

the Jewish Observer

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VOL. 77 NO. 12
JUNE 22, 2012
2 TAMMUZ 5772

All the pieces come together in Akiva graduates' gift to the school

By Kathy Carlson

Perhaps the first thing visitors to Akiva School's Hassenfeld Chapel will see from now on is a colorful tree of life, growing from spiky and shiny blades of glass and showing what makes the school unique.

The tree is a large mosaic, four feet square, displayed on the back wall and facing the ark and Torah. This year's eight Akiva graduates, guided by Nashville artist Yvette Renee Parrish-Cowden, crafted the mosaic over many after-school sessions. The students – Brandon Coleman, Naomi Horn, Zoe Lewis, Marissa Lipschutz, Sam Oppenheimer, Frances Palumbo, Itzik Sedek and Yoni Taaedkashani - presented the mosaic as their gift to Akiva on their graduation day, May 31.

"In the beginning, none of us really knew what it was going to look like," said Marissa Lipschutz. The 6th graders were confused, but as more pieces of tile fell in place, it looked more realistic, she said.

There was still a little confusion even when the piece was completed, but "once it was on the wall, we all loved it," Marissa said.

When the artwork was unveiled at graduation, Naomi Horn said, "there was a moment (when I thought) did my class actually make that?"

The graduates' parents had commissioned Parrish-Cowden to design and help the students create a mosaic that embodied the seven middot or values that Akiva works to instill.

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Front, from left: Naomi Horn, Marissa Lipschutz, Zoe Lewis, Frances Palumbo. Back, from left: Yoni Taaedkashani, Itzik Sedek, Brandon Coleman, Sam Oppenheimer

Scholar paints a bleak picture of the turmoil in the Middle East

By Kathy Carlson

From Egypt to Syria to Iran, the Middle East's landscape is fraught with problems that Israel should address with restraint and an eye on the long term, a Middle East scholar and journalist told about 140 people at the Gordon Jewish Community Center.

Barak Barfi spoke on June 21 as part of the series "Increase Your Israel IQ: From Argument to Advocacy," funded by a grant from the Jewish Federation of Nashville's New Initiatives Fund and organized by the

Federation's Community Relations Committee. His talk was titled "The Arab Spring – One Year Later."

He covered the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's post-revolution politics, unrest in Sinai, what will happen to stores of chemical weapons in Syria, Iran's dance with the West on uranium enrichment and nuclear capabilities, the situation in Jordan, and overall, how this unrest affects Israel. Fluent in Arabic, he has spent considerable time on the ground in the Arabic countries of the Middle East.

Barfi, currently a research fellow at the New America Foundation,

noted that Egyptian Islamists are hurling hostile words against Israel, accusing it of breaching the Camp David accords by failing to give autonomy to the West Bank and Gaza, for example. But Egypt's economy is in bad shape, with no tourism or outside investment to speak of and dwindling reserves of the foreign currency it uses to trade with other nations. It has been reluctant to accept a \$3 billion-plus loan from the International Monetary Fund and more than \$1 billion in military aid from the United States is in jeopardy.

The fragile economic situation

Continued on page 12

Cohn Moreau wins grand prize in AJWS design competition

By Kathy Carlson

Nashville software engineer Michael Cohn Moreau was one of three grand prize winners in the American Jewish World Service's recent design competition, which involved rethinking tzedakah boxes for the 21st century. He won in the Web/Interactive category with the concept of "Discover Needs" tags for grocery store products. The tags would be placed on a supermarket shelf near a specific product and would include a QR code and short caption linking a social issue with the product.

For example, someone buying insect repellent could scan the QR code to learn about malaria in the developing world, AJWS said in a news release. Then, the shopper would be directed immediately to learning about nonprofit organizations that are working to fight malaria, and could choose to donate right then and there, or to save the information and learn more later. Other possible combinations would be sunscreen and cancer research, baby food and malnutrition. "The charities are the tzedakah boxes themselves," Cohn Moreau said.

Cohn Moreau and Nashville nurse Elizabeth Traugott recently married, and he told AJWS that she indirectly inspired him to enter the competition. "She recently converted to Judaism and in order to be supportive, I went along with her to her conversion classes," he said. "One of the classes focused on the role of tzedakah and tikkun olam and it really struck a chord with me. I made a pledge to donate to one charity a month

and look for opportunities to volunteer. When I stumbled on this contest I thought it was a great way to explore these topics further."

