

OUT IN FRONT

EXAMINING THE 'STARTUP NATION'

SCHOOL CELEBRATES ISRAEL'S FOOD, CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP POSITION IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP
BY DOREEN HEMLOCK



A small country (the size of New Jersey) with 8.5 million people (fewer than New York City), Israel has the second-highest concentration of startups worldwide, after California's Silicon Valley. It has more companies on the NASDAQ exchange than Japan, South Korea and India combined – a total of 93.

Those are just two reasons the "Startup Nation" was the subject of the School's "Focus on Israel" event April 4. Out in front Israeli officials and company leaders active in South Florida headlined the event, which also gave attendees the opportunity to enjoy Israeli food and dance.

"Every year, there are 1,000 new Israeli companies being launched. Every eight hours, a new company comes to life," Inon Elroy, Israel's economic minister to North America, said to the business school audience gathered in Storer Auditorium. He added that Israel is known for innovation in mobile tech, cybersecurity, health care and water. Recently, U.S. giant Intel agreed to purchase Jerusalem-based developer MobileEye for \$15.5 billion; Intel will use its driver-assistance systems in autonomous vehicles.

Meital Stavinsky, a lawyer at Holland & Knight in Miami who helps Israeli startups expand in the U.S., outlined the nation's unique ecosystem: an active government that invests in and promotes innovation; strong universities; and a military that encourages draftees born in diverse countries to think "out of the box." Israeli innovation also is spurred by "necessity," needing to find methods to create water and food in the desert, she said.

"The way we were brought up is to think for yourself," added Itay Tayas-Zamir, CEO and founder of Woosh Water, an Israeli startup now expanding in the U.S. "There's a lot of chutzpah that makes it easy to imagine something that doesn't exist yet." His Tel Aviv-based company has developed "smart-water stations" that let customers clean containers and fill them with filtered, chilled drinking water. Miami Beach will be installing about two dozen of the stations later this year.

Israel's government encourages startups in myriad ways, even offering high-tech visas for skilled immigrants and, soon, innovation visas for immigrants to start companies in Israel, Stavinsky said.

That openness to immigrants helped draw Uri Benhamron, a Venezuelan who now runs a venture capital group focused on Israeli clean tech. He noted that Israel's government has set up incubators nationwide and funds them, pouring more cash per capita into R&D than any other nation.

Miami doctor and serial entrepreneur Maurice R. Ferre has used Israeli technology in all his ventures and now leads an 18-year-old Israeli company developing a new generation of non-invasive surgery techniques. Insightec directs beams of ultrasound to problem areas in the brain and elsewhere to treat essential tremor and other disorders. It has worked with more than 10,000 patients so far. "You might as well think big," said Ferre, "because it takes almost the same amount of energy."

The Focus event also featured a welcome from Israel's consul in Miami, Lior Haiat; falafel, hummus and other Israeli foods; and an Israeli dance performance.

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