



Speak EZ

Your Monthly MetroWest E-Newsletter

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Pope Pius and the
Holocaust, presented by
the Holocaust Council of
MetroWest

CAMPAIGN UPDATE

JCC MetroWest took 50
athletes to the JCC
Maccabi Games in Detroit,
Michigan, this summer. We
brought home four bronze
medals for tennis, swim-
ming, boy's basketball,
and boy's baseball.

Voice of UJC Leadership

The Best of Times

by Gary Aidekman, UJC President



As I begin my term as president of UJC, it is an exciting and challenging time for us all. We have difficulties to face together, but we also have new opportunities, and the chance to achieve more than we ever have before.

One of the major challenges facing us now is a tough economy. We are all feeling the pain of soaring gas and food prices. But this makes the work we do all the more urgent. Just think about those who depend on our help to get by in normal times. Think about how hard their lives must be now. We can't afford to fail them.

At the same time, there is a new spirit at UJC. It is part of our new initiatives and new successes. Jewish education is on the front burner now in a big way. The MetroWest Community Day School Fund for Academic Excellence and Affordability is helping more and more MetroWest families make Jewish education part of their children's schooling. And the PJ Library will be bringing quality Jewish educational materials right into their homes.

And there's more. The health and fitness center on the Whippany Campus will be revamped and improved in the coming months. We have come to an agreement with Gold's Gym. They are taking over operation of the center this month and have plans to upgrade the facility.

And our ability to serve Morris County Jews is increasing, due to our new Morris Outreach program, supported by a UJC grant, in coordination with JCC MetroWest and Jewish Family Service (JFS) of MetroWest. Morris County Connection (MCC) is bringing programs from JCC, JFS, and other UJC partner agencies to public spaces throughout the county, programs like Jewish story times at bookstores, Passover programs in local supermarkets and coffee shops, Hanukkah card-making workshops in home decorating stores, and more. In fact, in the coming year, we'll be expanding our efforts to include a day of community service; Morris County Carelink, in partnership with MCC, UJC's Young Leadership Division, and JFS; and a parenting conference, co-sponsored by MCC, JCC, JFS, the Partnership for Jewish Learning

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and Life, and the Hebrew Academy of Morris County. UJC is doing more in Morris County than ever before.

And we are basking in the glow of one of the most exciting and successful programs UJC has ever been part of. Taglit-Birthright Israel brings thousands of young Jews to Israel from all over the globe, for free, and they return home with a new passion for Judaism. We can hardly keep up with the demand in our community. We sent three groups this year, and it looks like there will have to be even more in future years.

It is an exciting time to be taking on the helm of UJC, and an ideal time to focus on our core mission, to inject the enthusiasm and momentum of our successes into the heart of what we do.

Our mission is two-fold. First, we help Jews in need. The challenges are great now and are likely to be for some time to come. But it is up to us all to be sure, even in tough economic times, that no Jew is ever without hope, is ever without a place to turn when there's trouble.

Second, we build and strengthen Jewish community, and we do it through conduct-

ing cultural events and initiatives to teach Jewish values – by living the tradition we share. The successes we've had recently are excellent, and they are only a beginning.

We are a people with a purpose. At the heart of our tradition is a responsibility: that we are “a light among nations.” It is our responsibility to lead the world by our example, and to provide the example of what it means to do good, to be good – to commit ourselves to *tikkun olam*, to repairing the world.

UJC plays a crucial role in actualizing that purpose. We are the nexus of Jewish community and one of the best resources for teaching and practicing Jewish values. I know of no institution in the Jewish world that better serves our people and our purpose, our mission in the world.

I look forward to working with you all to make our successes what success should always be – a first step towards future achievements. It is going to be an exciting time.

And, I wish you all a happy, healthy, and wonderful Rosh Hashanah.

