

The Advantage

A Publication of the FJMC for Men's Club Presidents



Issue 30

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FJMC = Environmentally Friendly! Reveals 'Partnership' with JNF

When many of us think of the work of JNF – the *Jewish National Fund*, we think of the blue and white boxes our parents and grandparents filled with coins, in order to plant trees in Israel. But JNF has evolved into a more proactive organization in the response to environmental problems, and it is for that reason that *the FJMC is negotiating a 'partnership' agreement with the JNF* as it fashions a response to those global problems.

Throughout the last century, Jewish National Fund has been known for greening the land of Israel – planting 240 million trees and creating over a thousand parks and recreational areas. The recently introduced GoNeutral program, (one of the programs which you will be hearing more about at the FJMC Convention 2009), will enable you to offset your own carbon emissions by planting trees in Israel. JNF has become a global environmental leader by performing comprehensive, cutting edge work to help solve the problems that are plaguing our planet.

Today, JNF grapples with the challenge of balancing the phenomenal growth and development of Israel in the last decade with maintaining an ecologically sound environment. JNF sponsors conferences on battling land degradation and combating desertification, reforestation, and water conservation techniques across the world, funds research on grappling with arid land

management, invests in alternative and solar energy projects, and leads the world in water desalination and purification techniques.

In the aftermath of the war with Hezbollah in 2006, JNF is implementing the principles of sustainable development and sustainable forest management as it seeks to re-green northern Israel.

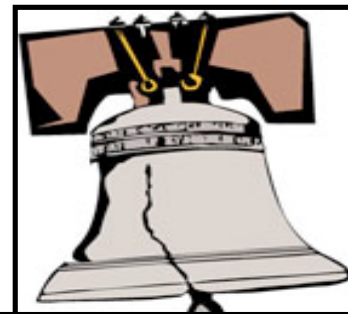
Coming issues of *The Advantage* will discuss JNF's efforts at sustainable water development, and combating desertification. You'll be hearing more about how **and your club and synagogue** can benefit from the FJMC - JNF partnership and help in combating ecological problems.

STAY TUNED!

Men's Health Issues: A Focus of Convention 2009

Even with the current slowdown in the economy, we are a growing and prosperous country (that includes the USA and Canada). The one area where this 'growth' is neither wanted nor healthy is in the growing waistline & stomachs of men. Too few of us aren't aware that a few extra pounds are much more than a few, and we fit into a category which none of us want to admit - being obese.

Obesity is a chronic disease affecting millions of Americans. It is defined by excess body fat and is generally measured by calculating a



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person's BMI (body mass index). If a person's BMI is 30 or above, he is considered to be obese. Past President Dr. Bob Braitman, spoke of this issue at his Farewell Address at Convention 2007, and is the leading force for 'wellness programming' for Convention 2009. Who is affected by this epidemic? The cartoon character Pogo said it best: "We have met the enemy, and they are US!" I know from personal example.

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Men's Health (cont'd)

In December 2006, on a trip with my family to Aruba, my wife looked at my stomach, and told me that after the New Year, we'd be starting on a well-known weight management program with the initials 'WW.' On January 2, 2007, at the age of 57 and almost 5'11," I tipped the scales at over 211 pounds. [It took me a number of years to accomplish this.] The BMI calculator disclosed that the person I saw in the mirror each day, was not just 'a couple of pounds overweight, but was "OBESE." And until I got down below 177 pounds, I'd be officially 'overweight.' It wasn't easy, but it wasn't painful.



What I learned in the six months that it took me to lose almost 40 pounds, and continue to learn, is that I have to choose much more carefully what I eat, that I have to eat until I am satisfied, not 'stuffed,' and that changes in what and how I eat aren't sacrifices (negative), but interesting and enjoyable (positive). And that these changes weren't a temporary adjustment, but a lifetime change.

Obesity is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease (mother had it), high blood pressure (brother has it), stroke, diabetes (uncles had it) and some forms of cancer (mother had it). Some 300,000 premature deaths are caused by obesity each year, and about \$100 billion in annual health care costs is attributed to obesity. After tobacco use, obesity is the second-leading cause of preventable deaths. About six out of 10 Americans are overweight or obese, and those numbers are rising. The number of children and teens who are overweight or obese is also expected to increase. And for almost all, it is self-inflicted.