Much charitable giving is done online these days, through specific web sites and through Facebook. Discover Needs tags would dovetail into this trend. Other categories in the contest were tzedakah boxes themselves and a broad category called "Out of the Box" for projects that didn't fit the two more specific categories. There were grand prize winners in all three categories.

"We're really excited and everyone I tell is really excited that he won," his wife, Elizabeth, said.

Part of the grand prize brought Michael and Elizabeth to New York this month to receive the award, see other entries and meet other award winners and AJWS staff. Michael also won \$2,500 and an opportunity to travel with AJWS to visit some of its partners in the developing world. Additionally, the grand prize winners' designs and those of the six finalists will be featured in a national mobile tour hosted in galleries, synagogues and various communal spaces.

"I wanted something practical and inexpensive in addition to driving donations," Cohn Moreau said. Implementing Discover Needs tags wouldn't cost gro-



Michael Cohn Moreau shows how his Discover Needs tags would work in a display at the American Jewish World Service's event in New York this month for winners of its "Where Do You Give" competition. Moreau took grand prize in the Web/interactive category.

cery stores anything, he said. Expenses would be incurred from printing tags, distributing them to stores and setting up a website with information about the nonprofits. "I learned a lot just coming up with the design."

Note: AJWS is an international development and human rights organization, based in New York. Inspired by Judaism's commitment to justice, it works to realize human rights and end poverty in the developing world. □

All the pieces come together in Akiva graduates' gift

Continued from page 1

Parrish-Cowden offered three different designs, but "this one was my favorite, the middot growing within the tree." She donated stained glass; Marissa's father, Jay Lipschutz, provided technical work to color some of the tiles that made up the sky; and Werthan Granite and Lowe's home improvement store donated broken tiles that the students shattered for the mosaic's raw materials.

The students worked for several afternoons after school, placing tiles in the spots Parrish-Cowden had sketched out on base of the piece. Parents brought snacks, helped with supervision and kept the students on track, parent Naomi Limor Sedek said. Each year, graduating students present a gift to the school, and

the mosaic was this year's gift.

"We mainly placed things down and made color decisions," Marissa said.

"It was really fun to make," Naomi Horn said. "We had to take tiles and smash them. We put them into a pillow case covered with a towel and hit it with a hammer." She smashed a \$1 golden yellow plate that became the sun behind the tree of life.

"It was a lot like a puzzle but the only thing was, we didn't have a box to make it from. We had the sketch on the board and our mind and our thoughts," said Naomi. Not all of the students worked on the piece at the same time, so they saw the work gradually emerge as others worked on it, she said.

"It was really cool seeing them work together and see it come through," said Bobbi Lipschutz, Marissa's mother.

The seven middot – Torah, learning, respect, the Jewish people, community, responsibility and spirit – are spelled out in Hebrew at the tree's roots and along its branches. At the base of the tree is

responsibility, and at the top are the Jewish people and spirit, Parrish-Cowden said.

"The Akiva Middot are the values that drive our school," said Daniella Pressner, Akiva's director of Judaic studies. They "are what we value in our children's education and what we strive to build." Wherever Akiva students continue their education, she said, "people speak about specific middot that shine through each student."

On the day of graduation, Parrish-Cowden was at the Gordon Jewish Community Center preparing an exhibit of her works and those of her husband. She wasn't able to attend the graduation and unveiling of the mosaic that integrates, she says, "probably a couple thousand pieces of stained glass and tile."

"I just feel it's very special, full of positive energy. ... I hope that piece serves the middot and people will feel that energy when they walk into the room," Parrish-Cowden said. As I told the children, I believe in the same values. □

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'The Observer' (ISSN 8750-5290) is published bi-monthly except July for \$25 per year by the Jewish Federation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 801 Percy Warner Blvd., Nashville, TN 37205-4009. Periodicals postage paid at Nashville, TN. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE OBSERVER, 801 Percy Warner Blvd., Nashville, TN 37205

This newspaper is made possible by funds raised in the Jewish Federation Annual Campaign.

The Observer is a member of the American Jewish Press Association and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

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Chazak Achsav!-Strength Now!

Nashville Jewish Film Festival makes screening selections

The 2012 Nashville Jewish Film Festival (NJFF) will be held from Nov. 7 – 15 and planning for the lineup is well under way.

Here are a few of the films already slated for this year's festival: **Hava Nagila**, NJFF's Opening Night film, is a charming and entertaining documentary about the song "Hava Nagila" that questions who wrote it and how it has become a fixture at every Jewish event.

