Making Your Synagogue Part of the Community
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From the Editor

Jews have always seen themselves as part of their communities, from the time that God called the whole people together to hear the law at Mount Sinai, down to the present day, when we still find strength and comfort in praying in a minyan.

In the larger world, we also band together—to feed the hungry, tutor new readers, or visit shut-ins—with other organizations, denominations, and religions.

With links to the world outside our walls, however, come unexpected questions. How can we get along with organizations very unlike our own? How do we find the resources to reach out to those in need? How can we coordinate the sometimes massive infrastructure required for a communitywide project? How can we involve our children in our neighborhoods, our towns, our world? How do we maintain our Jewish identity in the larger world, and how do we apply the lessons of Judaism to the work we do in that world?

There is no right answer, of course, but learning from the experience of colleagues has always been a goal of NATA. In this issue, we present lots of ideas that work, whether your congregation is large or small, well versed in community relations or just starting out. You’ll find ideas to jumpstart your initiatives and inspiration from the successes of others.

With apologies to the poet John Donne, no synagogue is an island, entire of itself. Where does your temple fit into the world around it?

Nancy Schneider, Executive Director, Temple Shaaray Tefila, New York City

President’s Message

As I write this column, American Jews are busy preparing for two holidays at once. Thanksgiving reminds us of our American heritage, and Chanukah reminds us of our Jewish one. The aroma of potato latkes mixed with that of turkey and cranberry sauce wafted through our synagogue. On Thanksgiving, we gathered with friends and family to give thanks for the bounty and freedom that is America. The next night, we remembered our ancestors and the freedom for which they fought.

The timing of the two holidays this past year speaks to us in a special way. Centuries ago, the Maccabees fought for religious freedom, a freedom still absent in much of the world today. With the same degree of dedication, our American forebears fought for many freedoms, religion among them. And Thanksgiving commemorates an even earlier time in American history, when the freedom to worship in one’s own way brought those who celebrated the first Thanksgiving to the new continent.

Building a free community is a challenge, and just as challenging is building relationships between our communities and others. Within these pages are many ideas for making our communities the kind of villages where people care for one another and work toward the common good. Whether it is the Jewish community or the larger one in which we dwell, our connections and ability to provide for one another is a privilege of the freedoms we enjoy.

“One cannot be holy as an individual, only as part of the Community of Israel” (Rabbi Mordekhai Hacohen, Al Hatorah, Vayikra).

Elizabeth L. Hirsch, FTA, Executive Director, Congregation Beth Or, Spring House, Pennsylvania
How NATA Creates Its Own Social Action Projects

by Gail Kroop, FTA,

Executive Director, Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple, New Brunswick, New Jersey

Two years ago, at our national convention, NATA introduced a mitzvah project. First, all of our colleagues were invited to bring with them items to be distributed to the needy. Then, those who took the items to the facility participated in the second part of the program, in which they visited with the clients there. The program has been so successful that, at our plenary in Cleveland in 2002, we voted to call our program the Mark Greenstein Memorial Mitzvah Project, in honor of our colleague who passed away prematurely.

In addition to wanting to incorporate a tikkun olam (social action, or, in Hebrew, “repairing the world”) program we chose a project that we could take to our home congregations. At our 2001 convention in Boston, we joined forces with Jews for Literacy, a national program. We asked all conventioneers to bring with them books, new or very gently used, for elementary-school children, and we collected about 300. During one of our luncheon sessions, about 15 of us went to a local school, which, we learned, had recently lost its funding from RIF (Reading Is Fundamental, a federal program). The principal graciously greeted us as did the national executive director and a local staff person from Jews for Literacy. Each of us had the opportunity to go in to a pre-selected classroom and read several of the books we had brought. Following the visit, all our books were given to the various classrooms to increase the number of books the students could read during the school year as well as the summer.

This year, at our convention in Cleveland, we asked attendees to bring hats, gloves, and scarves for distribution to the New Life Community, a nonsectarian program that provides transitional housing for four months. Participants enter the program from many outlets, including the penal system, substance-abuse programs, and homeless shelters. During their stay at New Life Communities they are required to participate in workshops on budgeting, cooking, parenting, diploma equivalency, resume writing, and stress management. They dress as if going to work each day, and until they have a job they are required to set up and go on interviews.

The program provides them with an apartment that they must maintain. For some, this is a new experience. We learned, for instance, that some of the residents had never had a dresser, and didn’t understand the concept of putting their clothes away.

We wanted to visit and interact with the people living in the community. It was suggested that we make stone soup, so together we read the story and mixed the magical ingredients. We also made cornbread and brownies. Following lunch, we invited our friends to “go shopping” in the bags of hats, gloves, and scarves that we had brought for them and their children. Their looks of joy and excitement at having the opportunity to choose their new items brought tears to the eyes of all of the volunteers. We saw the women’s burgeoning self-confidence and the strength of the friendships they had built within the group.

We hope that future conference participants will grow from the uplifting and meaningful experiences NATA will continue to provide. Perhaps you will bring our organization’s ideas back to your communities and use them to continue repairing the world.
When You Have Lemons: Making the Food Bank Connection

by Terry Kraus, FTA

Executive Director, Congregation Beth Am, Los Altos Hills, California

It all began with a telephone call in the winter of 1992. Hundreds of tons of citrus later, I’m happy to tell you the story.

“Rabbi, can you attend a dedication ceremony at the Westside Food Bank?” asked a caller from the Mazon office.

“The Westside Food Bank? What are they dedicating—a new facility?”

“No,” replied the Mazon staffer, “a bin-tilt repackaging machine.”

“A what?” asked the Rabbi.

And so it went. My Rabbi was unavailable, but he tapped my president and me to go in his place. And that’s how Temple Solel’s gleaning project (and my formal association with Mazon) began.

Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger was funding half the cost of a badly needed piece of equipment for the Westside Food Bank in Surprise, Arizona. So badly needed, in fact, that the food bank raised the other half of the funds itself, and scheduled the dedication to celebrate the machine’s arrival. The biggest celebrants were the volunteers, who no longer had to hand-scoop portions of foods like frozen peas and cereal from a big bin. Now, all they had to do was place a bag under the chute, press a lever, and seal the bag.

I knew a little about Mazon, and a quick read through the brochure gave me enough background to participate in the very moving ceremony. But the biggest eye-opener was the tour of the food bank, a massive operation with hundreds of volunteers and millions of pounds of food distributed through its warehouse each year.

I knew it was important for my congregation to be involved in alleviating hunger, but the food bank was located an hour away from our community. Even its closest satellite location was on the other side of town. How could we help? It was a simple question, with an even simpler answer.

The neighborhoods around our synagogue were filled with citrus trees, and the food bank distributed both fresh fruit and frozen juice. Lemons, oranges, and grapefruit were in high demand. All we had to do was make the connection.

We went to work right away, as the citrus was ready to ripen. The publicity went out: We needed volunteers to do the gleaning, and we needed trees to pick. The response was good. Once we determined the picking schedule, the food bank dropped off the empty bins and picked up the filled ones. It took a bit of experience to work out the math between the number of trees to be picked, the number of volunteers needed, and the time it would take (allowing for the occasional rainy day, when we couldn’t pick.) In the second year of the project, a very capable couple stepped forward to be the coordinators and take over all the administrative work. They even found a homeowner who gave the synagogue a donation to have his trees picked!

It was an easy volunteer project to sell to the congregation. All ages could participate, the weather during the gleaning season (January to March) was beautiful, and the project was very social. Gleaning didn’t require a great deal of time, and since many of the locations were near the synagogue, many parents dropped off children at Sunday school and came out to help.

We tried to involve all ages, and were most successful with adults (including the many seniors who participated), and with the high school youth group, who met on a Sunday afternoon to glean as a tzedakah project. It was difficult to involve school-age children, who were in school during our regular Sunday-morning shifts. We had some success with Sundays when school wasn’t in session and we did some family gleaning on Shabbat.

Although the gleaning season lasts only three months, we publicize this project at every opportunity, to ensure enough trees to pick and enough volunteers. Sometimes all it took was putting an orange on the lectern to remind our Rabbis to pitch it at services! We received quite a bit of local publicity, and our project was featured in the winter 1997 issue of Reform Judaism magazine.

Since the project began almost 10 years ago, nearly 150 tons of citrus have helped nourish hungry people in the Phoenix area. If you’re looking for a hands-on, “feel-good” project that makes a difference, gleaning fits the bill! •
Interfaith Community Programs: “Who Are We, Who Are You?”

by Marsha Greiner, Executive Director, Temple B’nai Israel, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Temple B’nai Israel supports two major branches of community programming. Our Religious Action Committee plans and coordinates our annual Martin Luther King, Jr., programming with the local black community. Our Interfaith Committee plans and coordinates programming that continues throughout the year with two local churches.

It is our congregation’s practice to have a staff person assigned to each of our committees; the Rabbi is the professional for both the Religious Action and the Interfaith Committees. The administrator helps with logistics and arrangements on an as-needed basis. The creative programming and planning are done by strong committee chairs with the Rabbi’s support.

Martin Luther King Day Program

For more than 10 years, Temple B’nai Israel and the local NAACP have sponsored the annual MLK program at the Temple. We have a commemorative service on the evening before the Monday holiday. Each year, the arrangements committee picks a church choir, local musical group, or soloist—usually from the black community, but on occasion our choir—to perform at the Temple. It has been hard over the years to help those performing to understand what is and what might not be an appropriate choice of music for such a mixed gathering. Meanwhile, we are learning to sway and clap to the music.

The committee, which is led by the chair, the Rabbi, and the president of the NAACP, chooses each year’s speaker. Previous speakers have included a local integration activist from the ’60s, a historian discussing the Tulsa Greenwood race riots of the 1920s, a young man who recited several of Dr. King’s memorable speeches, and a professor from the history department of the University of Oklahoma.

The evening begins with the group gathering in our sanctuary. A musical number is first, followed by words of welcome from the president of the NAACP and either the committee chair or the Rabbi. The guest speaker is next. Closing remarks and a prayer follow a second musical selection.

The entire group breaks up, alphabetically, into three small groups to discuss the theme of the evening’s speaker. At times, the discussion has been a little touchy for one group or another, but most people approach these conversations with civility and decorum. Much of what someone might like to say often remains unspoken, and perhaps in the realm of open give and take, the value of this time spent together might be questionable. The most valuable outcome of the discussion, however, is the opportunity to meet face to face and socialize.

What would a Jewish program be without food? So, after 20 minutes of discussion, everyone gathers in the social hall for light refreshments and more conversation. (For a little variety, this year the committee is considering a light supper before the speaker instead of the refreshments.) The program lasts an hour and a half.

Interfaith Activities

Our Interfaith Committee is actively involved with two churches. These programs operate independently of each other.

A Jewish-Catholic study and dialogue has been in process for two years with Christ the King Catholic Church. This dialogue and its programs have been given its direction by a joint committee whose members come from the Temple and the church. Initially, the programs revolved around the question of “Who are we, and who are you?” followed by a series of monthly programs with “Life Cycle” as the theme. We paired the events of each congregation, discussing birth at one session, followed by Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation at the next, marriage counseling and the marriage ceremony at another, and finally a look at death in the context of both faiths.

In addition, we have considered holidays, and now
we are looking at texts. Our program for November was entitled “Difficult Biblical Texts in the Christian and Jewish Traditions.” This group also is toying with the idea of a joint trip to Rome and Jerusalem to see and share the sites. Father Ross and our Rabbi will lead an open, respectful, and friendly group of participants whose questions are interesting and whose discussions are never dull.