Thoughts from MetroWest Rabbis

One Mitzvah Leads to the Next

By Rabbi Alan Silverstein

UJC MetroWest is a leader in promoting Religious Pluralism within the State of Israel. For more than a decade, our Jewish Federation has seeded and supported Masorti [Conservative], Reform, Modern Orthodox, and “Non-stream” projects that promote Jewish continuity and mutual tolerance among Israeli Jews. Religious outreach has been made to young adults, families with toddlers, teenagers, new immigrants, patients in medical facilities, people below the poverty line, folks affected by terrorism

and by repeated bombings, senior citizens, and many other groups, as well.

An example of the need for pluralistic religious options has been *Bar and Bat Mitzvah* training programs and ceremonies for children with Special Needs. Most youngsters beset with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, or mild retardation had been ineligible for these mainstream communal milestones. Traditional Jewish law posits that “the deaf [and the...] mentally challenged... are not obligated by the *mitzvot*.” Therefore, they cannot lead others in communal prayer. A strict application of this prohibition closed access to *Bar Mitzvah* for

families already distressed by severe limitations imposed upon their children in other walks of life.

Thirteen years ago, courageous Special Needs educators joined with rabbinic leaders within the Masorti Movement to sensitively find *halachic* solutions to this human dilemma. For example, the youngsters began to be called up to the Torah accompanied by another adult. With the application of diverse technologies for instruction as well as considerable allotments of “tender loving care,” at no cost to the family, more than 3,000 youngsters and their relatives from all walks of Israeli life [with 300 ceremonies more each year] have become *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* under Masorti auspices. Reporting from a Special Needs *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony at the Masorti synagogue in Kfar Saba, the July 8, 2008, edition of *Yediot Acharonot* noted: “Donning tallit and tefillin, and the boys wearing a kippa, 6 autistic children [5 boys and 1 girl] came forward to read from the weekly *parasha*. The occasion moved onlookers deeply, and there was not a dry eye in the room...”

The great success of this nation-wide program [the only national program of its kind in the Israel] has inspired *halachic* creativity elsewhere, notably among the modern Orthodox rabbis of the Tzohar organization. Religious pluralism, tolerance, and Jewish continuity have been well served in the process. Moreover, a new genre of pedagogic expertise and family counseling is spreading throughout the Jewish world. This coming fall [October 29-November 2], Susie Dvoskin, one of the daring Special Needs founders of the Masorti program, will visit MetroWest and Congregation Agudath Israel in Caldwell. She will share the tools of this sacred project with Special Needs educators, rabbis, and cantors in our community. “*Mitzvah goreret mitzvah*” [One *mitzvah* leads to another]. Doing the *mitzvah* of supporting Religious Pluralism in Israel has led to the future performance of *mitzvot* in New Jersey, as well.

Rabbi Alan Silverstein is rabbi at Congregation Agudath Israel of West Essex, in Caldwell.

Making a Difference

My Taglit Birthright Israel Experience

by Rachel Murray

From Christmas to Passover and everything in between, my parents, brother, and I celebrated the whole gamut of holidays while I was growing up. We didn't attend church. We didn't attend synagogue. I didn't learn about religion. I didn't care about religion. My father's background is Irish Catholic and my mother's is Ashkenazi Jewish. Both of my parents rebelled against their religions while growing up. The end result was our household and family being completely devoid of religion. My parents always told my brother and me that if

we ever felt the need to learn about a religion or go to a place of worship, they would take us – I never felt the need.

A few years ago, I met a Conservative Jewish boy who is now my fiancé. It's a good thing that I come from a “Jewish” family and have a “Jewish” mother, because otherwise, my fiancé, like any good Jewish boy, probably wouldn't have started dating me!

About six months ago, I was asked, during a discussion with my fiancé's parents, “Do you consider yourself Jewish?” I thought to myself, “What does it mean to be Jewish? What do you have to believe in? What do you have to do? What do you have to know?” At the time that I was asked, I felt that I couldn't confidently

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answer “yes,” because, honestly, I didn’t know the first thing about what “being Jewish” even meant, and I didn’t feel the slightest connection to any religion, including Judaism.