Nicky's Family is NJFF's religious school screening. The film is the story of

Sir Nicholas Winton, who as a young man organized and funded a kindertransport from Czechoslovakia and saved more than 600 Jewish children by finding them homes in England. He never spoke about what he did and it was quite by accident that his mitzvah was discovered.

Dorfman, a comedy starring Elliot Gould and Sara Rue and written by Wendy Karp, tells the story of Deb Dorfman. Deb, who is always searching for the perfect date, falls for a foreign correspondent who is glamorous and exciting. It takes some life experiences

to get her to stand on her feet and realize that the perfect guy is right next to her.

Little Rose is the story of the 1968 ill-fated rebellion when anyone with pro-Zionist feelings was forced out of Poland. Told as a fictionalized account of a Jewish college professor and the lovely young woman forced to spy on him.

Tony Curtis: Driven to Stardom is a documentary about the life of screen legend Tony Curtis (father of actress Jamie Lee Curtis) and his rise from Brooklyn bad boy to a matinee idol. This will be the Thursday matinee shown on Nov. 8.

AKA DOC POMUS. Doc Pomus wrote songs for Elvis, songs that everyone remembers and dances to including, "Save the Last Dance for Me," "Magic Memories" and a host of others. Born Jerome Felder, he was a disabled kid from Brooklyn who ended up in the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

In addition, this year will be the first preschool screening co-sponsored by the PJ Library and NJFF. All films will be shown at the Belcourt Theatre or at the GJCC. For more information, go to www.nashvillejff.org. □

GJCC teen Kehillah Award recipient to be announced July 17

The winner of the first annual 2012 GJCC Kehillah Award will be announced at the GJCC's annual meeting on July 17. In the spirit of the Ralph Shepard Memorial Award, the Kehillah Award is presented by the GJCC to honor teens who have devoted their spirit, leadership and dedication to the Nashville Jewish community.

High school seniors were nominated for the award by Nashville's Jewish youth group leaders and education directors. The winners will be chosen in an anonymous selection process by a committee of former Ralph Shepard Memorial Award winners.

The 11 high school seniors nominated are:

Madi Abelson: Congregation Micah, University School of Nashville; Sarah Baum: Congregation Micah, The Harpeth Hall School; Leah Caplan: The Temple - Congregation Ohabai Shalom,

The Harpeth Hall School; Anna Cone: The Temple Congregation Ohabai Shalom, University School of Nashville; Emma Drongowski: Congregation Micah, Franklin High School; Ross Levy: The Temple - Congregation Ohabai

Shalom, University School of Nashville; Alex Metzman: West End Synagogue, University School of Nashville; Whitney Perlen: West End Synagogue, University School of Nashville; Lesley Schiffman: The Temple - Congregation Ohabai

Shalom, Hume-Fogg Academic High School; Zachary Snyder: The Temple - Congregation Ohabai Shalom, University School of Nashville; and Jodie Weil: West End Synagogue, University School of Nashville. □

Walker refuses to authorize Hebrew version of 'The Color Purple'

(JTA) — Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, refused to authorize a Hebrew translation of her prize-winning work, citing what she called Israel's "apartheid."

In a June 9 letter to Yediot Books, Walker said she would not allow an Israeli house to publish the book because "Israel is guilty of apartheid and persecution of the Palestinian people, both inside Israel and also in the Occupied Territories."

In her letter, posted recently by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel on its website, Walker supported the boycott,

divestment and sanctions movement and offered her hope that the BDS movement "will have enough of an impact on Israeli civilian society to change the situation."

It was not clear when Yediot Books, an imprint of the daily Yediot Achronot newspaper, made the authorization request, or whether Walker could in fact stop translation of the book. At least one version of the book has already appeared in Hebrew translation, in the 1980s.

Walker said Israel's policies were "worse" than the segregation she suffered as an American youth and said South

Africans had told her it was worse than Apartheid.

"The Color Purple," which won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, was adapted into a movie in 1985 directed by Jewish filmmaker Steven Spielberg.

The novel and the film, which was nominated for 11 Oscars, treat racism in the American South in the first part of the 20th century and sexism among blacks.

Walker has intensified her anti-Israel activism in recent years, traveling to the Gaza Strip to advocate on behalf of the Palestinians. □

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Hebrew National's owner rejects suit's claim that products are not up to kosher standards

By Debra Rubin

WASHINGTON (JTA) – Hebrew National boasts of “answering to a higher authority,” but several class-action lawyers are hoping to take one of the country's largest kosher meat producers to an earthly court.