Our interfaith programming with Mayflower Congregational Church, an extremely open, liberal congregation that is welcoming of diversity, has been in existence for eight to 10 years. The direction of this group leans more toward community and social action. Together we have worked on a Habitat for Humanity Home, held candidate forums every other year for state and local elections, attended each other’s service while our Rabbi and their Minister traded pulpits, discussed philosophy in their parlor and our lounge, and joined annually as two of the co-sponsors of a citywide Interfaith Thanksgiving Service on the Tuesday before the holiday. Mayflower is newer to this service, but we have been a co-sponsor for 53 years, with our Rabbi being credited as the behind-the-scenes moving force who has kept this service strong.

The Interfaith Thanksgiving Service draws not only Jews and Congregationalists, but also Catholics, Hindus, Muslims, Baha’is, Native Americans, Unitarians, Eastern Orthodox—anyone who wishes to participate. A joint choir sings “We Gather Together to Ask the Lord’s Blessing”; a representative from each faith reads a few lines from their holy book in whatever language it is written; a local guest speaker presents a topic related to Thanksgiving; a few words are spoken regarding the recipient of the evening’s collection; the collection of money and/or canned goods is taken; a blessing is delivered; and the choir sings us all out the door for punch and cookies in just over an hour. Last year, the money collected went to Doctors Without Borders; this year’s will go to the Mennonite relief efforts for housing in Afghanistan. We rotate locations, allowing many the unusual opportunity to visit other local houses of worship.

Every other year, Mayflower and the Temple join together in bringing a Planned Parenthood sex-education series to our fifth- and sixth-graders and their parents. Spring is the time, pizza is the food of choice, and the location alternates. Interest in this vital series remains high.

These are just a few of our highlights! While our congregation shares in a variety of rich interfaith and community programming, often it is taken for granted by our congregants. There’s nothing like seeing it in writing to remind us of how much we do and how much more we could be doing! ●
Partnership Within a Federation: The Cleveland Model

by Loree B. Resnik, FTA,
Executive Director, Suburban Temple-Kol Ami, Beachwood, Ohio

Next year, the Cleveland Jewish Community Federation will celebrate its centennial year. Part of the celebration will reinvigorate its vision of partnership—creating new windows of opportunity to join with synagogues in meeting the needs of a vibrant Jewish community. Even before this process moves forward, Cleveland’s synagogues are already receiving far more support from the Federation than those in many other cities.

A number of years ago, a series of meetings was held among Dr. David Ariel, the president of the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies; David Kleinman, JCC executive director; and Alan Bennett, executive director of the Board of Jewish Education. Looking at Jewish continuity and at new educational partnerships, they began to form a vision. Around that time, led by Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver, of blessed memory, a congregational plenum was formed. Each Reform and Conservative synagogue was represented in periodic meetings by its senior rabbi and its president. The shared goal was to achieve a relationship with Federation that would be of mutual benefit. Fortunately for those of us in Cleveland, this all became a shared vision.

From these meetings, various ventures were funded. Initially, the Congregational Enrichment Fund allowed all synagogue supplementary schools to submit grant proposals in the amount of $38.50 per student. While this may not seem significant, it enabled many of our schools to start creative new enrichment projects that would not have been funded through their own operating funds. With money available, the school directors were able to create innovative projects that they previously could only have dreamed about. The JCC housed the Retreat Institute, with a director and staff who helped plan and fund children’s and congregational retreats. In my congregation, over the many years of this funding, we have been able to establish a fifth- and sixth-grade camp weekend retreat; high school “shadows” who work with special needs students to enable them to be mainstreamed in the classrooms; various curriculum writing projects; a schoolwide tzedakah curriculum with projects for each class; a series of theatrical scripts and a group of professional actors playing Biblical characters; and myriad stimulating family-education programs. The BJE, now the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, provided curriculum support through a funded program called Project Curriculum Renewal. Curricular writing teams, other staff, materials, ticket costs, and transportation are all included in these funding scenarios.

Over time, other programs have been developed. The Institutional Stipend program gives grant money to each school whose teaching staff meets minimum continuing education requirements by subsidizing this course work. A number of teachers have begun working toward advanced degrees through this program. Additionally, conference grants of up to $250 per participant may be awarded to teachers and educators to attend CAJE and NATE conventions, among others.

Close to ten years ago, another program, now the Cleveland Fellows, began. It started as a joint project of the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies and the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland. Each year, the five graduate students who joined the program would have class time at the college and would serve as fellows in the congregational and day schools. Beginning with 7 fellow positions in the schools, they eventually moved to full-time service. The program paid their salaries and employee benefits, with the congregation or day school assuming only the FICA and Workers Compensation costs. The fellows program has been replaced by an Executive Educators program, which continues to bring these fine educators into our schools almost entirely compensated through Federation Endowment Funds. For more than eight years now, we
have been able to have a family educator for our congrega-
tion without having to assume the costs.

One summer, four members of my congregational
staff went to the Whizin Institute of the University of
Judaism to participate in Ron Wolfson's family education
program for one week. The opportunity to study with
master teachers and be at the cutting edge of this important
educational concept was fully funded through the Feder-
ation Endowment Fund.

We have enjoyed a YOFI grant, given for innovative
youth group programming, the Gift of Israel program, and
camperships. We also were given a three-year declining
bridge grant to fund a newly created Religious School
Principal position. This gave us ample time to build this
position into our operating fund budget.

I am now sitting on a Federation task force that is
working on how Federation can help various agencies and
synagogues in the area of human resources. As with any
strategic plan, we have begun with the low-hanging fruit,
and we have already been involved in continuing-education
courses that are open to agency and synagogue
employees as well as Federation staff. We are looking at
the possibility of conference grants extending beyond the
educational community for things like NATA Institutes and
conventions and course work at the Mandel School of
Applied Social Sciences nonprofit management program or
at the Weatherhead School of Business, both a part of
Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Cleveland has been an outstanding Federation
community for many years. Enjoying the highest per-capita
giving in the United States and led by executives who
often go on to the national office, or to head Federations
elsewhere in the country, it is a model to be emulated. We
continue to explore creative partnership ventures that
benefit the whole community.