While Convention 2009 will have many ideas for your Men's Club / Brotherhood to adopt for programming, it's not too early to

start thinking about this increasingly important topic, and possibly adding a program or two addressing it into your club's programming PRIOR to convention.

Do you need some more programming ideas? In addition to some ideas within this issue, take a look at the FJMC's second publication in the Hearing Men's Voices series, Body and Spirit: Men Staying Healthy and Fit, which should be a part of your club's library. If your club doesn't have a copy, it is only \$7.95 a copy and available on the FJMC.org web site.



Keruv: FJMC's Intermarriage Response

The FJMC Keruv Initiative was launched to address the most profound change affecting the American Jewish community in the 21st Century.

- *More than 1/3 of American Jews are married to non-Jews.*
- *Close to 1/2 of recent "Jewish" marriages are between a Jew and a non-Jew.*
- *Of all the Jews who are cohabiting today, over 80% of these partnerships are with individuals of non-Jewish origin.*

In all too many cases, the parents of the children of these marriages, co-habitations, or arrangements, have nowhere to go to express the pain they feel, the dilemmas, in which they find themselves. A large number of Conservative Movement

Jews have children who are intermarried or who are considering intermarriage. This parent issue is far more prevalent within our shuls than the incidence of the intermarried couples themselves. It makes sense, no? The parents stay as shul members; it's their intermarried kids that are gone.

More often than not, their intermarried kids stop belonging to a conservative shul—either it wasn't important to them to begin with, or they don't feel welcome there anymore. But more importantly: their parents, who are still members of their conservative shul, have no place to talk about their family experience—this just isn't something that is talked about. And there are no clear guidelines for our rabbis to help them. We are in danger of losing these adults as well as their children, because we're not addressing their specific needs.

The Keruv Initiative strives to serve the needs of our congregations in several ways. Keruv programming provides an opportunity for our congregants to explore issues relating to intermarriage in a safe and supportive environment. Further, the implementation of a Keruv Committee fosters a culture change that makes the congregation more appealing to potential members with diverse backgrounds. As Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of FJMC has expressed it, "If we are concerned with the future of Conservative Judaism and fail to act proactively, then our movement will be condemned to a diminishing future."

The successful implementation of Keruv is not always easy in all congregations. There is sometimes resistance from both clergy and lay leaders who fear that the promotion of Keruv will either sanction intermarriage or compromise halachic standards. Above all, the

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Keruv (cont'd)

lead rabbi of each shul (the Hebrew term for this is "mara d'atra") is the final ruling authority of how the keruv initiative is applied in that shul. FJMC offers rabbinic think tanks at no charge to help the rabbi design and develop a customized keruv approach that is appropriate for his or her shul. Our lay Keruv consultants understand that our objective is not to change ritual practices in any way.

So what has been accomplished? The changes are obvious in congregations where Keruv consultants have active and flourishing committees and programs. Intermarried families feel more welcome and all congregants have a forum in which to discuss their concerns and emotions. Yet the changes are broader. Every Conservative movement institution has begun to rethink its traditional posture toward intermarriage. Conservative congregations are increasingly evaluating their own policies and trying to find ways to open doors to intermarried families. While we might wish for 100% intermarriage, intermarriage is a reality that our congregations must deal with as they face the future.

The Steering Committee of the FJMC Keruv Initiative remains focused on the people in our own congregations who need and want Keruv programming. We are motivated by the incremental progress that we see in the world of Conservative Judaism. We continue to be inspired by our mentors like Rabbi Harold Shulweiss of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, Ca who has written, "*In our attitude and practice toward the stranger we as a community of faith will recover the moral passion and purpose in Jewish living. Out there I seek seekers who want to discover a faith, wisdom, ethics and people who can solidify their lives. Out there are intermarried couples who stand outside on the threshold of the*



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Torch Award
will be passed
to a new generation of
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(since 1950), and willing to create
innovative programming which will
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synagogue, ambivalent, frightened to enter, waiting to be invited in.”

The Keruv program has continued to grow and place the issues surrounding intermarriage squarely before the Conservative Jewish movement. Keruv has created four program guides and a pamphlet chronicling “Journeys: Stories of Interfaith Families” as they deal with the tensions incumbent in interfaith families and their quest for resolution and fulfillment. All 5 publications are available for download at the FJMC’s Keruv web site.

