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Jewish Community Life in Regional Canada

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Message from RJCO Chair

Mark Siegel, M.D.

In 2013, Jewish Federations of Canada – UIA faced significant challenges as it searched for ways to maintain quality programming and services while significantly cutting

costs. Throughout the restructuring process, the board of directors and leadership was dedicated to maintaining the longstanding organizational commitment to the Jewish families and members living within regional communities across Canada.

Alongside Daniel Stern, Director of Regional Development at JFC-UIA, I will advocate on behalf of your communities in the face of the financial constraints on the organization. I will continue to work to strengthen the fabric of our Jewish community, both regionally and within the larger national scene.

But we can't do it alone. There are many people within your community who possess talents and drive that can be of great value to the organization. The Regional Communities Council is a forum in which you can be an active contributor to the conversation.

We are in the planning stages of a national conference for lay leaders, community members and philanthropists from regional communities. While the date is not yet set, we are eager to move

ahead with what I know will be an exciting event that will connect like-minded peers from across Canada. We

welcome suggestions for session topics and other matters that you feel would be of interest to explore.

We also recognize that vast distances separate communities and not everyone who wants to will be able to join us for the conference. A solution to this logistical challenge is regularly scheduled virtual gatherings. If we can't meet in person, online is the next best thing. It will serve to further strengthen the bridges between communities.

We will be in touch with details on all of the above initiatives as they take shape. But we welcome your input and feedback on all matters. Please contact Daniel Stern at DStern@jfcuia.org with ideas and suggestions on how we can improve on our results.

I hope 2014 brings you good health and much happiness.

A handwritten signature of Mark Siegel in black ink.

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Community Spotlights: Chanukah Celebrations

Guelph, ON

Families from the Guelph area enjoyed Beth Isaiah's Chanukah party on December 1st. The celebration featured candle lighting, with many guests bringing their own chanukiot. And what would Chanukah be without latkes and doughnuts? Beth Isaiah's own Marty the Magician put on a great show.



Above: Yaron & Michi and their sons Yossi & Solly (Howard Partnoy photo)

Kingston, ON



The Kingston Jewish Council hosted its annual Light Up the Night event on November 27th. The local Jewish community celebrated Chanukah with a candle lighting in Confederation Basin Park, followed by a special "latke dinner" and other festivities like a sing-a-long, dreidel games, a gift store and a display of unusual menorahs at City Hall's Memorial Hall.

Above: Queens University Hillel at LUTN (Barry Caplan photo)

Dalhousie IOC Students Build on Success

by Mark David, Advocacy Consultant, Atlantic Canada for The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (www.cija.ca)

After the recent, and very successful, Israeli Wine and Canadian Cheese event organized by Dalhousie IOC in coordination with the Atlantic Jewish Council and The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the IOC was specifically requested to table at the International Airport Terminal at the Dalhousie Student Union Building.



Naomi Rosenfeld, Director, Hillel of Atlantic Canada says the tabling was a huge success. The IOC table had by far the most foot traffic of any of the tables in the Terminal, the IOC students were extremely engaged in educating the people that came by, and they gave away tons of food and 'Size Doesn't Matter' swag. In addition, the Soda Stream machine at the table was a huge hit. At least 15 students asked where they could buy one in Halifax. They were referred to local retailers, especially Organic Earth Market. Can you say "BUYcott"???

Two King's journalism students who were writing an online article for class interviewed the IOC while two VPs of the Dalhousie Student union were at the IOC table - and they told the interviewers how cool they thought Soda Stream is. Lastly, a great new contact was established when a professor at the Rowe School of Management interested in bilateral exchanges with Israeli universities came by the booth.

All in all a very successful day - which shows how one good thing can lead to others. Way to go Dalhousie IOC!!

Dvar Torah

Do We Need to Believe in G-d to be Jewish?

Many are the thoughts of the human heart; let the counsel of the Lord arise! (Proverbs 19:21)

If you are having doubts about G-d you are in good company. 97% of North American Jews agree that one can be Jewish without belief in G-d. Half admit that they do not believe and a third would mistakenly argue that belief in G-d is not even a requirement of our faith. Twenty percent might describe themselves as being as “Jew-ish” as Woody Allen and feel comfortable discussing their belief in Jewish peoplehood while eating smoked meat on a Montreal bagel. Sadly, when the Cossacks came marauding through our Eastern European shtetlach, they didn’t stop to ask our beliefs before burning us. However, in the generations after the Holocaust, in democratic Canada, we have the freedom to choose and question.

Anecdotally, many perspective converts to Judaism tell me that they love the freedom to question G-d, and challenge intellectual pharaohs, that is embraced by Jewish theologians. Unlike our sister Monotheistic faiths Christianity and Islam, Judaism does not demand unquestioning acceptance of G-d. We are the Sons of Jacob, whom G-d renamed “Israel, the G-d wrestler.” Still, belief in Hashem is a litmus test and to join our faith one must stand before the open ark to say the Sh’ma thereby proclaiming that the Lord our G-d is One. Ruth famously declared “Your people will be my people” and

“Your G-d will be my G-d” when she converted.

