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Jersey City welcomes Israeli startups for conference



Alana Weiner, director of media affairs with the consulate general of Israel, emcees the Israel Technology Showcase at City Hall in Jersey City on Monday, June 23, 2014. Reena Rose Sibayan/The Jersey Journal

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Jersey City hosted a conference today for eight Israeli startup companies, with participants saying they hope the showcase will lead to more businesses choosing New Jersey and Jersey City in particular as a home base.

Ido Aharoni, Consul General of Israel in New York, who last appeared at City Hall for **an Israeli flag raising last month**, said today the conference was a way to introduce Israel's "competitive edge" and "enormous degree of creativity" to American investors.

"We've been spending too much time and too much energy discussing our geopolitical problems, which are important, but for the most part, irrelevant for the average American," Aharoni told The Jersey Journal.

Israel has more startups per capita than any other country on the globe and is No. 2, after the United States, in the total number of these newly established companies. Officials with eight of them, including Pango, which says its app can cut down waiting times at parking garages, and Farmigo, an online farmers market that connects farmers with customers, appeared at today's showcase.

Jersey City Heights resident Colleen O'Leary lined up to meet Farmigo CEO Benzi Ronen during the hour-long networking session. O'Leary, 37, told The Jersey Journal she's interested in both a job and in the growing local food movement.

"I like the idea of knowing where your food came from," she said.

Ronen, 43, said his appearance at today's conference helped him connect with residents, workers, school officials and pastors who want to help him expand Farmigo, which is based in New York, across the Hudson River.

"I think it's smart for Jersey City to try to position itself as a great place for startups," he said. "It has cheaper rent .. you have a great work population – why not make it a hub?"