Still, we face challenges. Just a few families have
assumed the funds for these programs. Outside evaluation
teams have been brought in periodically, and everything
we do is held up to scrutiny. How long these funds will
continue is an issue, as we are all faced with ever more
difficult philanthropic economic conditions. It is our hope
that these joint programs, which have so greatly benefited
the Jewish community here, will continue to supplement
the congregational budgets of Cleveland. ●

Members Who Received Senior Status in 2002

Steve Bascove
Patricia Blau
Marc Cohen
Marsha Greiner
Karen Grimm
Robert Isaacs
Bekki Kaplan
Jeanne Kort
Hilary Leboff
Melissa Lowdermilk
Joan Nagler
Gary Simms
Judy Weinstein
The Genesis of a New Tradition: Creating Our First Mitzvah Day

by Leon Silverberg,
Executive Director, Temple Beth El, Great Neck, New York

Temple Beth-El of Great Neck (TBE), a 75-year-old congregation with more than 1,200 families, will be conducting its sixth annual Mitzvah Day this year. Each year Mitzvah Day attracts more participation—between 400 and 500—than any other Temple event, aside from High Holy Day services. In an active congregation that offers numerous programs (including two semesters of adult education with noted speakers, nationally recognized social action initiatives, multiple family services, youth activities, family education, healing services, Brotherhood and Women’s Network (Sisterhood) programs, caring community activities, fundraising events, and more) this is quite remarkable.

The Concept

While considered to be one of the leading social action congregations in the country, TBE was not the first to have a Mitzvah Day. We recognized the importance and community-building benefits of it and appointed our senior staff and social action chairs to plan and develop the activity. We wanted Mitzvah Day to touch people and organizations in need. We realized we needed activities and projects that appealed to members of all ages, with varied interests and skills. We wanted to help our congregation, our town, and the greater Long Island community. We understood that as a new activity, we had limited financial resources (Mitzvah Day had not been a budgeted program) with unknown expenses and liabilities to consider.

The Appeal

Mitzvah Day would be successful if we could reach beyond the core of active members who are always involved in Temple activities. We appealed to our members in several ways. We asked them to do a mitzvah, support a mitzvah, or “buy” a mitzvah. That is, they could participate in one of more than 60 projects that were organized by our social action committee, donate items that were needed for many of those projects, or donate money to support the projects. In the long run, most participants did all three.

Projects were divided into several categories: interaction with the elderly and needy; interaction with children, teens, and families; food preparation and delivery; outdoor projects, painting, repair; sorting and delivering donated items; and other special projects including a bone marrow drive, working in the Temple’s braille bindery, addressing and stuffing envelopes for a local not-for-profit organization, and more.

After several months of Temple bulletin publicity and “save-the-date” reminders, a registration package was mailed to every family and individual six weeks before Mitzvah Day. The package described the different activities by location, age, and time; they ranged from two to six hours and were planned for the morning and afternoon. A detailed wish list was included that requested donations of items that supported many of the projects. These items, including food, clothing, medical supplies, toiletries, toys, kitchen utensils, books, school supplies, and sewing materials, could be brought to the Temple any time prior to Mitzvah Day. Each donation was acknowledged with a letter of gratitude. To buy many of the materials that were needed for other projects (such as boxes, packing tape, markers, paint supplies, lumber supplies, and more), members were asked for a contribution of $18.

The Response

In the weeks leading to Mitzvah Day, TBE became a repository for hundreds of pounds of clothing and food. Medical supplies (some being samples of prescription medications donated by physicians), appliances, and other items of value were securely stored. Donations reached $4,000 and one member underwrote the cost of Mitzvah Day T-shirts that would be distributed to all participants. Members donated much of the paint, lumber, and hardware that were scheduled to be purchased. Boxes and packing
supplies were also donated, and approximately 450 children and adults, many who were not even Temple members, registered for the various projects.

On Mitzvah Day, registrants received name badges, T-shirts, project instructions, and a small breakfast. Everyone attended a brief prayer service that reinforced our dedication to tikkun olam. Each person left the service enthusiastically and headed to an assignment. Those who remained in the Temple packed boxes, made gifts for the elderly, painted a classroom, or donated blood, and all did so with warmth and joy.

The feedback from the participants, the recipients and the coordinators could not have been more positive and rewarding. A new tradition at TBE had begun, and it has continued to be a galvanizing experience for all who volunteer.

The Realities

To contact dozens of social agencies and agree on a mutually acceptable program that can be performed by volunteers on a specific date—this required hours of time, patience, and persistence. The specifics of preparation took hours of planning and lots of staff to transform the Temple overnight. There were legalities that had to be researched, captains appointed and trained for most activities, and dozens of follow-up calls to be made to ensure that all materials and people would be there as expected. There were “fires” to put out as the day progressed and an incredible clean-up at the end of the day. Some receiving agencies did not pick up their boxes until they were called several times. Acknowledgement letters had to be written to those who donated money and gifts.

These realities in no way diminished the overwhelming success of TBE’s Mitzvah Day. The looks of appreciation and glee from the people who were served, the glowing letters of thanks from individuals and agencies, and the community-building impact of the day made this a landmark event in the Temple’s glorious history. It continues to be a marvel of community involvement each year.

NATA Consulting Services

The NATA consulting service is available to member congregations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. NATA represents the combined expertise and experience of hundreds of professional temple administrators/executive directors. These administrators will respond to your congregation’s needs in the area you designate.

The consulting fee of up to $750 is waived to UAHC member congregations. Congregations are required only to reimburse the consultant’s expenses.

Consultations may be requested by completing the form linked to the NATA webpage (http://rj.org/nata). The completed form should be returned to the Office of Synagogue Management at the UAHC. The Director will then confer with the NATA leadership to provide the most appropriate consultant(s). The congregational leader indicated on the request form will be contacted to make specific arrangements.

The Department of Synagogue Management can assist in other ways. See the UAHC Communicate program for great ideas.

