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Tucson mission seeks partnerships in Israel

Common interests in border security and anti-terrorism weapons are motivations.
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Tucson's high-tech sector is looking to hook up with Israel to create partnerships in biotech, information technology, aerospace and military fields.

Once again, the University of Arizona Science and Technology Park is behind this latest venture, which in recent years has taken park and other Tucson economic development officials to Lyon, France; Jena, Germany; Manchester, England; Stockholm, Sweden; and Ottawa, Ontario.

This time, the Tucson chapter of the America-Israel Friendship League pointed Bruce Wright and John Grabo at the tech park to Israel.

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"The business between **Tucson** and Israel is practically nonexistent," said Avi Maidenberg, the league's regional development director. "We're hoping to change that."

Israel and the United States do \$20 billion in trade every year, he added, and half the states have an office there.

With an estimated Jewish population of 25,000, **Tucson** should have an economic link to Israel, he said.

Wright and Grabo have searched the world the past five years to find compatible cities for high-tech collaborations. Israel intrigues them greatly.

"We see Israel as another region that gives us enormous opportunity," said Wright, the tech park's chief operating officer. "We have a large Jewish community (in **Tucson**). We see a need to build on those natural alliances."

And there is a common vision between Israel and **Tucson**.

"There probably is no greater technology commerce center in the world than Israel," Grabo said. "We have the same vested interests: protect borders. No one knows homeland defense better than the Israelis. We can do joint research projects."

Maidenberg said arid land studies in Arizona could also be discussed. Maidenberg, Wright and Grabo will lead a team of about seven Tucsonans for a technology **mission** to Israel from Nov. 7 to 14.

They will visit Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa to meet with foreign ministry and ministry for commerce and technology officials; scientists and administrators at Technion Institute, the leading high-tech research and development university in Israel; and several high-tech companies, Maidenberg said.

Bob Breault, who coined the term Optics Valley for **Tucson's** optics industry, will travel to Israel to increase the visibility of his optics software firm, Breault Research Organization.

Breault is a leading private-sector figure in **Tucson's** international business relations.

"They are trying to develop anti-terrorism things, and that's what we're working on, anti-terror weapons," Breault said.

"We have to think outside the region. (**Tucson's** relations with) Mexico and Canada are doing good; time to expand one more time," said Mayor Bob Walkup, who will join the **mission**.

In Ottawa, **Tucson** has developed university, mayoral and high-tech business relationships.

A delegation from Manchester is scheduled to visit **Tucson** in October.

The friendship league and Wright had tried to send a technology **mission** to Israel since 1999.

Four earlier **missions** were slated but canceled due to increased conflicts in the Middle East.

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