

makoreh

Jewish Community Life in Regional Canada

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Message from RJCO Chair

Mark Siegel, M.D.

The High Holiday period is a time for celebration of family and traditions. It is also a time for reflection, review and planning. Each year I recognize anew, as we gather together in our

separate family units at shul and homes, that just as it is connected individuals that make up a family, it is connected families that form a community. And when it comes to community, the whole is never greater than the sum of its parts.

At Jewish Federations of Canada – UIA, we recognize that each and every Jewish community coast to coast, regardless of size or influence, plays a vital role in strengthening the fabric of the greater Canadian Jewish community. Discussion about the Regional Jewish Council received very positive feedback at the most recent board meeting. While geographic realities impose challenges, we continue to search for ways to connect regional Jewish communities to each other in significant and lasting ways.

We are hard at work planning the first national conference for small and regional communities.

Scheduled for May 2014, it will bring together lay leaders, community members, philanthropists and government representatives from across Canada for meaningful and open discussions about relevant issues. Save May 4-5 on your calendar! Many exciting details to follow!

The PJ Library continues to bring Jewish books into hundreds of homes, free of charge. If you live in Atlantic Canada or in a regional community in Ontario and have children aged 6 months to five years, this is the program for you! Email info@jfcuia.org to learn more.

We want to hear from you. If you have any suggestions, ideas or comments, email info@jfcuia.org.

Wishing you and your family a year full of peace, health and happiness. Shana tova v'metukah.

Save the Date

1st National Conference for Regional & Small Communities

Sunday, May 4 - Monday, May 5, 2014

Toronto, Ontario

Created specifically for leadership and members of small Canadian Jewish communities.

- Engage in a political roundtable with government representatives
- Meet prominent Canadian Jewish philanthropists
- Connect with leadership from communities across the country

For more information contact Perry Romberg at 416-634-3070 or promberg@jfcuia.org

Community Spotlights

Victoria, BC



On June 2, exactly 150 years to the day of the establishment of Congregation Emanu-El, a grand ceremony to dedicate British Columbia's first

synagogue was reenacted in downtown Victoria. A parade celebrating the 1863 laying of the cobblestones followed the original route. The special ceremony included the Mayor, the Freemasons and various dignitaries.

A gala celebration was held at the historic Empress Hotel overlooking Victoria Harbour. Keynote speaker was Irwin Cotler, former federal Justice Minister, law professor and president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, who spoke on "Jewish Values and the Pursuit of Justice."

Cotler said "The history and legacy of Congregation Emanu-El and its partnership and support from Christian, Freemason and other faith and community groups, a model of a plural multicultural mosaic, are a source of pride and inspiration for us all."

Entertainment was provided by Hazzan Ayelet Porzecanski and the Vic High Rhythm & Blues Band.

Kitchener-Waterloo, ON



The 2nd annual Kitchener-Waterloo Walk for Israel on Sunday June 9th brought together over 150 people from across the region. Revived last year after a hiatus of more

than 20 years, money raised supports Youth Futures in Kiryat Shmona, Israel.

"In 2012, we raised over \$12,000 for youth in Israel and brought together over a hundred walkers." Said Jeff Budd, Waterloo resident and organizer of the event. "This year we built on its' success by bringing even more people out and raising even more money!"

Atlantic Canada



Yom Ha'aztamaut & Yom Hashoah events were held in communities across the Maritimes including Halifax, Fredericton and St. John's.

Over 200 people attended Yom Ha'aztamaut celebrations in Halifax alongside Canadian and Israeli dignitaries, including The Consul-General of Israel in Montreal Mr. Joel Lion.



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A time for renewing our commitment to Jewish Tradition

By Rabbi Claudio Jodorkovsky, Congregation Agudas Israel, Saskatoon, SK

One of the many peculiarities of the celebration of Simchat Torah is that during this day we read from the Torah the only weekly section that is never read on a Shabbat: Parashat Vezot Habracha. Probably, because of that exact reason, this Torah Portion doesn't receive the same attention as other Sidrot in the Torah and many people are not familiar with it. But although it is not commonly known, Vezot Habracha contains the text that served as the basis for one of the most famous stories in the rabbinical literature.

In Midrash Sife (on Deut. 33:1) we are told that before giving the Torah to the Israelites, God offered it to the nations of the world but every one of them rejected it because they could not commit to all of the precepts. The children of Esau objected the commandment "You shall not murder", the children of Ammon and Moab said they cannot commit to "You shall not commit adultery", etc. There was not a single nation to whom God did not go and every one of them rejected the Torah. Finally he went to speak with the children of Israel and they accepted it immediately, saying "We will do and we will hear" (Exodus 24:8).