A class-action lawsuit filed recently alleges that Hebrew National's iconic hot dogs and other meats do not comport with the brand's claim to be kosher “as defined by the most stringent Jews who follow Orthodox Jewish law.” The suit filed May 18 in a Minnesota state court

accuses ConAgra Foods, Inc., which owns the Hebrew National brand, of consumer fraud.

ConAgra, which has rejected the claims unequivocally, asked on June 6 that the suit be moved to the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota. The company has until July 13 to respond to the complaint.

Lawyers from firms in Scottsdale, Ariz.; Long Beach, Calif.; and Minneapolis, Minn., submitted the complaint on behalf of 11 named plaintiffs.

The lead attorney for the plaintiffs, Hart L. Robinovitch of Zimmerman Reed, is based in Scottsdale but his firm has offices in Minnesota. Robinovitch would not say how the suit was initiated.

Zimmerman Reed, however, solicited consumers through its website, where a page until recently announced a Hebrew National investigation.

“Our firm has received troubling reports that some slaughterhouse plants supplying Hebrew National with its beef may not be upholding the strict kosher standards Hebrew National promises,” the page stated. “Workers are threatened with losing their job, or demotion, if they speak up and try to point out violations of the kosher food laws.”

The firm advertised a free case review for anyone who purchased Hebrew National hot dogs in the past two years or had information about the preparation of the products.

“The lawsuit contends that ConAgra marketed, labeled and sold

Hebrew National according to the strictest standards defined by Orthodox Jews. We allege that it does not meet those standards,” Robinovitch said. “We're certainly not alleging that they're using pork products, or anything as blatant as that.”

The lawsuit's 11 named plaintiffs live in various states, including California, Minnesota, New York and Arizona. JTA was unable to reach any of the individuals.

The suit, which was reported originally by the American Jewish World newspaper, is seeking monetary damages equal to the total amount of monies that consumers in the class paid for Hebrew National meat products.

Triangle-K, the Brooklyn, N.Y.-based supervising agency that certifies Hebrew National products as kosher and the company that processes the kosher meat, also unequivocally rejected the allegations and contended that disgruntled former employees might be behind them.

Rabbi Aryeh Ralbag, who owns Triangle-K, said in a statement that the claims in the lawsuit were “outrageously false and defamatory.”

He added, “Those who make the false allegations know full well that because their identities are concealed and their false statements are made in a court pleading, Triangle-K and its principals cannot sue them for defamation.”

AER, which provides the kosher slaughtering services at Hebrew National facilities in the Midwest, including in Minnesota, rejected the charges as well. “The company intends to defend its reputation and good name,” AER's president, Shlomo Ben-David, said in a statement.

Teresa Paulson, a ConAgra spokesperson, said she could not comment on pending litigation, but that the company stood by Hebrew National's kosher status.

Neither AER nor Triangle-K is named as a defendant in the suit.

Triangle-K has been supervising Hebrew National products since 2004. The Conservative movement accepts the Triangle-K kashrut certification.

Kosher consumers choose among hundreds of companies nationwide as to which certifications they trust.

There are about 750 Orthodox kosher certifying organizations in the United States, according to Rabbi Yosef Wikler, editor of Kashrus magazine, which also maintains a website for non-Orthodox certifiers.

“Almost no kosher organization accepts 100 percent of any other kosher organization 100 percent of the time,” Wikler said.

The suit, which does not attribute the allegations to anyone by name, alleges that the Hebrew National brand was not, as the company advertises, kosher “as defined by the most stringent Jews who follow Orthodox law.” As result, plaintiffs, who paid a premium

price “believing the kosher title and certification made them a higher quality product than other meat products on the market” were “deprived of the value of the goods they purchased,” the complaint states.

Among the suit's allegations:

- Knives used in the slaughtering process were nicked, preventing a clean cut mandated by kosher law;
- Organ meat was not consistently inspected after slaughter, as required for kashrut;
- The blood of slaughtered animals was not consistently removed within 72 hours, as required by kosher law;
- Managers took certificates that had been issued to trained slaughterers and replaced their names with individuals who had not been trained;
- Kosher meat was not consistently kept separate from non-kosher meat.

In his statement, Ralbag said, point by point, that all the allegations are false.