Contact Mark R. Jacobson (at 404-873-1731) or Director of the Department of Synagogue Management Dale Glasser (at 212-650-4040) for more information.
Simple, Successful Programs: What Works for Us

Going, Going...

Our youth group holds an auction, with the funds raised going to Camp Jenny, the local UAHC camp for underprivileged children in the Atlanta area. Items auctioned included a dinner for ten, cooked by a parent who happens to be a gourmet cook; personal services like eye exams; and donated items.

Irene Warner, Temple Beth Am, Miami, Florida

New Life for Cell Phones and Bikes

We collected old cell phones. A spousal abuse advocacy group here is programming them to call 911, so that battered spouses can get quick assistance.

We also collected used bicycles. Through Pedals for Progress, they are repaired and sent overseas (most to Latin America and Africa) for use as basic transportation by poor people.

Gary Simms, Temple Sinai, Washington, DC

Uniting Across the Denominations

In Nassau County in New York, we have a wonderful organization called Kehillah of Long Island (KOLI). (Kehillah means “community.”) Fourteen area synagogues, including Temple Chaverim, are members of KOLI. Since its inception four years ago, the leaders of KOLI have organized a yearly Yom haShoah Program, a Chanukah Toy Drive, Passover Food Drive, Family Field Day. The group also sponsors the Israeli Day Parade. In February 2003, KOLI is sponsoring an Israeli Merchant Fair.

The mission of KOLI is to unite the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews of Nassau County. KOLI meetings are a wonderful affirmation of our similarities rather than our differences. An atmosphere of religious acceptance fills each meeting. We have pledged to work together to build up Jewish life and continue to create a strong Jewish presence in our area.

Kim Schweitzer, Temple Chaverim, Plainview, New York

Tzedakah Fair

At Chanukah time, we invite a number of local nonprofit groups to speak to the religious school about their needs. On a specific day, children bring extra money (in addition to money for the regular weekly tzedakah collection) and visit booths set up by each of the groups and divide their tzedakah money among the groups that appeal to them. They then get a card that they can color and give to someone, saying a donation has been made in their name.

Mayda Clarke, Temple Emanuel, Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Mitzvah Crib

A member donated a no-longer-needed crib, which we set up in the lobby with colorful, large signs. The signs announced that we were collecting clothing, toys, diapers—anything for infants and toddlers. We gave everything collected to an organization that assisted families who lost their homes through fire. The program lasted for about six months because it was so successful. The crib filled up each week with donations.

Nancy Schneider, Temple Shaaray Tefila, New York City

Sandwich Saturday

After our second successful Mitzvah Day, the chairperson realized we needed a vehicle for families to volunteer but without a regular commitment (weekly, monthly, etc.) The result was Sandwich Saturday, a once-a-month program through which members gather to make bag lunches for the homebound and homeless. Each person over the age of 13 brings three large loaves of white bread and 20 pieces of soft fruit. The temple supplies the filling for sandwiches—peanut butter and jelly, tuna, or cheese, juice packs, and cookies. The volunteers fill the bags with sandwiches, a juice pack, a piece of fruit, and dessert. Volunteers under 13 can decorate the paper bags and/or assist in filling them. The program begins at 3 p.m. and concludes around 4:30 p.m. with havdalah no matter what
time of the year. (We use an inside room without windows, so it is always dark.)

At first, the Social Action Committee funded the program, but we soon found a benefactor who is donating $5,000 a year for five years, which covers our costs.

_Nancy Schneider, Temple Shaaray Tefila, New York City_

**Adopt-a-Social-Worker**

The Adopt-A-Social-Worker Program is a public/private partnership that provides much-needed resources to abused children and impoverished families throughout Orange County, California. Through the Orange County Child Abuse Prevention Center (OCCAPC), social workers from several county agencies participate. The resources provided help to families working toward becoming self-sufficient, contributing members of society.

Temple Beth Sholom became a partner in this program in January 1999, working directly with county social workers to provide material goods to needy families. Many of the items provided include clothing, shoes, books, toys, school supplies, summer camp supplies, diapers, household items (dishes, glasses, towels, bed linens), furniture, baby strollers, cribs, cleaning products, paper goods, and personal hygiene supplies. Grocery certificates or non-perishable food items are also collected.

Temple Beth Sholom received the OCCAPC Organization of the Year award in 2001 for the Adopt-A-Social Worker program.

_Susie Amster, FTA,
Temple Beth Sholom, Santa Ana, California_

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**2002 NATA Award Winners**

**Service to the Community**

**Debbie Coutant**
Congregation Shir Hadash
Los Gatos, California

**Service to Judaism**

**Leslie Sporn**
Temple Sharey Tefilo Israel
South Orange, New Jersey

**Service to NATA**

**Serane Blatt, FTA**
North Shore Congregation Israel
Glencoe, Illinois
Intergenerational Programming

by Elizabeth L. Hirsch, FTA,
Executive Director, Congregation Beth Or, Spring House, Pennsylvania

Each year, Congregation Beth Or participates in many programs that bring our children and local Jewish nursing home residents together. Our preschool, religious school, junior choir and youth groups all take part in intergenerational programming with residents of the Madelyn and Leonard Abramson Center for Jewish Living, a brand-new assisted-living and skilled-nursing facility located only a few miles from our Temple.

This year, our junior choir began an innovative joint choir program. Residents of the center and choir received music to rehearse for a concert in the spring. They rehearsed separately and together, and will continue to do so for the remainder of the school year. A joint concert will be performed for the community. The children, ages 8 through teen, each have a resident pen pal. They write to one another in addition to their joint efforts at song. This has proven to be a wonderful opportunity for our children to participate with the residents of the center in a unique way.

Our religious school students are involved in a project called Shema, which stands for “Sharing and Enriching Multi-Generational Activities.” Through this multifaceted program, our seventh-graders participated in a Chanukah celebration, and our third-graders celebrated Purim at the center. Throughout the year various other school-aged groups will visit and participate in joint celebrations of Jewish holidays.