There are a growing number of experienced Keruv consultants available to discuss how you might approach your Rabbi about implementing a program in your congregation. At Convention 2009, you’ll have an opportunity to learn more. Or, contact Harvey Braunstein at assets00@aol.com.

Of Course This Advantage Has Program Ideas!

One of the important functions of The Advantage is to provide programming ideas for clubs. This issue will be no exception, and as the environment and men’s health will play huge roles in the 2009 Convention, we’ll suggest programming ideas for those topics:

• **Technicolor Recipes.** As what we eat plays a critical role in our health, have a program which

explains how the different colors in food affect nutrition and health, and highlights relatively easy and colorful foods with samples to taste and copies of recipes. Check out both some of the more recent Kosher cook books (such as [Kosher By Design](#)) and vegetarian and vegan cookbooks for recipes.

- **Spice It Up.** Continuing with the theme of food and its importance in our health, and since ‘FREE FOOD’ is often an attraction, you might be able to get some Sisterhood members to drag their men to a program which highlights the various non-Eastern European spices which can make food interesting and delicious. Have samples and copies of recipes for all to taste, for a helpful stimulus to attendance. In addition to the above cookbooks, check out Sephardic cookbooks, as there is a wealth of delicious and colorful Jewish cooking waiting to be discovered. If you can get a popular cookbook donated, offer to give it away, allowing each man who attends to have his name submitted with an extra one for his wife.
- **Health Fair.** If you have doctors in your congregation, whether or not they are involved in the Men’s Club, it doesn’t take too much thought to find a specialty which any of them may have that relates

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Programming Ideas (cont'd)

to Men's Issues, and for which they would be more than willing to speak before your club. And you can easily put together a number of specialists, to deal with various issues that men have to confront. The FJMC's Hearing Men's Voices: Body and Spirit (Men Staying Healthy and Fit), provides a wealth of specifics, and it is currently ON SALE, at the FJMC website, if your club doesn't have a copy in its library.

- **Nature Walk Bingo.** In addition to consuming too many calories, another primary problem with our life-style is the lack of activity. Depending on where you live, you likely have a nature trail that men and their children can walk around, create a 'bingo card' made up not of numbers, but rather of particular plant or wild-life which fathers and their children would be able to move around and 'search' for, in order to get Outdoor Bingo. Have some less expensive prizes if someone gets only one line of 'bingo' and increasingly more valuable prizes if they can find and cover multiple lines of 'bingo.' You may be able to find congregants with businesses willing to donate small favors. At the very least, you can inexpensively create colorful certificates on your computer. And realize that you can 'rename' your card to be more 'eco-friendly' and larger, such as NATURE (6 letters, and thus a 6 x 6 grid).

- **Bike Rally.** Most kids enjoy bike riding, and riding is a growing form of recreation for adults. Have a bike festival in which fathers and their sons and/or daughters compete at bike skills: riding a bike around a pre-defined track which takes skill, not speed, and like the Olympics, requires more than one circumference of the track. Or, if you have a bike path near your congregation, take

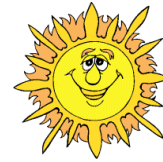
the path and stop along the way at pre-designated locations where interesting sights or nature exist. The purpose is to get fathers and children riding together in a different setting. And have inexpensively created colorful certificates made on your computer, for all participants. Men's Club can provide some liquid refreshments and health snacks along the path.

- **Energy Audit of Your Congregation and/or Homes.** You'd be amazed at how much electricity (which equals money) you or your congregation might be able to save by implementing relatively low cost. While a full-scale energy audit is usually beyond the scope and ability of a non-professional, clubs can present a program with guidelines for conducting an energy audit in the home, with a checklist for what to examine, and showing, even in the synagogue room, how they can go about doing such an audit.

You might be able to find a company that performs energy audits come and speak with your group. While energy audits were all the rage a number of years ago, the increasing costs of heating oil and electricity is making them even more relevant and cost effective today. If your synagogue hasn't had a professional energy audit because of cost, your Men's Club can also do some of the leg-work of a preliminary audit: checking for leaks in windows, electrical outlets, switch plates,

weather stripping around outside doors; energy efficient lighting, etc.

- **Install a Solar Ner Tamid in Your Congregation.**



At Convention 2007, the Solar Ner Tamid was introduced.