The suit also alleges that workers at some AER facilities, including in St. Paul, Minn., kept kosher, but would not eat the Hebrew National products. Those workers, according to the complaint, were allowed to purchase meats from “specifically selected cows [that] would be slaughtered and checked in strict accordance with all kosher laws, unlike the cows that routinely slaughtered for sale to Defendant and use in Hebrew National Products.”

AER said the allegation is misleading. According to AER, employees who eat only glatt kosher were provided meat to comply with their personal preferences.

Glatt is a higher standard of kosher and means that the lungs of the slaughtered animal are free of any blemishes. If the lungs are blemished, the meat is still considered kosher, but not glatt. Triangle-K does not claim that the products it certifies are glatt kosher.

Additionally, the suit alleges that employees involved in the kosher slaughtering process complained to AER supervisor Rabbi Moshe Fyzakov and Ralbag, but those officials “did little or nothing to correct the transgressions. Rather, the persons making the complaints were terminated or otherwise threatened with adverse retaliation, such as job transfers to other facilities or states. In turn, non-kosher meat was delivered to ConAgra and packaged, labeled and sold to the public [including the plaintiffs in the lawsuit] as strictly 100 percent kosher.”

A Triangle-K spokesman said, “Every complaint was followed up on, and no one was disciplined for making a complaint.”

The spokesman also said it is “totally false” that non-kosher meat was delivered to ConAgra to be sold as kosher and that “We have clear distinctions in place to prevent such happenings.” □



President Obama presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Israeli President Shimon Peres in the East Room of the White House in Washington, June 13, 2012. (Amos Ben Gershon/ GPO/Flash90/JTA)

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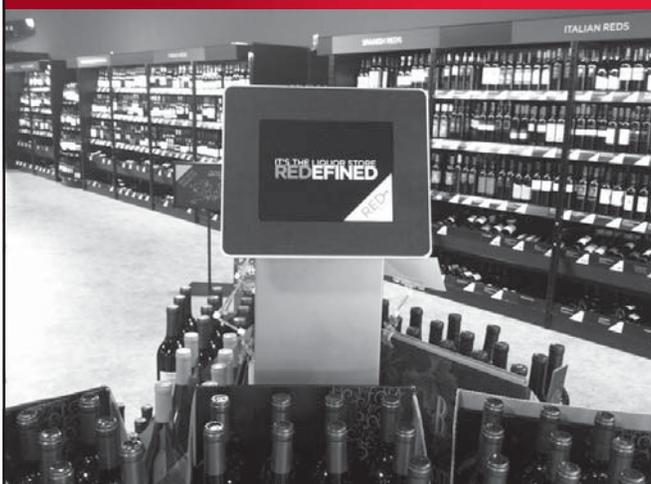
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JFS adds fresh vegetables and fruits to kosher food box

Jewish Family Service has been providing nutritious, non-perishable food boxes to individuals and families in need since 2009. Each food box contains certified kosher items that have been approved by a rabbi and a dietician. JFS has wanted to include fresh vegetables and fruits but due to the perishable nature of these foods, it has not been feasible until now.

JFS has partnered with Isaac Staton, the owner of a local vegetable stand on Highway 70 and Percy Warner, to provide recipients with a food voucher. Each family receives a voucher when they pick up the monthly food box that can be redeemed at the vegetable stand. The family then selects which items they want to purchase.

The partnership between Jewish

Family Service and Isaac Staton has been a success. Food recipients have reported that they are delighted to be able to choose fresh vegetables and fruits and have been happy with the quality of food items offered. Staton offers a variety of items such as squash, zucchini, tomatoes, onions, potatoes, okra, corn, cantaloupe, watermelon, oranges and peaches from local farms. The vegetable stand is open from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday through October.

In addition to the fresh vegetables and fruit, food box recipients continue to receive three frozen vegetables throughout the year.

If you are in need of food assistance, contact Toni Jacobsen at 354-1672 or tljlcsw@aol.com.

For more information about JFS, call Pam Kelner at 354-1644. □



Isaac Staton is accepting food vouchers for fresh fruits and vegetables from JFS kosher food box recipients.

lifecycles



Nashville attorney Marlene Eskind Moses, founder and managing partner of Moses Townsend & Russ, PLLC (also known as MTR Family Law), recently received the 2012 Distinguished Alumna Award from the Newcomb Alumnae Association at Tulane University. The award recognizes Moses, a 1972 graduate of Tulane, for her many academic and professional accomplishments. The award was presented to Moses in the annual Under the Oaks ceremony, hosted by the Newcomb College Institute during Tulane University's commencement week. Members of the Moses family are, from left: Ben and Marissa Moses Russ, Bob and Marlene Eskind Moses, Elaine and Edward Eskind. Photo: Cheryl Gerber

Graduate

Rachel Rummel, daughter of Laurie Rummel and granddaughter of Bettie and Irving Slotichiver, graduated from Phoenix Country Day School on May 31. Rachel, a National Merit Finalist and recipient of the Margaret Madden Senior Speech Award, gave the principal address for the graduating class of 58, with 20 of them National Merit Finalists and/or scholarship winners. Rachel will attend Northeastern University in Boston, Mass., on a full four-year scholarship.

