

Cannabis King “Big Mike” Straumietis Celebrates with 8 Young Israelis with Cerebral Palsy Inducted into the IDF

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TEL AVIV, ISRAEL, January 26, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Anyone who’s ever tried growing weed or advocated for legalizing marijuana has probably heard of Michael “Big Mike” Straumietis. Standing huge at six-foot-seven, Big Mike is a self-made entrepreneur, philanthropist, and innovator who revolutionized the cannabis industry in 1999 when he founded Advanced Nutrients. In addition to pioneering the leading

innovations in cannabis cultivation science, Big Mike’s research led him to acquire unprecedented understanding of the plants’ great medicinal properties. Driven by a mission to make cannabis an accepted, everyday part of healing humanity, Big Mike and his Advanced Nutrients company, which operates branches in over 107 countries, have helped make cannabis mainstream.

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Today is a holiday for Big Mike’s children. Mike is SIU’s most generous American partner and donor, and he’s committed to helping Israel’s special needs community”

Rabbi Mendy Belintzky



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Big in every way, Big Mike is also beloved for his big heart and genuine compassion. Along with mainstreaming cannabis, he is also committed to promoting inclusion in society and mainstreaming people with special needs so they can contribute maximally to society and realize their full potential.

On a business trip last year to Israel, Big Mike met his colleagues at Haifa Group, one of Advanced Nutrients’ strategic business partners and a leading

global supplier of specialty plant nutrition. In the course of a full day of meetings, Haifa Group CEO Motti Levine introduced Big Mike to the [Special in Uniform](#) unit that his company sponsors. The billionaire marijuana king was moved to tears upon meeting the determined, passionate young men and women who defied the odds to become full-fledged soldiers in the IDF. On the spot, Straumietis announced his intention to adopt a unit of soldiers which led to the establishment of the Advanced Nutrients Special in Uniform unit.

A groundbreaking program of the IDF integrating adolescents with mild physical and mental disabilities and autism into the Israel Defense Forces, Special in Uniform (SIU) is paving the way for an inclusive society in Israel. Military service is a rite of passage of sorts for Israeli high school graduates, as well as the gateway to a successful career and future. Special in Uniform offers adolescents with special needs training and skills that empower them to integrate long-term into Israeli society and the workforce by accentuating the unique talents of each participant and placing him or her into an appropriate setting within the IDF. Special in Uniform's two-year volunteer training program culminates with graduating youths receiving their soldier's IDs and being placed in military bases across Israel where they cull from the knowledge and skills that they acquired to perform important jobs on base.

Motti Levine, CEO of Haifa Group, shares that "Haifa Group has been sponsoring an SIU unit for quite some time, and we're delighted that Big Mike and Advanced Nutrients joined our mission. This program is not just about the kids; it's also about us, because our sponsorship and efforts to promote inclusion make us better people."

This week, Big Mike came full circle, returning to Israel to celebrate with the Advanced Nutrients SIU unit as eight young men and women with cerebral palsy received their dogtags, badges and



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Cannabis King "Big Mike" Straumietis and Druze Commander Major Rami Hassan

berets and became full-fledged members of the Israel Defense Forces.

A winter sun shone brilliantly in Ered Army Base in Yehud, and the lyrics of “Yachad Lev El Lev” sung by soldiers with special needs filled the air. For the past two years, SIU’s Advanced Nutrients group of wheelchair-bound teens traveled several times a week from Herzfeld Special Education School in Holon to Ered Base where they participated in a volunteer corps of the IDF and received intensive, one-on-one and group training that improved their physical, cognitive and social skills. This week, two years of effort were crowned in success.

Adi* of Holon has cerebral palsy, but even her wheelchair couldn’t stop her from achieving her goal of becoming a soldier. Her mom Hannah shares: “When our family learned about Special in Uniform from Herzfeld, we understood that this was a singular opportunity for Adi to realize her dream and make a significant contribution to the State of Israel in a strong, supportive environment.”

Special in Uniform endowed Adi with all the knowledge and skills necessary to realize her dream of becoming a soldier like her dad, older siblings and cousins. Throughout her volunteer stint, she was trained by outstanding commanders and flourished in SIU’s warm, inclusive and accepting social environment. Most important, she gained confidence in herself, her strengths, and her abilities to succeed.

Ofer, another brand-new soldier, was grinning from ear to ear as he received his dogtag and beret along with seven buddies, and he shares his feelings about this momentous day in his life. “I have cerebral palsy, which affects my mobility and speech. Yes, I’m confined to a wheelchair, but today, I’ve left my disabilities behind! Today, I’m a soldier, an equal. I can give to the country, and I will make everyone proud.”

The joy was palpable as the soldiers received their dogtags and tossed their caps in the air, celebrating their induction into the IDF. The beaming parents spontaneously lifted their children out of their wheelchairs, and they all danced together celebrating the realization of a collective dream.

Director of the Special in Uniform branch in Ered Army Base Colonel Rami Hassan shares: “Special in Uniform soldiers serve our country with love, faith, and commitment. I observe, every day, how military service enhances their characters and personal growth, and how they, in turn, contribute their all to the IDF. They’re amazing, and I never cease to be awed that together, we’ve created an inclusive military with hallmarks of values and ethics.” Hassan divulges that the brand-new inductees will be integrated into a company of soldiers who will prepare kits for Home Front Command to be distributed in schools around the country.

“Today is a holiday for Big Mike’s children. Mike is SIU’s most generous American partner and donor, and he’s committed to helping Israel’s special needs community,” says Rabbi Mendy Belitzky who founded Special in Uniform in cooperation with JNF-USA and the IDF. “Today, we

thank you and bless you, Mike!"

Eli Mandelbaum

Special in Uniform

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