In May, my brother, two cousins, fiancé, and I set off on our Taglit-Birthright Israel trip. Even though I didn’t feel Jewish or consider myself Jewish, I decided that I couldn’t pass up a FREE trip – after all, I do love traveling! I figured that going to Israel would be like any other trip I’ve been on – I’ve been to Europe, I’ve been to Mexico, Canada, Jamaica... I was pretty sure my memories of this trip would be much like my memories of my other trips – enjoyable, beautiful, fun. Then I would come home to life as I knew it before I left, and carry on my day-to-day lifestyle with a couple memories of the trip and maybe a few souvenirs. Eventually the souvenirs would break and the memories would fade.

When I first got to Israel, my first perception was that it was quite different from America. It looked different, it smelled different, the cars were different, the food was different. I couldn’t understand why, when I spoke to people who live in America about Israel, they always had this strong sense of Israeli nationalism. “Israel is amazing!” they would tell me. “You have to go to Israel. Israel is the best country!” For the life of me, I couldn’t figure out why people were so passionate about it!

As I continued on my Birthright trip, I started to realize that I was really enjoying not just the trip but Israel in general. Our tour guide was enthusiastic, passionate, and knowledgeable. We did so much and saw so much in the 10 days of the tour! We went north to the Golan Heights, camped in Bedouin tents in the desert, crawled through caves, climbed Masada and watched a sunrise, experienced nightlife in Tel Aviv, ate falafel in our tour guide’s house in Be’er Sheva, floated in the Dead Sea, listened to newspaper headlines on Shabbat in

Tiberias, ate Schwarma in Tzfat, learned about the Holocaust in Yad Vashem, perused the Jewish quarter in Old Jerusalem, met seven Israeli soldiers who stayed with us for five days, and rafted down the Jordan River – just to name a few of the activities!

I have heard from a lot of people that the Western Wall is a very touching place to visit. I always wondered how a wall could be so interesting. After all, it’s not a building, it’s a single wall! Call me a skeptic, but what is so moving about ONE wall?! But, as I started to walk closer and closer to the wall, I started to feel energy. Swirling all around me. In the air, in my body, everywhere. There were women bowing, some had tears in their eyes, some were silently mouthing prayers. The closer I got to the wall, the more energy I felt. By the time I was able to touch the wall and look straight up at the individual blocks and the crystal clear blue sky, the feelings I had were overwhelming. It was quiet there. There was a little breeze rustling the plant life growing through some of the cracks. I rested my head on a little piece of the 2,000-year-old wall, and reflected on all that I had seen and all that I had learned on my trip, and as I stood there, with all the energy around me, that’s when I finally realized – “I’m Jewish.”

This trip was not like other trips. I flew back to America a changed person. A person with a new found respect and thirst for knowledge of a culture, a religion, a country, a language, and a cause. I feel the need to go back to Israel to learn more, see more, experience more. And I fully intend on doing all that I can to help other people, like myself, with little or no background in Judaism, understand why going on a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip is so important.

Rachel Murray lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

Issues of the Day

Involving Young Adults in Jewish Community:

an interview with Rabbi Daniel S. Brenner

Speak EZ: What is the primary challenge you face in your capacity at Birthright Israel?

Rabbi Brenner: The focus of my work in the past year has been on how to get young adults involved in Jewish communal life. David Brooks, of *The New York Times*, has described them as “being in their odyssey years.”

SEZ: What does that mean, the “odyssey years”?

Brenner: A number of sociologists have looked at the widening gap between the time people leave home, when they are 18, and the time they set up a home, when they get married and settle down. In the last couple of decades, that gap has grown greater every year. The average age of marriage has gone from the lower 20s to 28, and we think that among Jews the average age is getting close to 30.

That means that we have a gap between 18 and 30 when people are not settling down. Thirty percent of people in their odyssey years go from one apartment to another apartment, from one city to another city. People in their odyssey years have an average of over 10 jobs during that time. They bounce around professionally and change their minds about what they want to do. Due to these factors, the normal wisdom about how people plug into a community after college just doesn't apply.