Honors

The Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce has announced the finalists for the 2012 Nashville Emerging Leaders Awards. Among them are: Phillip Shmerling, Choice Food Group, in the category of hospitality and tourism; and James Mackler, Bone, McAllester, Norton PLLC, in the legal category.

Sympathy

... to the family of Atreal Beatrice Ceigler, 83, who died June 3 in Richmond, Ind. Born June 11, 1928, in

Tennessee, she is preceded in death by her husband, Alfred Ceigler; daughter, Edna Ruth Fietelson; parents, Charles and Maggie Bohannon Bullard; five brothers and three sisters. Survived by son, Wayne Phelps of Richmond, Ind.; brother, Dr. Jesse Bullard of Texas; sisters, Patty Jones of Nashville and Frances Hanner of California; three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Mrs. Ceigler lived in Nashville most of her life and retired from Metro Government in Nashville.

... to the family of Tamsen Douglass Love of Atlanta who died June 5. She is survived by her husband, John Lariccia; children, John Douglass Lariccia, Phoebe Katharine Lariccia, Thomas Albert Lariccia and Katherine Marsch Lariccia; father, William

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Douglass Love; mother and step-father, Jean and Philip Roseman of Nashville; sister, Lydia Catherine Love; brother, Andrew Berrien Love. Contributions may be made to Atlanta Pet Rescue, 4874 S. Atlanta Road, SE, Smyrna, GA 30080. Online condolences may be made at hmpattersonspringhill.com.

... to the family of Sidney W. Schatten, 91, who died June 21. Mr. Schatten is preceded in death by his wife, Delores Babin Schatten; parents, Max and Sadie Silverman Schatten; brother, Emanuel Schatten; sister, Charlotte Schatten Morris. He is survived by his daughters, Suzanne Schatten Oppleman (Jeffrey) of Richmond, Va., Robin Schatten Mishkin (Joe) of Mobile, Ala.; grandchildren, Brian Mishkin, Todd Mishkin (Nicole), Staci Bedell (Brian) and Brooke Capoino (Anthony); great-grandchildren, Dean Bedell, Zoe Bedell and numerous loving nieces and nephews, and great nieces and nephews. Mr. Schatten attended public school and graduated from Hume Fogg in 1938. He

also attended Andrew Jackson University, and completed a cost accounting course at Vanderbilt University in 1942. Mr. Schatten was in the Armed Forces for four years. He was a Master Sergeant in the Army Air Corps assigned to the 1341st base unit, 1359th base unit, and the 1350th wing headquarters overseas in China and India. He was an operations and administrative specialist in the movement of the Chinese Army from Burma and North China to East China. While with the 1341st and 1359th base units, he supervised the weights and balances of troop transfers, and transports flying gas, bombs and troops from India over the hump to China. Mr. Schatten was in the wholesale shoe business from 1950 to 1971, when he joined Schatten Properties Real Estate and Development Company owned by his brother, Emanuel Schatten, as a partner and member of the board. Mr. Schatten was also a member of The Temple, West End Synagogue and Masonic Lodge. Memorial contributions may be made to Alive Hospice, 1718 Patterson St., 37203.

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Nashville families read along as PJ Library marks 3 millionth book

By Uriel Heilman

NEW YORK — PJ Library wants to come between parents and children — literally.

Every month, PJ Library mails free Jewish-themed children's books to nearly 100,000 households in North America with a grand ambition: that somewhere between Dr. Seuss and the Berenstain Bears, a child may turn to a book like Vivian Newman's *Ella's Trip to Israel* or Laurel Snyder's *Baxter, the Pig Who Wanted to Be Kosher*, and spark a Jewish discussion in a household that doesn't have enough of them.

"The conversations that take place in the home between parents and children, and parents among themselves, is one of the most important byproducts of this program," said PJ Library's director, Marcie Greenfield Simons. "We're helping Jews on the periphery take those first baby steps to being welcomed by the Jewish community."

