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Howard and Brad Singer were among representatives of Seeds of Peace who rang the NASDAQ opening bell May 26.

Two local funding partners of Seeds of Peace, Howard and Brad Singer, were among those present as representatives of Seeds of Peace on May 26 given the honor of opening NASDAQ. "Seeds sent us an email on Friday saying that they were invited for Tuesday to ring the bell," Brad Singer told The Jewish Journal. "They asked if we were interested in joining them. We said 'of course'."

Founded in 1993 by journalist John Wallach, Seeds of Peace has become an internationally recognized model for conflict resolution. At the center of the program is an international camp visited each summer by students from high conflict areas all over the world, mainly the Middle East and South Asia. The singers are active in the Jewish Federation of Ocean County.

"What began in 1993 as a camp program with 46 Israeli, Palestinian, and Egyptian teenagers has expanded into a global operation with offices in over 10 cities around the world and nearly 4,000 young leaders working for peace," according to the Seeds of Peace Web site. Since 2001, Seeds' South Asia program works with Indian and Pakistani youth in hopes of breaking down tension between the two groups. There is also a domestic program known as "Maine Seeds," which deals with racial and ethnic conflict resolution within the state of Maine.

The organization has gained plenty of national and international recognition from many countries' governments. High profile politicians and recognizable figures sit on the Seeds of Peace Board of Directors. Their advisory board includes: George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Queen Noor of Jordan, and Israeli President Shimon Peres.

Seeds of Peace relies on government support and financial funding from different large organizations and businesses in order to maintain its programming. As funding partners, Howard and Brad Singers' company, Clean Like Pros, makes an annual donation of essential cleaning supplies to the Seeds of Peace campsite in Maine. Howard Singer learned of the organization in 1993 when Manny Lindenbaum, a past chair of the Jewish Community Relations Council and member of the board of the Jewish Federation of Ocean County, brought the program to Omnibus in Lakewood. "I love the whole concept," said Lindenbaum. "I did one program at Omnibus in Ocean County. Howard and [his wife] Anise saw it and were captivated."

After learning about Seeds of Peace, "I became so caught up in the mission that my wife and I wanted to help in some meaningful way," said Howard, who had been working with Seeds for some years, when his son, Brad, wanted to get involved as well.

"My son, Brad, works alongside me these days," Howard said. "We draw product from various manufacturers that we buy from and they in turn donate supplies. We also donate what we have not been able to sell from our fiscal year."

Leslie Lewin, camp director of Seeds of Peace, spoke to The Jewish Journal about the Singers' involvement.

"We are all incredibly grateful for their continued support," she said. "Howard and Brad have truly taken it upon themselves to reach out. They gather up quite an annual donation of very practical things that we need... we feel very fortunate."

Both the Singers and the Lindenbaums had endless praise for the organization.

"I just heard about it and immediately got excited," Lindenbaum said. "I've always been very peace oriented, and there is so much education that goes on which is so negative. People are scared of the other. Seeds helps both sides to meet on neutral ground. It's a great thing."

"We run two three-week sessions every summer with about 150 campers each session," said Lewin. Young teens from high conflict areas, chosen by their governments, schools, and other community organizations, stay in bunks with peers of different backgrounds.

The goal of the workshops is not to change participants' views completely, but rather to make progress and help them to see both sides.

The Singers and the Lindenbaums observed this firsthand at the camp.

"These kids are great, just phenomenal young people," said Howard Singer. "If we help them to get together to learn from one another there will be a change... I don't think that

I will live to see it, but you never know."