



# Speak EZ

Your Monthly MetroWest E-Newsletter

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## Voice of UJC Leadership

### Planning the Next 15 Years for Young Leadership

*by Dan Ramer, Co-Chair of the Young Leadership Division*

In 1994 my wife and I were newly married and new to Essex County. A co-worker invited us to come to a UJC fundraiser. We went, barely knowing what UJC stood for, let alone all the good UJC performs locally and around the world.

Fifteen years later, we find ourselves living and breathing UJC. I can't overstate the value of what can be accomplished by one Jew asking another Jew to help a different Jew. And that is what Young Leadership Division (YLD) is all about.

A lot has changed over the past 15 years. Email, the internet, texting, the rise of websites like Facebook, and a challenging economy to say the least. As we look forward, we must take these changes into account while planning the next 15 for Young Leadership.

As YLD co-chair in the second and last year of my term, we have learned many things about Jewish singles, couples, and parents ages 25-35. YLD covers to age 45, however we have been focusing our efforts recently on the next generation. Their volunteer time, spent away from their career and family, is very precious and they want to spend it productively in a way that will leave an impact. The typical large event UJA function with a speaker is not what's motivating or inspiring to them. More intimate settings like Shabbat gatherings in a private home or a night out at a cool, hip establishment where the next-geners can mingle, network, and develop friendships are more appealing. This younger group wants to get their hands dirty and participate in social action projects like painting an old home for the mentally challenged Jewish community. They want to do physical activities like Run for Rachel. And of course, they want information that will benefit their Jewish lives, such as a Parenting conference. These are all programs that we have put in place over the past year or so.

Our change in attitudes started about three years ago; we have strived to grow this younger crowd and to put together programming that suits their specific interests and passions. Our Young Leadership development program has been incredibly successful in teaching this group about the breadth and depth of the organization as well as the inner workings of the structure and financial process. We then place YLDers in areas of the structure that they feel most passionate about. We may have up-and-coming leaders who



Dan Ramer

### CAMPAIGN UPDATE

UJA launched a special Matching Gift Opportunity on March 22. Any new or increased portion of a previous gift will be matched Dollar for Dollar. To date, this effort has raised \$239,387, which doubled means \$478,774 to support crucial services.

want to be part of JVS because they are more business minded and others who want to get involved in the Israel Program Center because they are motivated by Israel and what Israel means to the Jewish people.

We have been successful. However, we have a lot to do over the next three to five years to ensure the future survival of UJC. I don't mean in 10 years, but in 20 and 25 years. One thing we continue to work hard toward is to translate our outreach and education efforts into fundraising power. We are, of course, at heart an organization that raises money for Jews in need. Sometimes, for some of our newer leaders, calling strangers and asking for money can be a daunting task. However, once you have UJC's purpose in your heart and mind, the passion and commitment comes through the telephone and in person and solicitation becomes a natural. We have to encourage and foster that commitment and passion so UJC will be as vibrant and relevant in 25 years as it is today. The YLD community is our future and we must adjust the means by which we attract and retain these volunteers to ensure the future of our leadership, and the Jewish community as a whole.

## Matching Gift Opportunity

### UJA is in a Funding Crisis, and Vital Services are at Risk

Like charitable efforts throughout the country, United Jewish Appeal of MetroWest NJ is in the midst of a funding crisis.

The ongoing economic downturn is more intense and appears likely to go on longer than anyone expected. It is affecting everyone, and it is affecting the Jewish community. Every week, a larger part of the MetroWest Jewish community is in real trouble: people suddenly at risk of losing their jobs, their homes, their health insurance, with many suffering severe emotional distress from not knowing what the future holds for them.

As the economy worsens, the problems increase, and UJA faces new challenges to our fundraising. For the first time in many years, we are facing a massive financial gap, which can jeopardize the vital services on which many in our community depend. At United Jewish Communities, we are cutting close to \$1 million in our annual operating budget, but we still face the prospect of falling short of our UJA campaign goal, by perhaps 15%, or more than \$3 million.

