



**I**n today's political climate where Left and Right find it increasingly difficult to meet in the center, Englewood, New Jersey mayor and high-profile immigration attorney Michael J. Wildes seems to have the magic touch to bring them together. Recently winning a political and moral victory, Wildes, a democrat, rallied his otherwise partisan constituents into a united front to stand up against evil and to stand up for America.

# MICHAEL WILDES

## *'Fight for Right'*

By Aliza Davidovit

Soon after of the release of the convicted Pan Am bomber who received a hero's welcome in Libya, America learned that Moamar Qaddafi was planning on coming to America to attend the annual fall United Nations Conference. When Mayor Wildes discovered that the tyrannical thug planned on spending his nights in Englewood and camping out on the grounds of a mansion owned by the Libyan government, he was enraged and determined to stop it from happening. His conscience screamed, "No way, no how, not in my backyard." As the grandson of Holocaust survivors he understood too well that haters and evil doers have to be stopped, barred, and disempowered each and every step of the way. They can't be

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afforded any breathing room at all, never mind camping ground. “There was no way this was going to going to happen on my watch,” Wildes says with great passion. “I was not going to be remembered as the mayor who saw Englewood’s hospitality maligned and misused by a financier of terrorism.”

While the whole world barked then balked, Wildes and the citizens of Englewood did not blink—and Qaddafi backed down. Mayor Wildes and city officials successfully filed a lawsuit in the State Superior Court in Hackensack for an injunction to enforce a stop-work order against the construction company performing repairs at the estate where Qaddafi planned to stay. It was granted.

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But Wildes is no stranger to dealing with high-profile international figures. In 1993, he joined his father’s prestigious Manhattan law firm, Wildes & Weinberg, the United States’ premier firm in immigration and naturalization issues. Wildes senior is best known for

his successful representation of former Beatle John Lennon and his wife, Yoko Ono, in deportation proceedings spanning a five-year period. Michael Wildes has his own share of famous cases. Wildes has made headlines by securing the cooperation of an accused terrorist who was implicated in the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia—an atrocity in which 19 U.S. servicemen lost their lives. Under protection of Capitol Police and wearing flak jackets, Wildes and his client went to Washington to speak with congressional leaders about Saudi Arabian diplomat Mohammed al-Khilewi’s need for asylum after defecting and walking off with incriminating evidence of international terrorism and espionage. The diplomat made allegations that the Saudi government was planning to assassinate Washington diplomats and had bugged the offices of the Jewish Defense League. Wildes prevailed and al-Khilewi was granted asylum, which is an extraordinary remedy for a national of Saudi Arabia. Wildes also represented Kwame James, who subdued “shoe bomber” Richard Reid, saving 197 passengers and crew members on American Airlines Flight 63 but who was nonetheless going to be deported because his visa had expired. He also helped a Manhattan doctor retrieve her three children from Syria, where they were allegedly being held unlawfully by her estranged husband.



A graduate of Yeshiva University's Benjamin Cardozo School of Law, Wildes began his elected career as a councilman in 1999 and was proud to be sworn in in 2004 and 2006 as Englewood's mayor by New Jersey Senator Frank Lautenberg. But being mayor doesn't always involve staving off visiting terrorists. He is also called upon to comfort families, firemen, congregants, and constituents in times of tragedy and loss. Often those visits have to be made on a Shabbat, the biblical day of rest, when driving is prohibited for Orthodox Jews. He is thus often seen walking for miles and miles to reach the homes or hearts of constituents who seek his support. Seeing that Englewood is 4.92 square miles, Wildes says that in the line of duty he has "definitely worn out a pair of Florsheims or two."

*"I love my role as mayor and helping people and making "my" small corner of America as good as it can be,"*

small corner of America as good as it can be," he shares with a sigh. "However, the demands of my legal career leave me with little choice." Those demands became evermore pressing when he accepted the role of Managing Partner of his firm.

The question is who can now fill Wildes' shoes as his second term is coming to an end and he has decided not run again, a decision which was hard to make. "I love my role as mayor and helping people and making "my"



He also plays the role of father and husband. Wildes is married to Amy Messer Wildes, an attorney as well, whom he met in his father's Immigration Law class at Cardozo. Amy is an associate at Wildes & Weinberg. They have four beautiful children together.

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Despite his stepping away from the political arena, those who know him also anticipate the next role he will assume. It's rumored that he has his eye on Congress and that Democratic leadership has its eye on him. The Democratic Leadership Council has listed Wildes on the "One Hundred to Watch" list which profiles 100 new Democratic

leaders around the country who are on the quick rise. as such, he has worked with the late Edward Kennedy, Hillary Clinton, Joseph Lieberman, Nancy Pelosi, and John Kerry, who have recognized and appreciated his fundraising prowess. Most recently, he has been a strong supporter of the re-election bid of New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine, who appointed Wildes to a statewide "Blue Ribbon State Panel on Immigration Policy"—a recognition of his talents and expertise in U.S. immigration law and policy.

But ribbons do not make the man. In his heart resonates the ever-present voice of his departed mother who taught him that it's more important to be a mensch than to be a mayor or a senator. And it is by those guiding principles that Wildes leads his life. "One day I know I'll be the former something—former mayor, former senator, a former something," Wildes says realistically. But with steadfast values he will make certain the day never comes when he'll be the former Michael Wildes.

 LISA DAVIDOVITZ