This story shows us the People of Israel freely and consciously accepting the Torah at Mount Sinai. However, when we go and compare it with other well-known rabbinical text, we will be surprised to find an opposed version about the acceptance of the Torah:

The Talmud tells (Tractate of Shabbat 88a) that when the Children of Israel were standing at Mount Sinai waiting for God's revelation, God pulled out the mountain from the earth and held it over the heads of the Israelites. He told them: "If you accept My decrees all will be well; if not this will be your grave!". In this text we see the

people of Israel being forced to receive the Torah, which is the opposite understanding of revelation of the story in Midrash Sife. Here we see God threatening the Israelites and imposing on them the acceptance of the commandments, maybe trying to teach us that the survival of the Jewish people cannot be guaranteed if we remove ourselves from the values of the Torah.

What can we learn from this contradiction? I like to think that the two different versions of the revelation at Sinai can teach us a great lesson about our relationship with our Jewish identity. We can live as Jews understanding that the basis for our link to Judaism is a one-time event of the past, an event that "imposes" on us our identity following what happened in the past. This can mean being born in a Jewish family or choosing Judaism many years ago. And although this is what formally establishes our belonging to the Jewish people, for our tradition is also important that we constantly and consciously "choose" to be Jewish, renewing our commitment for Torah and the Jewish Tradition. We are called to identify ourselves as Jews not only because of our origins, but because we love what we are and our lives are permanently exalted by the wisdom of our Tradition.

During these days, when after Simchat Torah we renew the yearly cycle of the reading and studying of the Torah, we remember how important it is to be constantly renovating the relationship with our Jewish life. We are called to choose Judaism freely, consciously and actively every day, studying Torah and the teachings of our Rabbis, in order to live meaningful lives enriched by our ancient Jewish Tradition.

B'birat Shalom.

Yom Hashoah in St. John's, NFL



Holocaust survivor, former Newfoundlander and author Philip Riteman spoke to a standing room only crowd of over 2,000 at a Yom Hashoah event in St. John's. In a community where events generally attract much smaller numbers, the success of this inspiring and educational evening was unprecedented. In attendance were survivors and grandchildren of Newfoundland soldiers who liberated the European camps. Guests also included representatives of the Queen and every level of government.

Importantly, a full recording of the service and collateral material will be introduced into Newfoundland's high school history curriculum next year.



Program Spotlight

Free Family Book Program

The PJ Library sends free books and audio CDs to Jewish children throughout North America. In partnership with the Grinspoon Foundation, Jewish Federations of Canada- UIA offers 200 PJ Library subscriptions to Jewish families living in regional communities throughout the Atlantic provinces and Ontario.

Every month, subscribed families with children aged six months to five years receive a Jewish themed children's book monthly, specific to the age of their children. In the 12th month, children receive an audio CD instead of the regular book. Books are published specifically for the PJ Library program and include discussion questions and insights on the inner flap of each book for parents to further engage their kids.

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

** PJ library subscriptions are limited and only available to residents of Ontario and the Atlantic provinces.*

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Donor Spotlight

Northern Opportunities

Teaching Science to Youth in Northern Israel

In 2010, the **Sidney Warren Estate** provided \$1 million for a Science Education Centre for Youth at Tel Hai College. The gift also included \$400,000 for the three year Full School Program at Danziger School and \$50,000 for a three-year program for youth-at-risk in Kiryat Shmona. It is the largest gift ever made from Atlantic Canada to Israel.

It has opened opportunities for hundreds of young people living in Israel's northernmost region. Chosen by executor Jack Prince, the Upper Galilee in Northern Israel has been connected with the Atlantic region for decades. Save for Sderot and the settlements facing Gaza, no other region has suffered as much from rocket fire as frequently and devastatingly. Jack could not think of a better place to bind Sidney's love for the Jewish people than to this region and especially the welfare of its children.

The Full School Program at Danziger School is a multi-level holistic strategy for students between the ages of 12-17 that fills in grave gaps that undermine abilities to cope with educational, social and psychological challenges. Led by a team of proven educators and specialists - provided by the Rashi Foundation - the despair many of these children experienced has been replaced by hope and promise. Teva

has made a multi-year commitment once the inaugural three year program ends.

The **Sidney Warren Science Centre for Youth at Tel Hai College** exposes students from all schools in the area to the wonders of science. The Science Centre is considered a model for youth science centres nationwide. For a country that relies on brain-power as its major resource, the value of establishing such a facility cannot be overestimated.

The **Centre for Youth at Risk** provides training sessions and workshops for youth at risk. Clients gain an appreciation of their self-worth and envision possibilities as never before.

This gift from the Sidney Warren Estate is an investment from which dividends will be enjoyed for generations to come. It has so far changed thousands of lives. It is a Jewish story that will be added to Israel's narrative about what can be achieved when Jews come together for the common purpose of advancing the cause of the Jewish people.

Jewish Federations of Canada – UIA and the Rashi Foundation provided guidance in the selection and implementation of the programs.

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