### **Without more support, vital services in MetroWest *WILL* have to be cut.**

That puts our community at a critical juncture. Some services may have to be cut, or eliminated – not only those aimed at the victims of the economy, but also programs and services that so many in our community depend on, year in and year out. Here are just a few that could be at risk:

- Subsidized mental health counseling for the uninsured
- Subsidized home care for the elderly
- Career counseling and job placement services
- Day care for MetroWest seniors
- Jewish education programs

The importance of each of these programs is measured in the faces and the stories of every person who needs them, and in what will happen if these programs aren't there. Think about just a couple of recent stories, and what it meant to "Sara" and "Glen" that they could turn to agencies that UJA supports when they needed help.

"Sara" is a Holocaust survivor who depends on Jewish Family Service for visits from a JFS social worker in her own home. If UJA funding is cut, she may be among 40 survivors, whose ages average 84, who could be denied services such as subsidized home care, adult day care, emergency financial assistance, and case management coordination.

"Glen" took early retirement four months ago when his employer closed the New Jersey office. But his pension is not what he expected. He is 57, has four children, and his wife has multiple sclerosis. Unable to find another job, he came to JFS with \$14 in his checking account. He received emergency cash assistance to fill his gas tank and buy food for his family. If UJA funding is cut, Glen may be left with nothing but \$14 in his pocket.

### **We can't do it without YOU!**

We need YOU – and everyone – to make your best possible gift to the 2009 UJA Campaign. And we, and everyone in MetroWest, need you to make your gift today.

To make your UJA pledge, please contact Holly at (973) 929-3043, or visit [www.ujcnj.org](http://www.ujcnj.org).

## Thoughts from MetroWest Rabbis

### **Passover: The Celebration of Freedom That Binds**

*by Rabbi Francine Roston*

Passover is all about questions. Why is this night different than all other nights? Why do we eat these special foods? When are we eating? Why don't kosher for Passover cookies taste better? Every year we ask the same questions and every year we have fresh discussions. Every year we come to the seder new people, having experienced another year of life, having learned more about

ourselves and having a new perspective on the gift of freedom, the harm of oppression, and the presence of miracles in the world.

Questions are the way we learn and the seder is structured in a way so as to elicit good questions. We place symbols on the table that provoke questioning: why do we have to eat *matzah*? Why do we take the beautiful green vegetables and dip them in salt water? Why do we eat bitter herbs and bittersweet *haroset*?

A question that has been bouncing around in my head this year is: how will I keep our celebration joyous? How will the restrictions of Passover help me to feel connected with God and the Jewish people and not utterly oppressed?! The celebration of Passover must be first and foremost a joyous festival of freedom. The limitations we feel by the laws of Passover are meant to teach us that liberation binds us to God. After leaving Egypt we are free to commit ourselves to Judaism – to a life directed by Jewish values, Jewish teaching and the *mitzvot* or commandments.

We are given eight days to experience the gifts of freedom. Although it feels like oppression when we have to pull back from general society and keep to ourselves more for eight days because of our dietary restrictions, it is not. This is one of the beautiful lessons of Passover, as JTS Chancellor Arnie Eisen wrote:

The point, I think, is that true liberation binds us, false service giving way to true. Unredeemed daily existence filled with its own pretenses gives way to more modest fare; the prohibition on bread, of course, also reminds us that human beings 'cannot live on bread alone, but upon all that goes forth from the mouth of the Lord.' If *hametz* represents our *yetzer ha-ra* (evil impulse), so does that evil impulse fuel our desire to cast off all bonds, all obligations, all authority; the atrocities committed in our day in the name of 'liberation' are staggering. So: *davka* (exactly) when we celebrate redemption, we are limited in the satisfaction of the most primal human desire (food), and are focused on the modest fare of *matzah*. Freedom, in this tradition, means subjection to the 'yoke of *mitzvah*' rather than the human yokes of either Pharaohs or false messiahs.

## Speak EZ

[from *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide & Commentary* by Michael Strassfeld, Harper & Row, NY 1985]

Why don't we make this year's Passover different from last year's? Why don't we put more attention to our observance of the laws for the entire eight days? Why don't we put more attention to our preparations for our seder discussions? The food is really the means to the end, which is engaging, educational experiences that help the generations connect and perpetuate the ideals of Judaism. This year, may we all appreciate and celebrate our freedom guided by God's *mitzvot*.

And, may we remember, in this year of uncertainty, that there are people around the world who are sitting at seder tables and others in need of food. Let us provide food and shelter for the needy, redeem the captives and continue to partner with UJC in perpetuating the mission of the Jewish people – to be a light to the nations and offer God's loving care to those in need.

