Chabad Without Borders (Mexico) hosts the Rebbe’s Diamond Daveners

While Chabad Houses worldwide were in full swing with their Chanukah Peulos, 30 Anash children who attend Kol Yakov Yehuda -The Rebbe’s Diamond Daveners in Los Angeles - headed to Tijuana, Mexico, for their annual Shabbaton. Kol Yakov Yehuda is a special Los Angeles Shabbos davening program,  that gets local children truly involved in the davening, and in fact in the running of their entire congregation.  Within the adult shul of Congregation Levi Yitzchok, they have their own Sefer Torah, a president, a gabbai, a “rabbi”, social events, and other shul-type activities.  And every year they make an annual Shabbaton trip to an exciting locale.

This year the Diamond Daveners were hosted by Rabbi Mendel Polichenco and his wife Dini of Chabad Without Borders, the Chabad center in Tijuana, Mexico (they also serve the nearby community of Chula Vista, California).

The kids were picked up at Cheder Menachem after davening with their fellow students and headed to the U.S.- Mexico border just south of San Diego.

They kept busy during the two-hour bus trip with a Chassidishe version of "I Spy" and a Chanukah Trivia Game.  Upon reaching the border the Daveners left their buses and walked across, meeting the Rebbe’s Shaliach to Tijuana, Rabbi Mendel Polichenco and his large Mitzvah tank.

Together they headed to the largest Tijuana tourist-oriented mall to do mivtzoim, followed by a *metzia* bargaining shopping spree, which they really enjoyed.

Shabbos is taken in earlier in Mexico, so they traveled on to the Chabad campus and were assigned their accommodations.  And then, the Shabbos that will remain with these kids for a lifetime truly began.

The local community, over 125 people, greeted them, first for Kabbolas Shabbos and then for the Seudah in their large and spacious social hall. The entire Shabbos meal had a very nice chassidishe atmosphere with a Mexican touch in food, divrei Torah, and in song – a new experience for the boys.

Then came the highlight of the evening, when the shaliach asked Habochur Hatomim Hamispallel Efraim Schmukler to address the community. Schmukler, who so eloquently held forth in a twelve-minute speech, which included a Dvar Torah and a detailed explanation of what KOL YAKOV YEHUDA stands for, received a standing ovation.  (Efraim is a shliach with his parents in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and presently attends Cheder in Los Angeles.)

Once the community departed - a farbrengen just for the boys was held, followed by seder nigunim.

The early birds woke up early to *chap arein* the Mexican sunrise and fresh air, and then headed to the Shul for Chassidus.  Shabbos day again saw a beautiful local crowd, and an emphasis on these young guests who came to spend a Shabbos away from home -- and to get a glimpse and a hands-on "shlichus" experience.

Addressing the congregation right before Musaf was the newly elected President of the Rebbe’s Diamond Daveners -- Habochur Hatomim Hamispallel HaPresident*Efraim Levenberg* – who spoke with such fire and brimstone that the entire kehillah was amazed at the confidence and knowledge that this 13-year-old displayed.

Again a beautiful Shabbos Seuda was served which included a Mexican Cholent.

Following a "Stump the Shliach" session and a Mesibas Shabbos -the Junior L.A. Congregation headed to the hills of Tijuana, led by the Shaliach himself, Rabbi Polichenco, who besides being a *talmid chochom*, is also known as a hiking outdoorsman.  Once on the mountaintop, Rabbi Mendel Duchman, founder and leader of KYY, held a rally highlighted by the 12 Pesukim, which echoed strikingly throughout the hills. The kids sang their way down the mountain, singing out their pride:  "Everywhere we go, people want to know, who we are, so we tell them: We are the Rebbe’s Diamond Daveners!"

Joining the kids on this inspiring Shabbos *shpatzier* were local children and several Israeli backpacker visitors, guests of the Polichencos.

It was bittersweet that Shabbos ended, said Levi Weiss, a KYY member.  “On the one hand, we wanted our Mexican Shabbos to continue forever, on the other, we had a blast right after Shabbos with an outdoor swim, chassidishe dancing and lastly a two-hour circus spectacular performed  especially for us. And then, to top it all off -- we gathered on the front lawn for a Grand Campfire, singing the night away from a specially-printed Shabbaton song book, cooking our own marshmallows and listening to a midnight story of the Baal Shem Tov told by Rabbi Duchman, not only in words but with his acting out some of the parts of the story.”

Nobody wanted to go to sleep that night -- but after Kriyas Shemah and a Magnificent Pillow Fight, KYY was finally out cold for what was left of the night.

Sunday morning,  the Mispallelim of KYY davened with the community, helped some local people put on tefillin, joined them for a breakfast, and attended a farewell ceremony which was difficult for all, as the community had really enjoyed interacting with these frum Lubavitcher kids -- something they hardly see –who behaved with such dignity and *derech eretz*.  It was truly a *kiddush Hashem.*

Upon arriving back in Los Angeles -- a Tremendous Pizza Party was served at Pizza Maven restaurant -- both to welcome the kids back to America and to thank them for the tremendous "DUGMA CHAYO" they had presented during their three day international trip to the Chabad House – Chabad Without Borders.

Kol Yakov Yehuda thanks Rabbi and Mrs. Mendel Polichenco, Habochurim Yitzy Zakon and Sholom Ber Gelerenter, shluchim of YOEC, and Reb Alan Stark, for making this Shabbaton the incredible success that it was.

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