Currently, 254 Nashville-area families participate in the PJ Library, said Melissa Sostrin, local program coordinator. Children from six months old to age 5½ can join the program and receive 11 books and either a CD or DVD each year, free of charge. The program is open to all families raising Jewish children in this age group, regardless of synagogue affiliation or level of participation in Jewish events.

The program, she said, not only opens up opportunities for parents to talk with their children about Jewish topics, but also opens doors for parents toward Judaism and the community. The books are "just little things to nudge people toward conversations, action, connection with other families," Sostrin said.

The PJ Library is available in Nashville with the local support of the Jewish Federation of Nashville, Gordon Jewish Community Center Early

Childhood Learning Center, Micah Children's Academy and the Temple Preschool. It is funded through a Federation Next Generation grant as part of the Best Jewish Nashville priority-setting project.

Nationally, PJ Library can provide books to children up to age 8, and Sostrin said the Nashville program hopes to extend eligibility to age 8 as well.

In the past seven years, the national PJ Library organization has helped publish more than 200 titles that have filled kids' shelves in 175 North American communities, become a force in the publishing industry through its mass purchases and spawned two similar programs in Hebrew — one in Israel and one for the children of Israelis living in the United States.

This month, the organization is set to send out its 3 millionth freely distributed book.

For Harold Grinspoon, the 82-year-old real estate mogul and Jewish philanthropist from Massachusetts who founded the program, PJ Library is about more than just books. It's meant to be a portal to Jewish life. "What kind of an educational process are we getting with these kids?" Grinspoon said. "How much are they loving Judaism? Are they baking challahs? Are they dancing and singing and enjoying the joys of Judaism?"

PJ Library said most of its recipients hail from households where there were fewer than 10 Jewish books before the deliveries began.

That figure is from a 2010 PJ Library email survey of more than 16,000 recipient households that also showed that 26 percent of respondents were interfaith families, 32 percent were not synagogue affiliated and one-third saying they were unlikely or only somewhat likely to read Jewish content if not for PJ Library.

About three-quarters of respondents said they read the books at least once a

week, and the vast majority said it made them feel or think about being Jewish.

The books, which are chosen by a selection committee of educators and editors, run the gamut from explicitly Jewish to barely so.

The themes reflect the personal predilections of the program's founder, who puts a premium on stories promoting tikkun olam (repairing the world), Jewish summer camp, visiting Israel and contemporary families enjoying Judaism. Each age group receives its own age-appropriate books, and all the books include a parents' guide for further discussion or activity.

The \$100 or so per-household cost of sending a year's worth of PJ products — 11 books and one CD — is split between the Grinspoon Foundation and the community institutions. The institutions also help market the program to new families and run community events around the books, including pajama Havdalah par-

ties, holiday concerts and intergenerational book readings at senior homes.

Keeping the program free for recipients is the key, PJ officials say, though recipients are asked after a year or two in the program if they'd like to "pay it forward" and make a donation to fund books for someone else.

"The idea that this is a gift from the Jewish community is an important message that each family is getting: You're part of something bigger," said Greenfield Simons, PJ's director. As books become increasingly digitized, PJ Library said it is committed to sticking with the old pulp-and-paper model.

"There's something incredibly powerful about parents and children snuggling together with a real book in their hands," Greenfield Simons said. "We're pretty wedded to this idea." □

Observer staff writer Kathy Carlson contributed to this JTA report.

around the town

Israeli dancing

The Nashville Israeli Folk Dancers meet every Thursday evening at the Schulman Center for Jewish Life (across from Memorial Gym) at Vanderbilt University. Warm-up and beginners dances are 7:30-8:30 p.m. Intermediate-advanced dancing and requests are from 8:30-10. Stay for all or part of the time, and attend any or all of the sessions. No previous dance experience is required. For more information, please Carol Rubin at 352-9447 (Carol.Rubin@vanderbilt.edu) or Sharon Morrow at 662-4881 (smorrow@wswcpasnashville.com) or visit the website at www.vanderbilt.edu/israelidance/

GJCC splashball and water polo

The GJCC Aquatics Department splashball program for 5-13 year olds and a water polo program for teens and adults

have openings. Water polo has been added as a varsity sport in high schools throughout Tennessee. Splashball is a water polo program for children which helps them to develop water safety skills, build endurance and muscle tone, cultivates health and wellness, provides social interaction and helps build relationships. Splashball is going on now through July 19 on Tuesdays from 6 – 7:30 p.m. and Thursdays from 1 – 2 p.m. Water Polo is also scheduled through July 19 and takes place Mondays and Thursdays from 6:30 – 8 p.m. through July 19. Contact Yvonne Hall with questions or to sign up at yvonne@nashvillejcc.org.



