ABIGAIL KLEIN LEICHMAN

It is not easy to look at the scars of a child burn survivor. Teaneck-based attorney Sam Davis has seen hundreds of such children since he founded the not-for-profit Burn Advocates Network as a philanthropic outgrowth of his experience helping clients whose lives were devastated by burn injuries.

When he looks at children attending the many burn camps in the United States to which BAN has provided volunteers, adaptive musical instruments, and recreational equipment over the years, he sees their pain but he also sees tangible ways to help.

Help can be as simple as providing Strumstick string instruments, which children who are missing fingers or hands can play with an adaptive pick, or as complicated as finding the funds and personnel to start ambitious new programs.

Years ago, BAN arranged to fly a few Israeli children to a Pennsylvania burn camp after Mr. Davis learned that Israel did not have a program similar to Amer-
able to find a date because of her disfiguring facial scars, the result of the burns she suffered in a house fire 11 years earlier. Her doctors did not have any solutions to offer other than a risky open surgery.

Her comment reminded Mr. Davis of something he’d learned very recently at the European Burn Congress held at Shriners Hospital in Boston.

“They were all talking about how lasers have become a primary tool rather than an adjunct tool,” he said. “Without the risks of open surgery, new-generation CO2 ablative lasers are capable of making scars less noticeable and even enabling a kid with facial contractures to smile without effort.

“A single treatment can help release a contracture. A course of five to eight sessions can diminish the size and discoloration of scars. Deep CO2 laser surgery starts a process where the collagen reorganizes and improves appearance dramatically, with very few complications,” he continued.

“When used in combination with minor plastic surgery to release the tension on a scar, laser treatment can really improve how kids look and feel, and also relieve the itching, which is a big problem.”

Mr. Davis discovered that some of the companies making these cutting-edge lasers were located in the Yokne’am industrial park less than half an hour from Camp Sababa. And so the idea of I-PEARLS was conceived.

“I-PEARLS will become a center of clinical excellence teaching plastic surgeons and others about this new modality and how and when it should be used,” he said. “It will also be a teaching and research center.”

One area of research will be how lasers can deliver drugs in an evenly dispersed manner to fight scarring using the same holes created by the laser treatment.

Camp Sababa campers will be eligible for treatment at the center regardless of ability to pay. Later this year, proceeds of a celebrity chefs culinary festival planned in Israel by Karlitz and Company will go toward defraying the cost of procedures.

Although Mr. Davis’ work with BAN has come to focus primarily on Israel, the organization also works with American soldiers wounded in the Iraq war, and it also has provided assistance in Haiti ever since the 2010 earthquake, which caused many devastating burns.

BAN refurbished and stocked the only burn clinic operating in Haiti at the time, and built a physical and occupational therapy clinic at Cap Haitien’s Justinian University Hospital. Davis sent over Bergen County medical specialists, arranged for the shipment of tons of medical supplies, and implemented a Burn Prevention Campaign to educate more than half a million displaced Haitians sheltered in tent cities.

BAN continues to sponsor surgical residents from Haiti for training in burn treatment. One of these young surgeons now is studying in Jerusalem. “He is the first Haitian to train with lasers at the I-PEARLS Center. After his rotation he will bring back with him the much-needed techniques to treat burns,” Mr. Davis said.

When he first met Dr. Yitzhak Kreiss, Sheba’s director general, Mr. Davis noticed a photo on the wall that looked familiar.

“I realized we had both volunteered at the same hospital in Haiti,” he said. “I’m proud to be associated with a hospital whose mission is to export healing.”

Whether in Haiti, the United States, Israel, India, or Brazil, pediatric burn survivors are remarkably similar, Mr. Davis observes.

“They all desperately struggle to fit in to their schools, make friends, and not be judged by their scars or be bullied because they look different,” he said. “We hope to make the combination of burn camp and laser surgery available to these kids and that someday it will become the standard of care globally.

“Burn camps restore the spirit. Lasers heal the scars. The combination is unquestionably synergistic.”

For more information on BAN, call Mr. Davis at (201) 220-3908 or email him at sam@burnadvocates.org.