SEZ: What are the principal challenges of getting Jewish young adults involved in the Jewish community?

Brenner: I don't think there is a Jewish institution that gears itself towards the needs of people between the ages of 22 and 30. Successful synagogues are geared towards young families. Hillels for the most part end their involvement at 21. There are some Hillels that have graduate school programs, but they are nowhere near the size and scope of the undergraduate programs. Jewish Community Centers are increasingly geared towards families and the elderly. There isn't a natural organization or institution in the Jewish world that clicks with people between 22 and 30.

SEZ: What happens if we don't succeed in getting Jewish young adults involved?

Brenner: Young adults live in a society which is increasingly focused on commerce and fashion and calls on them to change their identities multiple times. It is also a society that is 24/7. I feel that the Jewish community offers a counter cultural way to live. It offers a way to say that history matters, that some sense of the sacredness of rest and the Sabbath matters, that life is lived best with friends that form a community.

I think that is very important for young adults. They are often the first to feel the effects of the economic shifts. And they're often away from home and away from community. So, community is an important factor in their lives. It's something that many of them are looking for. And the Jewish community has a particular take on community that I think is very grounding for many people.

SEZ: And is there a danger to the Jewish community if we don't involve young adults in greater numbers?

Brenner: I'm not one of those people who thinks the sky is falling at every moment for the Jewish community. But I think that we have a choice. If in 10 years, we

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want to have hundreds of thousands of Jewish couples bringing their three year olds to TotShabbat, we've got to invest in the 25 year olds now.

Not many people are doing that. I feel that the Jewish community has got to rethink the role that we can play in the lives of 22 year olds to 30 year olds, and I think we'll find that we can reap incredible benefits. The biggest benefit is that we'll have a generation that creatively leads the Jewish community forward. It's not that we'll have more members in any particular Jewish organization, but that we'll have the incredible creative energy of this generation and real leadership to pass the community on to.

SEZ: How does Birthright Israel fit in with that objective?

Brenner: The program that's been the most successful by far in engaging people 18 to 26 has been Birthright Israel. Working with Birthright Israel, I'm working with over 100,000 Jewish young adults. We have incredible name recognition among this group, and very positive vibes. 97% of the people who go on Birthright Israel trips say it was transformative, it changed their lives, it was a great Jewish communal experience.

Our goal is to empower the young adults to do the community organizing themselves, to involve them in organizing their friends, those they met on the trip and friends from other parts of their lives who are Jewish or connected to Judaism. To that purpose, we started a program called Next Shabbat, in which Birthright Israel trip participants organize their friends for Sabbath dinner. It cannot be in a commercial venue, it can't be in an institutional venue. It has to be in their apartment or in a park. And they organize through the Birthright Israel web site. We make it easy for them to create a web page and send out emails to invite their friends.

Within the first week we had this offer available to our alumni, we had over 800

people sign up to host events. They've invited over 10,000 friends. In our first round, we found the average size of an event was 14. Some crammed 20 and 30 people into their apartments. And we reimburse them for the expenses of the event.

The statistics are fantastic. 78% of the meals were home cooked. 87% said Kiddush. 82% reported the meal was kosher or kosher-style food. 77.6% wouldn't have hosted without this program. 55.2% said it was their first time hosting a Shabbat meal.

When I look at that kind of impact, I think, we need to see more of this. We need to see more of young adults, more organizing, on their own terms. We need to encourage that, we need to support it. So, we're working on a Shabbat resource guide, and we're working on training for Shabbat hosts.

This is a way to say, being part of the Jewish community does not mean going to something; it means getting involved in creating something. That's the ethos we're encouraging, and we're very excited about how hundreds of young adults are engaging in this way.

Rabbi Daniel S. Brenner is Vice President, Education, Birthright Israel Foundation.