Our confirmants add holiday joy by making Chanukah candy with the residents. Many of our b’nai mitzvah students choose to do a mitzvah project that involves the center. They provide pet therapy and visit specific residents on a regular basis to discuss their upcoming bar or bat mitzvah ceremonies. Some residents have even studied with the students during their visits.

Our junior high school and high school youth groups also participate at the center. Shortly before the secular New Year they have a party for the residents with food and dancing. It is a joy to see our youngsters dancing with a wheelchair-bound resident. There is a real party atmosphere, and many residents look forward to it all year long.

Even our preschool visits a few times each year during regular morning school hours. They sit with the residents and do various art and story projects with a Jewish theme. The residents love to see and work with these youngest congregants, and the children learn from the adults as well.

Adults from our congregation also visit the center. Once a month on Shabbat, they help navigate the residents to the on-site synagogue, worship with them, and join in a kiddush following the service.

At Beth Or, participating in programs with our local Jewish nursing home includes all generations. Children learn about aging and honoring our elderly, and adults help the aged residents continue participating in Jewish worship and learning. All learn to be part of our extended family and community.

Save These Dates!
November 1-5, 2003
NATA Convention
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Study, Worship, Learn, and Spend Time with Colleagues and Friends
Tutors Share the Joy of Reading

by Sallyjo Levine,
Congregant, Temple Kol Ami, West Bloomfield, Michigan

Several years ago Temple Kol Ami's social action committee was looking for a new project. We seemed to be running on autopilot, always doing the same things, in the same ways. At one meeting, we learned about a new project that we should consider. It seemed that Leonard Fein had made a commitment through the Jewish Coalition for Literacy to bring Jewish tutors into the schools of America. Were we interested?

That question was answered with a resounding "Yes!" We began to think of how we could be the most useful. We decided to go to Pontiac, Michigan, a community with desperate needs, located not too far from the congregation. The majority of Pontiac students receive subsidized or free lunches. Many of the children come from homes where two parents are not present. School is where a child is sent to learn what the adults may not know.

Alcott Elementary School, where a member of the congregation was the principal, was a perfect match.

We began as a group of four. We drove together, more for conversation than for safety. The school was so delighted to have us that they assigned the reading consultant to oversee the program. She remarked that although she needed us, we certainly did not need her. We were on our way.

Our day, Tuesday, was spent with first-graders. If children are already behind in first grade, they need assistance to catch up. It was up to us to help teach letters, then sounds, and then word recognition. For some children, success was achieved if they could remember the letters in their name. We were dispensing not only reading help, but also the time and one-on-one connection that is equally valuable. Our children knew when it was Tuesday.

We went on like this for three years, adding to our roster of tutors, some from the Temple and some not. We were retired teachers and full-time moms. Every tutor came back if she was able. We were committed.

And then the commitment changed. We wanted to do more than tutoring; we wanted to become a part of the Alcott school community. Temple Kol Ami adopted the school.

Now, members of our congregation attend PTA meetings, help at school functions, and hold reading programs on Sundays. Our "Spring into Reading" event last spring had children making books and bookmarks, decorating cookies with a reading theme, and sending the children home with donated books. Every spring we organize a book collection for Alcott. During the High Holy Days, we ask for donations of a "New Book for a New Year." The new books we take for granted are treasures to students from impoverished communities.

We are so fortunate in the Jewish community. We have been brought up to love reading. No parent turns down a child's request for another book or more time to read. Our aim is to have this program continue to grow.

(Reprinted from Fall 2002 Tzedek V' Shalom with permission of the author.)
From a World Away, Learning Lesson of Freedom

by Rabbi Leah Kroll,
Milken Community High School of Stephen Wise Temple, Los Angeles, California

This is the story of how the middle school students at Milken Community High School of Stephen Wise Temple became abolitionists. It is the story of a program that touched students deeply and inspired them to action. And it is the story of how every teacher in a school can be involved in planning something significant.

The idea was to give Passover a deeper meaning for the students, so we decided to investigate the issue of freedom. The entire school, students and teachers, read Sonia Levitin's book, Dream Freedom, which chronicles the problem of slavery in Sudan. If we have learned anything from our history as Jews, we know that we cannot remain silent while others have been abandoned into bondage. Spurred by the eloquent testimony in Dream Freedom, and in partnership with the American Anti-Slavery Group, we became modern-day abolitionists.

During the month of March, we spotlighted how each of us, no matter how old, can work for freedom. To begin the process, the students in Jewish studies classes were presented with an eight-lesson mini-unit on slavery and freedom. We worked toward four enduring understandings:

- Based on our experience as Jews, we have a responsibility to work toward the redemption of those who are not free.
- Freedom is an inalienable right of all people.
- Hopes and dreams are an essential part of the human condition.
- Every individual has an impact on the world, for better or worse.

In their classes, students viewed several videos about slavery today, read testimony by former slaves, learned more about the problem of worldwide slavery, and the different kinds of slaves that still exist, discovered what they could do to make a difference, debated the buyback of slaves, and came to understand why so much of the world is silent on this issue and why we feel that this is, in fact, a Jewish issue.

Later that month, the middle school gathered for a unique assembly. We met Dr. Charles Jacobs, the head of the American Anti-Slavery Group and Mr. Francis Bok, a former Sudanese slave. By then, the students had read most of the book and were able to speak intelligently about the issue of slavery today. They learned the most up-to-date information from two individuals who are experts on slavery, and they committed themselves to raising the money to free more than 100 slaves. (They far surpassed this goal – but more about that later.)

For most students, visiting with a former slave made the difference in the monthlong project. One student wrote, "It is so amazing to me that only a few short weeks ago I hardly knew slavery even existed; and yet today I am helping to free several in bondage. The whole concept of selling people like property and treating them like animals is the most horrendous and disturbing problem that faces our world today. While studying about the different types of slavery and learning that 27 million people are actually enslaved today, my eyes were opened to see how truly blessed I am. Now all my problems seem so minuscule, and I feel guilty for complaining about the amazing life I live. Before actually meeting Francis Bok, slavery seemed like a horrific nightmare, and I never imagined that the nightmare would stand right in front of me. To witness a slave was an enlightening experience, and I thank God every day that I am free."