Hag Sameah.

*Rabbi Francine Roston is rabbi at Congregation Beth El in West Orange.*

## UJA Benefit Concert

### The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual UJA Benefit Concert is coming, May 13

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Benefit Concert will be held on Wednesday, May 13, at 7:30 p.m., at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark. The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra will perform, conducted by Carlos Miguel Prieto. Philippe Quint is the featured violinist.

The honorees for this year's concert are Jane and Arthur Brody.

The Annual UJA Benefit Concert is always an important occasion, bringing the MetroWest Jewish community together and providing one of the largest fundraising events of the campaign year. But this year, the concert is more important than ever.

In the midst of the current economic crisis, the needs of the MetroWest Jewish community are increasing. The partner agencies of United

Jewish Communities of MetroWest NJ provide the social safety net, offering critical services needed by people who are facing sudden job loss, financial adversity, family stress, and other related challenges. To do that, these agencies depend on increased funding from UJA.

That makes this year's Annual UJA Benefit Concert not just a gala event, but an indispensable humanitarian affair. And that is something this year's honorees understand very well.

Jane and Arthur Brody are leading community philanthropists who have helped to shape the future of the Jewish community in MetroWest and beyond.

The Brodys have had a lifetime of volunteerism and leadership within the MetroWest Jewish community, including Arthur's service as past UJA Campaign Chair, past president of UJC MetroWest, current chair of UJA's Achim Division, and board member of the Executive Committee of UJC and the Jewish Community Foundation. He has been a member of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and vice president of the Council of Jewish Federations. He was also past president of the Jewish Education Service of North America and board member of the National United Jewish Appeal. In addition to his record of Jewish community service, Arthur has had a successful professional career as a vintner with vineyards and wineries in New York State and California.

This year's UJA Benefit Concert will also be something special for featuring two of the young leading lights of the Classical Music World.

Carlos Miguel Prieto, considered one of the most dynamic young conductors in recent years, has further widened his exposure by accepting a total of four music directorships in his native Mexico and the United States.

From the moment he takes the stage, Grammy Award-nominee violinist Philippe Quint captivates audience with his charismatic presence. Beyond his recognized star power, Mr. Quint is often lauded for a "searingly poetic lyricism" (*Daily Telegraph*, UK) in repertoire that ranges from Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms to the leading composers of our time. Mr. Quint has been in wide demand, both domestically and internationally.

The UJA Concert benefactors are Joan L.

and Allen I. Bildner, Short Hills; Judy and Stewart Colton, Short Hills; Toby and Leon G. Cooperman, Short Hills; Beth and William S. Furman, South Orange; Anita and Franklin Hannoeh, Livingston; Dr. Victor and the late Dr. Mia Parsonnet, Millburn; Lore and Eric F. Ross, South Orange; Judy and Josh S. Weston, Montclair; Beth and Leonard Wilf, Short Hills; and Barbara and Edward Zinbarg, Short Hills. The benefactors established an endowment that helps cover the cost of the concert, so a majority of the proceeds can support UJA and its partner agencies.

Proceeds from the concert will go to the 2009 UJA Campaign.

A Community Dessert Reception will be held at 6:30 p.m.

Concert tickets range from \$100 to \$20. To order, call 1-800-ALLEGRO (255-3476), Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. For additional information about the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual UJA Benefit Concert, call (973) 929-3037 or e-mail [ujabenefitconcert@ujcnj.org](mailto:ujabenefitconcert@ujcnj.org). You can also find detailed information about the event at <http://www.ujcnj.org/concert>.

## Making a Difference

### In Israel, a Jew Can Feel Jewish Simply by Being

by Brian Freedman

*Brian Freedman is a participant from MetroWest currently in Israel with the OTZMA program, an initiative of UJC and Jewish Federations of North America, in cooperation with The Jewish Agency's Department for Jewish Zionist Education. OTZMA participants travel to Israel for 10 months, taking part in community service projects. Brian was in Israel during the recent hostilities with Gaza. Here, he writes about how the trip is affecting his feeling solidarity with Israel, and with the Jewish people.*

Public transportation in Israel shuts down for the weekend in observance of the Sabbath. Jewish holidays, not Easter and Christmas, dictate the closing of schools. Twice a year, a siren commands all traffic in Israel to stop and dedicate a moment of silence for Jewish lives lost in the Holocaust and in the many wars in Israel.