To access the Community Calendar,

go to www.jewishnashville.org and click on "Calendar." Every community event is listed for your convenience.



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Scholar paints a bleak picture of the turmoil in the Middle East



Barak Barfi speaks with Mary Shelton, Joan Shayne and Betty Werthan

Continued from page 1
reduces the likelihood that Egypt will take hostile action against Israel, Barfi said.

Sinai, however, could pull Israel down a "slippery slope" toward war, he said. Attacks on Israel from Sinai have



Barak Barfi addressed 140 people on June 21. Photos: Judy Saks

become more brazen, and in the latest attack, one of the Arab gunmen was a Saudi, he said, signaling the entry of for-

eign players into hostilities against Israel from Sinai.

"I'm not predicting war but there are problems we have to be aware of," he said. In his opinion, Israel and Egypt need to restore Sinai as a buffer between the countries and "Israel needs to help shepherd Egypt toward democracy while remaining in the background." Moreover, he said, Israel should be prepared to anticipate a few losses from Sinai in the next few years so that Egypt can deal with economic problems rather than shift its attention to a fight with Israel in the Sinai.

Relations with Egypt may be problematic, he said, but "Syria is just a nightmare. ... The revolution is not over and nobody knows how it's going to end."

Topping all that, Syria has large stocks of chemical weapons, he continued, and there's a fear that Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militants in Lebanon, will get them. The chemical weapons are well guarded by Assad loyalists, he said. Americans are poised to get the weapons out before terrorists can get hold of them, he said. "This is a national security concern for the United States, to safeguard these chemical weapons."

Hamas is the silver lining in the discord in Syria, Barfi said. It has cooled its ties with Iran and is aligning with Qatar and Saudi Arabia. A Sunni regime in Syria would isolate Shiite Iran, Barfi said.

He indicated Iran has been cagey in playing the West while continuing to enrich uranium well past the point at which it is used for fuel. The most recent economic sanctions against Iran may prod it to back off on uranium enrichment, he said, adding that the regime in Iran is more susceptible to public opinion than, say, Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

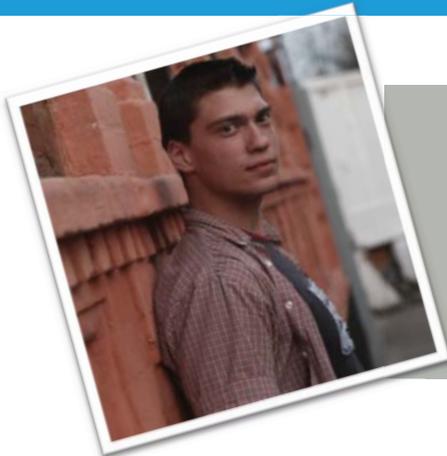
Jordan plays a key role in Middle East stability. The nation "is Israel's best friend" in the area, he said, adding that they agree on 80 percent of the issues they face. "Americans have no better friend in the Middle East," he said. Jordan wants peace, he said, but must cope with divisions among the population and pressures on its economy as neighboring Syria tries to quash a rebellion. "The U.S. would never allow Jordan to fall," he said.

Asked to give a five-year forecast for the region, Barfi replied, "You can't predict anything in the Middle East; nobody knows what's going to happen. There are going to be big problems in the near term in the Middle East, but the move toward democracy is good for America and good for Israel." □

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Meet Alex

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Born and raised in Cherkassy, Ukraine, Alex did not grow up with a strong sense of Jewish identity, although he was aware that he came from a Jewish family. He found out about the Jewish Agency through his grandparents, who now live in Haifa. "They helped my grandparents get to Israel," Alex explains. He began attending events at the Jewish youth center in his hometown, where he learned about customs and holidays.

Thanks to support from Federation, Alex has been able to pursue his interest in learning about Judaism, and eventually to get to Israel. "I went on a Birthright trip, which helped me realize the most that I belong there," he says. "Before I first came here, I knew I was Jewish, but the things I've learned and people I've met at the youth center really helped me realize it." Having just graduated from university, Alex will soon travel to Israel again in order to spend five months learning Hebrew.

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