The next week was full of many activities in our Dream Freedom campaign. Students logged on to our Dream Freedom school web site that had been created by students. They posted answers to questions in an electronic forum and responded to the opinions of their classmates. Individualized schedules for our teach-in were distributed as well as Dream Freedom T-shirts. During prayer services on Thursday morning, students and
teachers read freedom testimonials and prayers they had written. That afternoon, during the middle school dance after-school program, students raised funds to free slaves with a dance-a-thon. It costs only $36 to free a slave, and almost every student made the commitment to free a slave. Before the dance, students had painted Sparkletts bottles in a variety of colors. The bottles were placed in every room on campus, and students contributed money to the bottles throughout the week. Some students went door to door in their neighborhoods to educate and raise money to free slaves. Others contributed Bar and Bat Mitzvah money or visited parents’ offices to spread the word.

Their studies culminated in a day-long program at the end of the month. Students rotated through four learning centers, each run by a department in the school. They explored the issue of personal slavery—what enslaves them in their lives. They made slides about slavery for a Powerpoint presentation. They made bracelets engraved with the name of a slave who had been recently captured, to remind them that we were working to free human beings with families, names, lives before being captured and enslaved. And they decorated a photo frame that included a prayer for their seder tables—the matzah of hope—to remind us that we, who were once slaves, need to work for the freedom of others. Sonia Levitin, the author of *Dream Freedom*, spoke to the students, showed slides from Sudan, and answered questions.

The day concluded with an old-fashioned rally with guests from the community and politicians as speakers. The school was presented with a flag flown over the United States Capitol and with proclamations of support from local officials. Rousing songs were sung, and then came the day’s highlight. With media from television and radio present, students revealed the amount of money that they had raised to free slaves. In two weeks, the middle school students collected a whopping $13,300—enough to free 370 slaves! (And money is still coming in.)

Our goals for the program were simple: let students understand something real about freedom and slavery, and empower them to make a difference. I am still processing why this program was so successful, why it touched the hearts of students and provoked such a heartwarming response. One of the students said it best when she spoke at the rally: “We must remember how lucky we are to live in a country that allows us to exercise our freedom daily, and that our gift of freedom is only meaningful when we use it to empower our actions. As our tradition teaches us, ‘When one person is enslaved, we are all enslaved.’”

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**The NATA Web Site: Log On!**

Have you visited the NATA web site? If not, log on at http://tj.org/nata.

Major sections include the *Journal*; convention information; FTA certification, criteria, and information; officers; and the mission statement. You can also find information on the NATA Placement and Consulting Services. Two other sections include Judaic and other internet resource links, including links to other web sites that contain information of interest and help to NATA members.

New information is always being added, and suggestions are always welcome, as is assistance in our goal to make the web site more interactive.
Elders and Caring Kids
Make a Connection

by Maggie Canter, Chairperson of Caring Kids,
and Congregant, Temple Beth Am, Buffalo Grove, Illinois

Sara was a university professor. Stella taught Hebrew for many years. Leah survived the Shoah. Milton remembers meeting Sandy Koufax. (Sandy wasn’t very polite). Maury was a physician and was very well read. Rachel has memories only of when she was a young mother, since Alzheimer’s has taken over her mind. Betty has MS and is 30 years younger than everyone else in the nursing home.

They all have stories to tell and lifetimes to share. Some have families, but most of their time is spent alone. The days are so carefully punctuated that the monotony is hard to understand when you’re on the outside looking in. We wanted to see a change.

Caring Kids is a new program launched this year by our congregation. This program calls on families to make a friendly visit to local nursing homes in small groups. The visits are usually an hour or an hour and a half long. The families, in groups of three to ten, go at convenient times to do arts and crafts, sing songs, or play a game. Lots of kids are visiting, so the children feel less awkward because their friends are with them. The children in our current group range from two months to 18 years old.

Dates are sent out to the groups by email, activities are set, and children and seniors are able to make connections and friendships. Since a lot of kids don’t have elderly relatives close by, extended families can be created. Many of the seniors who don’t have a chance to be with children often can see the innocence and joy dancing in their eyes, or hold an infant for the first time in years.

The program was born when parents wanted to find ways for their children to learn Jewish life skills. With nursing homes and assisted-care centers popping up in the area, Rabbi Marc Belgrad suggested that families make the time to visit the elderly of our community.

As the idea took shape, T-shirts were made to identify our children and let them know they were part of something important. Orientations explained to the families what dementia, Alzheimer’s, and elderly care concerns were, so that children and parents could understand that everybody’s mind doesn’t work in quite the same way. We didn’t want kids to be upset if grandmas and grandpas couldn’t remember a name or the answer to a question they had just asked.

The parents were enthused with the concepts and latched on to it. Right now, we have between 45 and 50 families participating.

Once a quarter, we celebrate Shabbat at a local nursing home and bring a Czechoslovakian Torah that was saved from the Holocaust. Everyone from the group is invited to attend and lead the service. In our last service, a parent chanted the weekly portion, her son played guitar, another mom led the service with her 11-year-old, other kids did Torah blessings, and led the kidush and motzi. All the kids helped with a sing-a-long of Shabbat songs at the end. The goal at the end was to drown out the song leader, since their voices were better. They sang loudly, and the residents joined in.

Caring Kids has connected people together and taught important values. Sometimes an hour of your time or a dancing three-year-old can make life a little easier for someone who’s alone.
Seder of Hope Raises AIDS Awareness

by Wendy Good,
Executive Director, Temple Sinai, Sarasota, Florida

On a Sunday in the spring, Temple Sinai hosts its annual Seder of Hope. People of all religious backgrounds come together in an interfaith expression of recognition and support for friends and families of those who have been or are affected by HIV/AIDS.