In the State of Israel, a Jew can feel Jewish simply by being. It is not necessary for a nonreligious man to attend synagogue just to feel part of the Jewish culture and tradition. It's not necessary for a 13-year-old boy to spend countless hours memorizing a portion of the Torah, the majority of which he does not comprehend, just so he can recite it on the altar and proclaim his manhood.

As a secular Jew growing up in Morris County, a Christian-dominated society, my Jewish identity faded into the background. It usually was not until Christmas, when I would see ornate, brightly festooned trees dot the houses and lawns in my neighborhood, that my Jewish spirit would revive. My religious identity was defined more by my exclusion from events than by my participation in them. My parents once even hid presents under a small tree in the house just so I would not feel ostracized.

Living in Israel for the past seven months has revealed the significance of Judaism, not for its archaic rules and restrictions but for its ability to connect people and instill upon them a sense of solidarity and belonging. This unique bond attracts Jews to Israel from all corners of the Earth, from the United States and Argentina to Ethiopia and Iran.

This sense of solidarity has not been more evident than it was during the recent Gaza offensive. As a participant in a 10-month volunteer program, I most recently did a month of service for the army, and I just finished up two months of volunteer service in Ofakim, a sister city of UJC MetroWest.

While on the army base In January, our officer ordered us – 20 American volunteers, a group of senior citizens, and a group of mentally challenged volunteers – to stuff into backpacks a jumbled array of vests, helmets, fireproof uniforms, and jackets, which would then be sent to soldiers in and around Gaza. The total team effort took about three hours.

This feeling of collective responsibility is on display throughout Israel. At a town meeting in Haifa, families agreed to invite into their homes children in the South who are in daily threat of rocket attacks. In Jerusalem, a girl skipped high school to paint with children in bomb shelters in Sderot, where classes have been temporarily suspended. Also in Jerusalem, I attended a

concert fundraiser that was collecting money to offer kids in Ashkelon, a city also hit often by rockets, a “Fun Day” as a respite from the mental anguish caused by the daily sounds of blaring warning sirens and crashing rockets. In Tel Aviv, people swarmed to a market where shop owners from the South who have had to close their stores sold their products.

In Israel, religious and national prides melt into one towering wave of support, both for the army fighting the war and the citizens who are victim to it.

As a kid growing up in Montville, I never felt a strong bond with a large community, be it religion or country. I saw religion as old men with bears spouting words in a language I did not understand. I saw country as a massive, unidentifiable gaggle of people with cultural and religious beliefs different from mine.

Jews in Israel share the same history and same religious beliefs. Holocaust refugees from Poland can sympathize with Iraqi Jews who also fled their homeland from anti-Semitism, when, in the early 1950s, Arab countries around Israel persecuted their Jews in retaliation for the 1948 War of Independence.

A Jew from the United States and a Jew from India can share the experience of fasting on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, or eating apples and honey to toast the sweetness of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

In short, people need to feel part of something bigger than themselves. Nowhere in the world is this sense of solidarity more strongly enforced among Jews than in the State of Israel.

*Brian Freedman is 23 years old and lives in Montville, NJ.*

## Issues of the Day

### Jewish Education is an Investment in Jewish Identity, in *Menschlichkeit*

by Dr. Jonathan S. Woocher

The Great Depression was not a good time for Jewish education. Enrollments in Jewish schools (almost all “supplementary” in those days) dropped substantially, as families were forced to cut back on “discretionary” spending. Teachers were let go. Many communities drastically cut

funding for, and in some cases closed, their central agencies for Jewish education. By most accounts, it took until the post-war migration to the suburbs for Jewish education to recover, and we’ll never know how many Jews drifted away from Jewish life as a result.

We now face another period of widespread economic distress. Clearly, responding to immediate needs for food, shelter, and support is and should be a top priority. But, where will this leave Jewish education? Will we again see students dropping out, teachers being dismissed, and communal support wither?

Here in MetroWest there are positive signs that this will not be the case. Our major initiative to strengthen day schools and make them more affordable is moving forward and has become a national model. The Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life continues to plan and implement creative new initiatives like our campership program and PJ Library. Many of our synagogues are engaged in creative work of their own, developing new approaches to congregational education.