My teacher David Wolpe observed that Judaism can exist without belief in G-d, but only briefly, as it can’t be fully transmitted. It is not true that the only “good Jew,” is a G-d fearing Jew. Theodore Herzl, who inspired the creation of the state of Israel, was still a “good Jew.” However, as Rambam said, “Ani Ma’Amin, I believe”!

Furthermore, I humbly submit that in Kingston (and generally outside of Israel) unless we uncover the faith to declare that G-d gave us the covenant of Torah, Shabbat, and Mitzvoth and opt-in to a regular prayer life, we will not have a thriving Jewish community. Our children will be increasingly unaffiliated and assimilated.

Without a belief in G-d who transcends human history, Judaism becomes just one cultural option among many, to be sampled like the frozen flavours at Menchies. Luckily we can move from non-belief to belief in a heartbeat and G-d will forgive us and welcome us back with open arms. The Rabbis discovered long ago that if we light Shabbat candles, come to services, and study Torah, even without believing, we may recover our faith.

G-d bless you!

Rabbi Shalom Plotkin

Beth Israel Congregation, Kingston, Ontario



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International Mitzvah Day in Kitchener-Waterloo & Guelph

On November 17th, in an unprecedented act of cooperation, the entire Jewish community of Kitchener-Waterloo and Guelph joined together for International Mitzvah Day - a Jewish-led day of social action dedicated to tikkun olam (repairing the world), tzedek (righteousness) and gemilut hassadim (acts of loving kindness).

Spearheaded by the Waterloo Regional Jewish Community Council (WRJCC), cereal boxes were collected for ‘Nutrition for Learning’, a community program that provides meals for over 13,000 students daily across the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Participating institutions included Beth Jacob Synagogue, Temple Shalom, Rohr Chabad Centre of KW, KW Hadassah Wizo, Waterloo Hillel, Beth Isaiah Temple and Guelph Chabad. Many unaffiliated local Jewish members participated in this community-wide initiative. When the food drive was over, the WRJCC had 50 new members on its Facebook page. Each participating organization ran individual donation campaigns. Students at Waterloo Hillel even braved the cold temperature and put on a “Tea for Charity” drive at Waterloo Town Square.

The collective total was over 500 boxes of cereal which will provide healthy breakfasts for over 5,000 students.

“In all my years, I have never seen such cooperation by every single Jewish institution in KW for any cause” said Michael Bierstock, Co-Chair of the WRJCC. “It was amazing to see everyone bond together as a community... I would highly encourage all communities across Canada to participate in this event. I know next year we will be doing it again.”

International Mitzvah Day in Sudbury



(l-r) Lise Senecal, Executive Director of the Community Outreach Program, Chris and Roger Nash

In Sudbury, members of the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue collected almost 100 winter coats as part of International Mitzvah Day, which is based on the Jewish values of tikkun olam and gemilut chassidim - repairing the world and acts of loving kindness. The coats were handed out to families in need through the L'Association des Jeunes de la Rue Community Outreach Program.



Program Spotlight Free Jewish Book Program

The PJ Library delivers free books and audio CDs right to the doorsteps of Jewish children across North America.

In partnership with the Grinspoon Foundation, Jewish Federations of Canada- UIA is offering 200 PJ Library subscriptions to Jewish families living in regional communities throughout Ontario and Atlantic Canada.

The program is free. Contact Daniel Stern at 416-634-3082 or DStern@jfcuia.org to sign up today!

Donor Spotlight The Barth Family

Changing Lives and Creating Community Across Ontario



Student in Washington, D.C. 2012

A tragic accident took 30 year-old Aviva Barth from her family in 2004. At the time, Barth was a senior consultant with the business firm Bearing Point. She studied math at York University before receiving an MBA from McMaster University.

The eldest of three siblings, Aviva was committed to social issues and volunteerism. She was devoted to tutoring youngsters and worked with the Regional Jewish Communities of Ontario Outreach Program which she had participated in as a youth living in Guelph.

In tribute to their daughter, Saul & Goldie Barth established the Aviva Barth Scholarship Fund for Jewish youth living in regional communities in Ontario who want to participate in Israel programs and Jewish summer camps.

“Through this scholarship Fund, Aviva’s example of encouraging young people to connect with their Jewish identity and to seek new and exciting challenges and networks lives on today.”

The Regional Jewish Communities of Ontario Outreach Program was renamed the Aviva Barth High

School Outreach Program in honor of Aviva.

The Aviva Barth Scholarship Fund supports the Aviva Barth High School Outreach Program for post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah teens living in small Jewish communities throughout Ontario.

Through a curriculum of studies, Jewish experiences, educational trips and bi-monthly weekend shabbatons complemented by relevant educational assignments, the program strengthens personal connections to Judaism. The three-year program builds great friendships while making Jewish education fun and meaningful.

“For many kids in the program, this is their main source of Jewish education and their only opportunity to really connect with Jewish peers with similar interests. In addition to strengthening their personal Jewish identity and connection to Judaism, it creates a sort of extended family that these kids will be in touch with for years to come. The program is changing lives - not just today but also for future generations by forging strong Jewish identities that will last a lifetime” said program director Evan Mendel.

To send a tribute card and support the Aviva Barth Scholarship Fund, contact Shelley Calleri at 416-636-7655 x 5503 or SCalleri@jfcuia.org

For more information on giving contact Daniel Stern at dstern@jfcuia.org



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