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Business

Billionaire Saban Helps Raise \$29 Million for Israeli Troops

By [Amanda L Gordon](#)

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- ▶ Haim and Cheryl Saban are the force behind L.A. fundraiser
- ▶ Paul Singer, Daniel Loeb, Len Blavatnik among the donors



Haim and Cheryl Saban *Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg*





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Haim Saban has spent a lot of time on the stage of the Beverly Hilton ballroom.

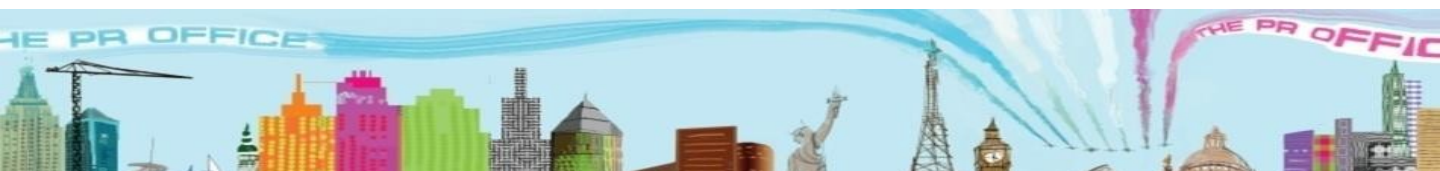
For 13 years, the CEO of Saban Capital Group has “schnorred” guests, as he puts it, on behalf of the Israel Defense Forces, emptying their pockets of more than \$250 million while he and his wife have given \$55 million of their own.

He’s done this by calling on friends to stand up at their seats and publicly announce the amount of their gifts. One year, the haul was \$31 million, then \$37.1 million, with Saban pitching in to bring the total to \$38 million. Last year -- which was his swan song -- it was \$60 million.

“I thought it’s time to pass the baton, so we’re passing the baton,” Saban, 75, said in an interview at his table as a waiter put down a plate of sushi. “Nobody asked me to. Nobody pushed me to.”

This year’s event raised \$29 million. Some came from donors who didn’t attend the Nov. 7 fundraiser in Los Angeles, such as Paul Singer, Daniel Loeb, Sheldon Adelson, Steve Tisch, Len Blavatnik, Yuri Milner and Larry Ellison.

Still, there were plenty of pledges made in the room, from the man who gave \$5,000 in honor of Donald Trump and Mike Pence, to the recent bar mitzvah boy who gave \$180.





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Saban was the first up, pledging \$10 million. Later, his wife Cheryl said they would give another \$5 million.

Star Power

And where were Ashton Kutcher and Robert De Niro, just two of the celebrities that have attended in the past, drawn in by the Sabans?

Without the Sabans chairing, the star power was dimmed. Instead, the Israeli soldiers seated in uniform throughout the ballroom got the spotlight all to themselves, starring in Hollywood-style videos that told their stories.

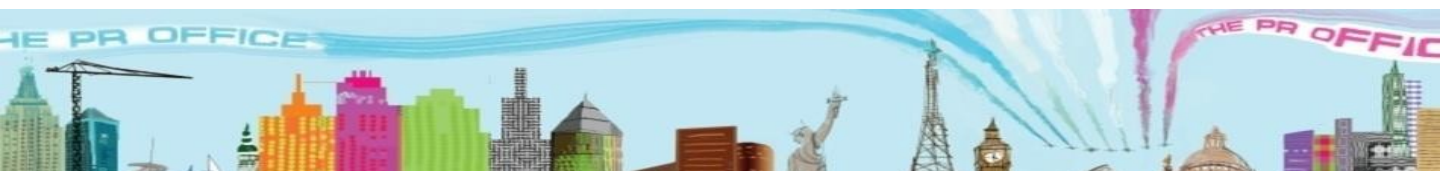
Amit Kadosh, 30, went to college on a Friends of the Israel Defense Forces scholarship after serving and became an engineer at a tech company, according to the video. It ended with him and his girlfriend Talya at a beautiful outdoor spot, musing on where he'd be if FIDF hadn't helped pay for his education.

Then, boom! Kadosh was on stage, in the flesh, proposing to Talya on bended knee. She said yes. The room roared.

Another video told of an American soldier who lost his eyesight in an explosion in Iraq. But an Israeli device called OrCam is giving him new vision. It provides voice descriptions of items he holds up to it, from a \$5 bill to the color of a shirt.

For Saban, the pitch for supporting FIDF is simple enough.

"I just let them understand as much as I can that there's only one Jewish



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state in the world, that Israel is our staunchest ally, and if it weren't for the IDF there would be no Israel," Saban said. "So those who care about their Judaism, their Jewishness, those who care about the state of Israel, who care about the U.S-Israel alliance, care, and people have been very receptive."



Ryan Spivak, a plastic surgeon, and Danielle Spivak, head of of American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. *Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg*



Mayer Khakshouri and son Daniel, with Lonnie and Jimmy Delshad. *Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg*



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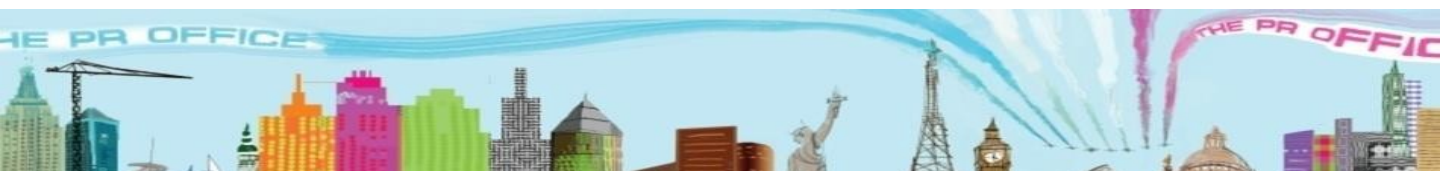


Or Lenchner, an Israeli diplomat, and Captain Noy Bar of the IDF. Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg

Israeli talent was also in the spotlight in London last week at the awards ceremony for the Conference of European Rabbis' annual Internet Entrepreneurs Competition. The event, whose backers include Blavatnik and Ronald Lauder, awards 62,000 euros (\$69,000) in prizes to altruistic startups.

After the ceremony at Bevis Marks, the U.K.'s oldest synagogue in continuous use, the winners -- Yehuda Elram of biotech startup eggXYt, Elena Sinel of Acorn Aspirations and Yael Zamir of Embryonics -- moved to a ballroom of the Four Seasons hotel that neighbors the Tower of London for salmon tartare.

Zamir, a physician and mother of four, founded Embryonics in 2017. The





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startup is developing artificial intelligence algorithms designed to improve the success rate of in vitro fertilization treatments.

Sinel's Acorn Aspirations is aimed at introducing teens to problem-solving using AI, while Elram's eggXYt is developing an ultrasound technology that detects the sex of chicken embryos to prevent unnecessary and wasteful incubations in the poultry industry.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-11/billionaire-saban-helps-raise-29-million-for-israeli-troops>