Nonetheless, the temptation may emerge, on the individual, institutional, and communal levels, to again put Jewish education in the category of something discretionary, even a “luxury” to be deferred to a more propitious time. This, I believe, would be a drastic mistake. Jewish education is an investment, not just an expenditure. It’s an investment in Jewish identity, in *menschlichkeit*, in creating the kinds of individuals and community that will always respond when the need is great.

We can learn some important lessons from business here. All businesses make efforts during tough times to cut unnecessary expenses. But, the really smart ones know that when the opportunity to grow comes again, they need to be ready. So they continue their R&D, and they maintain their core infra-structures and key personnel to the maximum extent possible. They know how difficult these are to replace once they have been dismantled.

One of the ironies of the present moment is that Jewish education has been on a dramatic upswing in recent years in terms of quality and innovativeness. The new programs that have been put in place in MetroWest are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of emerging possibilities

for engaging more children, adults, and families in exciting and inspiring Jewish learning. It would be a tragedy if we were to pull back now, when the challenges are great, but so are the possibilities.

The next few years will pose difficult dilemmas when it comes to allocating resources, whether in families, synagogues, schools, or the community as a whole. But if we remember that it is Jewish learning – Torah – that has kept us strong and united through the ages, I'm confident that we will make good choices.

*Dr. Jonathan S. Woocher is Chief Ideas Officer of JESNA (Jewish Education Service of North America) and heads its Lippman Kanfer Institute: An Action-oriented Think Tank for Innovation in Jewish Learning and Engagement. Dr. Woocher is also a resident of MetroWest and involved in UJC, both as a contributor and a volunteer.*

## Community Relations Committee Update

### CRC in Action

*Become an informed and active advocate*

#### **Urge Your Representatives to Support Iran Sanctions Enabling Act of 2009 (H.R. 1327)**

The Iran Sanctions Enabling Act of 2009 (H.R. 1327) allows state and local governments to divest from companies that have invested at least 20 million dollars in Iran's energy sector and will protect fund managers from potential lawsuits if they choose to divest from these companies.

Iran is the greatest national security threat to the U.S. and its allies. The Iranian regime tops the list of state sponsors of terrorism, is pursuing nuclear weapons in defiance of the international community, repeatedly calls for the destruction of Israel, and has one of the world's worst human rights records.

Your help is needed to end Iran's sponsorship of terrorism and its aggressive pursuit of nuclear weapons. As the new administration develops its policy towards Iran, we urge you raise your voice and advocate for tough economic measures to stop Iran's covert nuclear enrichment program and take action by divesting your personal holdings from targeted companies doing business with Iran.

#### **United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI) launches Iran Business Registry**

Signaling the growing concern among U.S. citizens about Iran's nuclear enrichment program, a newly formed organization called United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI) to provide advocates with a tool for putting financial pressure on companies reported to doing business in Iran. The IBR serves as an information clearinghouse to be used in making investment decisions and decisions on the products you purchase. Iran is uniquely susceptible to financial pressure at this time, as Iran's leadership diverts billions of dollars of oil revenue to its nuclear program.

#### **April is Genocide Prevention Month - Take Action to End Genocide in Darfur**

Genocide Prevention Month 2009 campaign honors the past, urges action now on Darfur, and seeks to create a global call for a mass atrocity prevention system. We urge you to participate in local efforts, which include the "Books of Conscience" project, urging President Obama to act for Darfur.

As April approaches, at least 1.1 million lives are at immediate risk due to the Sudanese president's decision to expel 16 aid organizations that provide essential food and medicine from the country. While the International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued a warrant for the arrest of President Bashir and a newly appointed U.S. special envoy has been appointed and is working to lead a sustained diplomatic effort toward peace in Sudan, the violence continues. In recent weeks, peacekeepers in Darfur have been attacked, aid workers have been kidnapped, and hunger and disease may soon spread like wildfire in refugee camps. Now is the time to take action to keep pressure on Washington and the international community on Darfur.

#### **Yom HaShoah observances serving the MetroWest Community.**

For more information about CRC Action Alerts, visit the CRC website at [www.ujcnj.org/crc](http://www.ujcnj.org/crc).