Working Together with our Partner Agencies

Maturity Works: What do YOU want to be when you grow up? Options and Opportunities for Baby Boomers in Retirement *by Dr. Leonard C. Schneider*

There is a scene in the movie “The Graduate” in which an omniscient businessman approaches Dustin Hoffman at his graduation party and gives him the now famous and sage advice about what to do with his future. The businessman leans forward and whispers a single word in Hoffman’s ear: “plastics.” If “The Graduate” was filmed today, the businessman would whisper a different word: “Boomers.” Baby Boomers, those of us who were born between 1946 and 1964, number 78 million and represent a demographic tsunami that has already begun to change the shape of society in ways most of us never could have imagined.

As Boomers approach retirement, many are contemplating what to do next. According to studies conducted by AARP and others, more than 80% of Boomers want to work, or will have to work, after their traditional retirement from the workforce. High among the priorities of these Boomers in seeking a new position is the opportunity to “give back” by working in a nonprofit or community-based organization. Whether it is in a child care agency, a community health clinic, an arts organization, or a religious institution, Boomers are looking for ways to roll up their sleeves, use their skills and “do good,” whether for pay or as a volunteer.

Marc Freedman, founder and CEO of Civic Ventures, a nonprofit think tank devoted to Boomers, work, and aging, defines “the second half of adult life as a time of

individual and social renewal.” Freedman has coined the term “encore career” as “work that matters in the second half of life.” According to the 2008 MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures Encore Career Survey, more than half of all Boomers are currently in, or are looking for, purpose-driven jobs that can use their talents and provide them with both means and meaning. At the same time, companies, government agencies, and especially nonprofits are beginning to face a potential loss of skilled talent as long-time employees retire. The confluence of these two dynamics can lead to a mutually beneficial outcome for both the individual and for nonprofit agencies in the Jewish community and elsewhere.

In anticipating these trends, the Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) of MetroWest, under the auspices of the Ronald I. Coun Center for Creative Maturity, has developed a number of initiatives to be of assistance to both the mature adult and the community:

- “Maturity Works,” a no-fee job placement service especially for the mature job seeker, not only provides leads for paid employment through its 43-member synagogue network and dedicated web site MWjobs.org, but also offers assistance and training in resume preparation, interviewing skills, and networking. This service is being expanded to include civic engagement (or volunteer) positions throughout the community, which will provide retired Boomers with opportunities for not only reHirement, but reFirement, as well;
- “Life-Work Planning,” a comprehensive approach to exploring both vocational and a-vocational opportunities, helps individuals identify their interests, aptitudes, and transferrable skills, which can then be used in their

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search for meaningful paid employment, volunteer positions, or leisure-time pursuits;

- “Creative Maturity Expo,” an all-day event featuring noted speakers, workshops, and vendors providing information on health and wellness, financial planning, paid and volunteer job opportunities, eldercare services, and leisure-time pursuits. Hold the date for the second annual Creative Maturity Expo, to be held at the Alex Aidekman Family Jewish Community Campus, on November 16, 2008.

If you are a mature adult seeking a new opportunity to use your skills and experi-

ence, contact Dr. Meryl Kanner, JVS Supervisor of Career Counseling & Placement, via email at: mkanner@jvsnj.org; or by phone at: (973) 674-6330, ext. 271.

Founded in 1939, JVS provides a broad range of employment, skills training, rehabilitation, health and human services to New Jersey businesses and residents of the community. JVS is a partner agency of United Jewish Communities of MetroWest NJ.

Dr. Leonard C. Schneider is Executive Director, Jewish Vocational Service of MetroWest.

Community Relations Committee Legislative Update

CRC in Action: September 2008

Become an informed and active advocate

- CRC Community 9/11 program on Terror-Free Investment and Why it Makes a Difference
- Stop Iran Rally - UN Headquarters - September 22 at 12 noon. Iran's President Ahmadinejad is coming to the UN. Will you? Community buses are being organized: contact crc@ujc.org.
- Election 2008 programs in MetroWest

Sign up for the CRC mailing list to receive advocacy updates and action alerts