which translated from the Hebrew and Arabic, respectively, means Oasis of Peace. The community of 53 families, about half of them Jewish and about half of them Palestinian, is in Israel west of Jerusalem. All villagers are Israeli citizens.

Abdessalam Najjar, the mayor of the community, and Michal Zak, deputy director and adult department coordinator of the village's School for Peace, are touring the United States this month.

Representatives tour twice yearly in the United States, said Deanna Armbruster, executive director of American Friends. "We go where we've been invited," she said.

Najjar and Zak will speak at 7:30 p.m. Monday in the Coville Theater of Manlius Pebble Hill School, 5300 Jamesville Road, DeWitt.

Elaine Rubenstein, of Cazenovia, a former member and president of the Friends board, arranged the Syracuse leg of the tour.

"I admire people that live according to their ideals," she said. "I think it's wonderful for Americans to know what's going on."

Najjar and Zak will talk about the history of the village and "why they came to live in such a community," Armbruster said.

Najjar and Zak also will meet with MPH students Tuesday afternoon and speak at 5:30 p.m. at the Muslim-Jewish student dinner at the Winnick/Hillel House at Syracuse University. Both appearances are private events.

They will speak at 7:30 p.m. to residents of The Oaks at Menorah Park, 18 Arbor Lane, DeWitt. Space is limited, but anyone who cannot make Monday's talk is welcome, Rubenstein said.

Najjar and Zak are speaking at several places in Philadelphia this week and weekend and will speak in New York City and Tenafly, N.J., before arriving in the Syracuse area. After the local talks, they will continue on their tour, speaking in Rochester and Boston.

Oasis of Peace was founded in 1972 by a Catholic priest, the Rev. Bruno Hussar, who believed Jews had a right to their own state and Arabs had a right to maintain their homeland as citizens of Israel. Hussar died in 1996.

Armbruster said 12 families are moving to the community. The application process involves meeting with the community.

Residents are responsible for building their own houses, she said.

The Oasis of Peace also is home to the School for Peace, a conflict management and research center that has hosted more than 35,000 adults and children in its programs. The village's bilingual and bicultural primary and junior high school educates about 300 pupils in grades K-6. About 90 percent of the pupils come from outside the village, Armbruster said. The American Friends organization, also with 10 similar organizations in Europe, helps support the schools financially, she said.

Najjar was the first Palestinian to bring his family to join Hussar in a camp on a hillside between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem that eventually became the village. Zak, who is Jewish, brought her family to the village a few years later.

Najjar helped develop the community and its educational institutions, co-founding the bicultural, bilingual primary school and the School for Peace. Zak, in addition to her duties at the School for Peace, leads the Humanitarian Aid for Palestinians program, which the village established four years ago to respond to the medical and humanitarian needs of Palestinians on the West Bank.