While the energy savings for the congregation is primarily symbolic, a solar Ner Tamid, and the reminder it provides, can have an appreciable impact on energy use. And installing one will entitle your club to a special Torch Award. You can do a program about powering things with renewable resources (which the sun is), and although installing solar lights in a household isn't particularly cost effective, replacing incandescent and halogen bulbs with compact florescent bulbs is. If your attendance is large enough, there are organizations that will provide free 'samples' of compact florescent bulbs (at a value of approximately \$5.00).

- **Planting Trees in Your Community and/or in Israel.** You have two (2) days to shoot for: Tu Bishvat, the Jewish Festival of Trees is February 9th, and Arbor Day, the National Holiday celebrating trees, is April 24, 2009 in both the United States and Canada. Does your congregation have an area where some trees can be planted? That's a perfect place. But even if it doesn't, we all can

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They may be waiting for the Early Bird Special...

But YOU Don't Have To!

It's not TOO EARLY to start planning to go to Convention 2009 and submit a Quality Club Award Application! (see November issue)

Program Ideas (cont'd)

learn about trees and their importance to the environment. Coordinate with your Sunday school, and have a speaker from the U.S. Park Service or even a local nursery. Depending on where your club is located, the county may have places where trees can be planted under their guidance. And if the weather doesn't permit, you can make it a fundraiser for planting trees in Israel, particularly through the JFN, and the fundraiser doesn't have to end on the particular date of the program, but can be the 'kickoff.' And your club can have a goal for the entire congregation in terms of numbers of trees.

These are just a few ideas which involve the theme which Convention 2009 and much of the world will be focusing on. It is not too soon to think creatively and create the next great program that you'll share with other clubs, and other clubs will want to emulate.

FJMC's Recent Actions & Programs on the Environment



Whether you know it or not, the FJMC has become a leading actor in the Conservative movement in addressing issues which must be addressed.

The FJMC had already started its response to the growing environmental concerns, prior to \$4.00 a gallon gas. Convention 2007 introduced the Solar Ner Tamid program, to get Men's Clubs and their congregations to install a solar eternal light, as a symbolic and prominent symbol of the need to use renewable sources of energy.

Three additional initiatives have either been announced, or are soon to be implemented, which you need to know about:

- **Soy Shabbat Candles.** The traditional candle is made from paraffin, a petroleum wax. In the move away from petroleum based products, the FJMC has announced distribution of soy wax candles, produced from the soybean plant, by hydrogenating (adding hydrogen to) the soybean oil. The soybean wax is produced from natural and renewable resources that are nontoxic and environmentally friendly. Soy candles burn clean without any candle soot, are long lasting, up to 35%- 50% longer than paraffin. The candles are off-white in color. You should have received a copy of the promotional sheet in an earlier mailing.



- **Biodegradable plates and utensils.** We've all grown up using Styrofoam, particularly during Shabbat Kiddush. The material these items are made of is a hydrocarbon that is commercially manufactured from petroleum by the chemical industry.



Worldwide, more than 14 million metric tons of polystyrene, the material used to make Styrofoam, are produced annually, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Most of this ends up in landfills. Although polystyrene represents less than 1 percent of solid waste generated in the United States, at least 2.3 million tons of it is dumped in U.S. landfills each year. Only 1 percent of polystyrene waste is currently recycled.

As an alternative, you can purchase biodegradable plates, cups and utensils made of plant starch. It's sturdy and durable, and out performs most petroleum based plastic cutlery. It is biodegradable and home compostable (it composts in approximately 180 days at an approved facility). It is also heat



resistant to 200 degrees F, so it can be used with heated foods. And, best of all, it's made with a natural and renewable product grown here.

- **Voluntary Assessment for Carbon Offset.** The Executive Committee of the FJMC has instituted a voluntary assessment for members driving and/or flying to Board meetings, so as to be carbon-neutral. For example, my driving distance to the FJMC's Philadelphia Executive Committee meeting in September, from my home in Maryland, produced approximately 240 pounds of carbon if I had driven myself. One tree will offset such carbon during its lifetime, so I purchased a tree in Israel, through the JNF, to help make both the land and the environment a little greener.

What Is Carbon Offset?



With 'global warming' and other environmental issues becoming more and more prominent, one of the terms we'll often hear is 'carbon offset.' Some of us have used the expression in conversation, without really understanding what it means.