The Temple Sinai Seder of Hope has grown over the past five years, with nearly 175 people attending last year's dinner. The mission of Temple Sinai's Seder of Hope is to raise HIV/AIDS awareness in our community. The seder offers healing and comfort through music and prayer. Our Rabbi and other attending clergy officiate, along with pre-assigned participants. Our music director and a local gay chorus provide the music. The Seder of Hope Committee and the rabbi wrote the original hagaddah. It is modified annually as necessary. Our sisterhood, the Women of Sinai, prepares and serves the seder meal.

Evelyn and Al Clark brought the idea of this special seder with them from Massachusetts. Their son, Peter Clark, died of AIDS in 1992. Peter was special. When he was diagnosed with HIV, Peter became involved in trying to bring healing and comfort to others affected with AIDS and HIV. He started a Thanksgiving dinner for AIDS and HIV affected people and their friends and families. At the first dinner, there were a few hundred in attendance. Today, Peter's Thanksgiving dinner in Boston serves more than 3,000.

The Seder of Hope Committee displays a collection of AIDS quilts on loan from St. Martha's Church. These quilts represent AIDS victims and the families who love them.

The Seder of Hope is supported by the Social Action Committee of Temple Sinai, the Arms of Temple Sinai, the Archdiocese of the district, local AIDS support groups, local supermarkets, and many individuals. There is no charge for admission, although contributions in cash or in kind are encouraged.

This year, three weeks before the Seder of Hope, we already had a waiting list of more than 30 people.

NATA Members with FTA Designations

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Serane Blatt
Steven Bram
Janet Bronitsky
Gary Cohn
Sonya Dinnsen
William Ferstenfeld
Norman Fogel
Sandra Galfond
Mandell Greene
Jeffrey Herzog
Elizabeth Hirsch
Thomas Jablonski
Fern Kamen
Edward Kaplan
Terry Kraus
Gail Kroop
Alice Miller
Eli Montague
Loree Resnik
Janice Rosenblatt
Marc Swatez
Terry Taubman
Mark Weisstuch
How One Community Fosters Tolerance and Understanding

by Joyce Engle,

Executive Director, Temple Israel, New Rochelle, New York

Temple Israel of New Rochelle has been involved with, and has played a leadership role in, two different interfaith organizations in our community. The major goals of both of these organizations are to combat anti-Semitism in the community; to build on American ideals; and to provide a structure for community service to our congregants.

Coalition for Mutual Respect

The Coalition was created in 1979, in the wake of the Andrew Young incident. (Young, who is black, was the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and held talks with the PLO, although the U.S. did not then have diplomatic relations with the Palestinian group.) Racial tensions between the black and Jewish communities rose after President Jimmy Carter relieved him of his position.

In response to this situation, Rabbi Emeritus Amiel Wohl of Temple Israel brought 20 Brotherhood members to meet with Rev. Vernon Shannon at the St. Catherine A.M.E. Zion Church (New Rochelle). They agreed to change negative attitudes within the two communities. Since its inception, the Coalition has sought to create a community where blacks and Jews can work and live in mutual respect.

The Coalition has set the tone for mutual respect in New Rochelle and has moved the community toward fostering tolerance and understanding. Rev. Michael J. Rouse has followed in the footsteps of Rev. Shannon and has joined Rabbi Wohl as the current co-chairman.

Every year, Temple Israel of New Rochelle holds an annual dinner and service to honor Martin Luther King. Rev. Rouse and the church choir participate. This tradition is continuing under the leadership of Rabbi Michael Cahana.

Our congregants attend a Sunday service each year at A.M.E. Zion Church at which Rabbi Wohl is the speaker.

In addition to the annual pulpit exchange, an annual interfaith Passover seder is held alternating between Iona College and the College of New Rochelle, highlighting the common heritage of different ethnic and religious traditions. We have held a trip to Israel, focusing on Christian and Jewish sites.

The Coalition has expanded to Westchester County and serves as a national model for black and Jewish cooperation and interaction. It is now seeking to expand membership to a national level.

Interreligious Council of New Rochelle

The Interreligious Council of New Rochelle (IRC), founded in 1975, includes houses of worship of all faiths and historically religious educational institutions. The council is committed to promoting interfaith cooperation and understanding among all religions through a combination of action and dialogue. Keeping the lines of communication open fosters an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

The IRC believes that "reconciliation with God can occur only when people are reconciled to one another. Based on this belief, the IRC expresses the essential commonalities of our varied religious heritages and traditions while respecting our differences; promotes interfaith cooperation and amity; studies the human needs of the communities; and serves the community by undertaking such ministries as needed and by cooperating with other groups and individuals.

The IRC has served the community in myriad ways. It founded Meals on Wheels of New Rochelle, providing its initial funding and charter members of the board; provided leadership for dormitories for the homeless and food for food kitchens; was a catalyst for the creation of senior housing at Maple Center, a project of Interfaith Dwelling, Inc.; provided for many major community problems; has been actively involved in the Pastoral Care Program at New Rochelle hospital; and conducted ecumenical services during periods of crisis.
Each year, we hold an interfaith Thanksgiving service, which brings together participants from all segments of the community. Each year a different church, synagogue, or college in New Rochelle hosts the service, which is followed by a collation. (My personal favorite was at the Greek Orthodox Church where the women prepared all sorts of Greek desserts.) We collect donations each year at the service for different charitable causes.

Our involvement continues to grow. Rabbi Michael Cahana has become an active participant in the Thanksgiving service and other IRC events since he became senior rabbi three years ago. I have recently been appointed as a delegate to the IRC.

We have developed lines of communication between the city government and the religious community. The mayor of New Rochelle meets regularly with the clergy to keep one another aware of developments in the city.

The IRC focuses attention on the religious dimensions of life and on celebrating the diversity that is New Rochelle.

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- Nathan Emanuel, FTA*
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- Bernard Lepoff, FTA
- David I. Mitchell, FTA*

* of blessed memory