Carbon is an element, so it is not created or destroyed. No carbon enters or leaves earth. The amount of carbon on earth never changes. It exists in several forms:

- carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas
- inside living things - people, animals, trees, plankton, etc.
- buried underground (in land or sea) in the form of fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas)

When we burn fossil fuels, the carbon in them is turned to carbon dioxide and released into the air, where it causes global warming. Plants take carbon dioxide from the air and turn it into the organic chemicals they need to survive and

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Carbon Offset (cont'd)

grow (we say they "fix carbon"). In this way carbon is moved from the air to a "carbon sink", which is a good thing. [If we could wait a few million years, we might be able to watch the plants die and turn back into carbon-rich fuels, i.e., oil, coal, etc., but my 'visa' for this planet expires a long time prior to that happening. I believe your 'visa' also has the same deficiency.]



So much of our ordinary human activity, i.e., electricity use, flying, driving, etc., often referred to as 'carbon footprint,' cause carbon to be released into the air. Since plants take the carbon (in the form of CO²) out of the air, if we plant a tree, hopefully it will eventually grow big enough that it would 'contain' one kilogram of carbon, having absorbed the carbon from the air. Thus, our overall contribution to global warming would be one kilogram less. There are a number of web sites in which you can get a rough estimate of the amount of carbon your activities produce, such as the Jewish National Fund's calculator, found at:

www.jnf.org/goneutral/CarbonCalc.html.

A person's carbon 'footprint' may be so large that it's impractical to plant trees in one's own garden. However, we could plant trees and reduce or eliminate our carbon footprint, in a most significant 'Jewish' way, with an organization which has been on the forefront of environmental action for most of its existence.... the Jewish National Fund, the organization which, almost, single-handily invented the little blue box (not to be confused with 'the little blue pill').

Since air moves without respect to national borders, trees, wherever they are, absorb CO² and thus help the fight against global warming. Thus, that mitzvah of planting a tree in Israel, which you thought only helps reforest the land, plays a

positive role in the fight against global warming.

In the coming months you'll be hearing, in this publication and others of the FJMC, of the 'partnership' we're in the process of negotiating with JNF, and how your club, by doing good deeds, can earn money to use for its own environmental programs.



Always on
the Lookout
for
Interesting
programs

FJMCAvantage@fjmc.org

Ask Allan

Dear Allan:

Can you suggest a good way to let our congregation know what our Men's Club is doing this year?

Gotta Have a Gimmick

Dear Gotta:

One possibility is to create a Men's Club Corner in the synagogue lobby with photos of past events, and a pocket with fliers listing your events for the year, a membership "thermometer" to chart your membership campaign for the year and information about upcoming programs. And a creative or witty phrase for it helps to get attention.

Does your synagogue have a list-serve, which sends out weekly emails to the membership? Make sure your events are mentioned in the list-serve, and see if you can distinguish how your Men's Club information looks on the list serve listing as opposed to other events.

For next year, try to take advantage of the fact that everyone will be at the synagogue for the High Holy Days. See if you print your Men's Club program schedule on a bookmark and insert it in all of the High Holy Day prayer books. Everybody will notice it and many will take it home with them as a

reminder. If you're quick, you could create one in time for this Sukkot, as many younger men will be in synagogue with their children, helping to decorate the Sukkah.

Dear Allan:

Our club is having trouble finding a niche within the congregation. We tend to duplicate the kinds of programs done by the Sisterhood or by congregational committees, but ours never seem as compelling. Can you give some guidance?

In a Fog

Dear In:

Yours is a common problem. The first thing you need to determine is what areas of the congregation are currently underserved. Talk to the rabbi, Executive Director, synagogue president, and other congregational leaders to get this information. You might even want to prepare a short survey for them to complete.

You also might talk to the synagogue president in particular about congregational committees that don't seem to be functioning as well as they should. Maybe the Men's Club could take over the functions of a particular committee.

Here are a few areas in which the Men's Club might take a lead in the congregation, particularly because of the wealth of programming and assistance resources which the FJMC and your region can provide: family activities; community service projects; Israeli affairs; enhancing Jewish observance in the synagogue and at home; support of youth; how the synagogue can be involved in environmental issues; addressing the intermarriage issue; and men's (as well as all the member's) health.

Another possible solution to your problem is that perhaps your club is attempting to do too much, and in the process you're spreading yourselves too thin. It's better to do a few activities well than to do a lot poorly.