

# Middlesex

See article below

## Highland Park temple marks 75 years as a center for faith and family

by Debra Rubin  
Special to NJ Jewish News

The Highland Park Conservative Temple and Center was founded after four men grew tired of crossing the Raritan River on a bridge that brought them to a synagogue in New Brunswick.

Seventy-five years later, HPCT stands as a thriving Jewish institution with an array of educational and social activities, holiday programs, and a congregation committed to the enrichment of Jewish life.

"The temple is very special because the members feel like family," said Elaine Fromkin, chair of the 75th anniversary program that took place May 19 at the temple. "We care for one another and it crosses generations. Generations of families have belonged so the dedication continues. My fondest memories come from the team work during our events."

She cited in particular Jewish Expo 2004, when an entire portion of the shul was turned into an early 20th-century Lower East Side neighborhood to celebrate the 350th anniversary of Jews arriving in America.

"More than 200 members shared their skills and energy, volunteering their time for the temple's com-



Breaking ground in 1949 for a new synagogue building with a new name, the Highland Park Conservative Temple and Center are, from left, Abe Friedberg, Abe Hamelsky, Harry Kroll, and Morris Schwartzbard.

mon goal — the education about the era through exhibits and role-playing activity," recalled Fromkin.

The May 19 program, which featured a catered dinner and a play about the founding of the shul, also had

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## Diocese 'knights' Jew for support of hospital

by Debra Rubin  
Special to NJ Jewish News

Joseph Tabak of Highland Park has been granted a rare honor by the Catholic Church, receiving knighthood in the Order of Pope Saint Sylvester.

What makes his selection even more unusual is the fact that Tabak is Jewish and is the first non-Christian in the 25-year history of the Diocese of Metuchen to have the papal honor conferred on him.

The business executive and longtime supporter of St. Peter's University Hospital in New Brunswick received a certificate and medal before a crowd of about 600 April 30 in St. Francis of Assisi Cathedral in Metuchen. He was recognized for his efforts on behalf of the hospital and the church's mission to care for the sick.

"I'm honored because it furthers our shared Judeo-Christian values and inter-religious relations," said Tabak, who previously was awarded the Israel Peace Medal by State of Israel Bonds and is active in the Jewish community (see sidebar). "Although we have many types of religions, we all are one people, we all pray, and we all need to help one another. We all share the same values."

Joanne Ward, a spokesperson for the diocese, said its bishop, Paul G. Bootkoski, had requested that Pope Benedict XVI bestow pontifical honors on 25 clergy, religious, and laity who "have made significant contributions to the mission of this particular church over the past quarter century" in honor of its 25th anniversary.

Four kinds of awards were given on April 30. Tabak was the sole recipient of the Saint Sylvester honor, which itself has four ranks, beginning with knighthood. It is given to non-Catholics only under rare circumstances.

"Mr. Tabak is so deserving of this pontifical honor, I was very pleased that His Holiness made him a Knight of Pope Saint Sylvester," said Bootkoski. "He is the embodiment of Judeo-Christian values. His service to St. Peter's, our only diocesan hospital, has been invaluable."

Tabak said he became involved with the hospital about 20 years ago when he was on the board of the Franklin Bancorp, and its chair asked him to join the St. Peter's Foundation Board, on which Tabak continues to serve. As a board member, he has not only contributed generously to the hospital but has helped it raise funds for new additions, programs, and services. In 2004, the bishop selected Tabak to be on the hospital board of trustees.



Joseph Tabak: "When you receive you also have to give."

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### Article #1

## Synagogues' effort hopes to harness the power of positive thinking, doing

by Debra Rubin  
Special to NJ Jewish News

Six Raritan Valley Orthodox synagogues are embarking on a project to promote character development through a combination of Torah study and good deeds.

More than 40 people have already signed on to the Achieving Change Through Torah, or ACTT, program, which began May 14 with a kickoff event at Congregation Ohav Emeth in Highland Park (see sidebar).

The program will include public study and discussion groups, as well as resources encouraging participants to study on their own on a daily basis. Each "module" will focus on a specific character trait, including loving-kindness, gratitude, anger management, and *kavana* or concentration during prayers.

"Our philosophy is to take baby steps that will lead to gradual change that will be lasting," said coordinator Phil Rosen. "The goal is to build a solid foundation, and this does so through a multi-faceted approach where we select different character improvements for personal character development. The concept is that a person will commit to reading a short amount of Torah-oriented reading — maybe only five minutes of learning a day. Then they do one act of kindness per day."

The program will also encourage support groups to share lessons and discuss what has and hasn't worked. "They will be able to share ideas," said Rosen. "We also have on-line discussion groups to share ideas and disseminate inspirational materials."

The program grew out of a community-wide push by the area's Orthodox synagogues and rabbis to bring about positive change. Rabbi Steven Miodownik of

Congregation Ahavas Achim said the program was the brainchild of people who wanted to help others deal with tough times.

"They saw some tragedy in the community, some deaths, and wanted to involve people in self-improvement," he explained. "When faced with tragedy, we don't look to blame others. We turn inward and handle it with prayer and study."

A committee was formed with representation from each participating synagogue, each of which publicized the program in bulletins and through pulpit announcements.

A letter went out to the community signed by the rabbis of the six synagogues, including Miodownik, David Bassous of Congregation Etz Ahaim, and Eliyahu Kaufman of Ohav Emeth, all in Highland Park; Yaakov Luban of Congregation Ohr Torah in Edison; Abraham Mykoff of Congregation Poile Zedek in New Brunswick; and Yaakov Wasser of Young Israel of East Brunswick. A representative lay committee member from each synagogue also signed the letter.

The group's mission statement says that its goal is "to provide a Torah-based approach and support system that nurtures spiritual growth and sustains enduring positive change."

In addition to study, it will encourage participants to undertake specific acts, including running an errand for a friend, greeting someone cheerfully, remembering someone's birthday, or calling a person going through a difficult time.

Organizers acknowledged such actions should develop naturally among people committed to an Orthodox lifestyle, but that efforts are sometimes needed to overcome "inertia."

*The program was the brainchild of people who wanted to help others deal with tough times.*

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## Publisher pulls plug on Middlesex Jewish weekly

by Norm Oshrin  
Special to NJ Jewish News

The Jewish State, a weekly newspaper distributed for free in Middlesex County and neighboring communities, closed down earlier this month after 10 years in business.

The May 18 issue of the Highland Park-based newspaper, delivered to 300 retail locations and synagogues in five counties, was its last.

"I think the best way to put it is we had extremely high hopes for a very solid product and hoped to move it into its next stage of growth," said publisher Jacqueline L. Pappas, whose company, New Jersey Bluefish Publications, Inc., purchased the paper last January from Ron Ostroff, its founder, editor, and publisher.

"When we took ownership, we didn't want to change how it was serving surrounding communities," said Pappas. "We wanted to take a good

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## Through My Father's Eyes...

by Mark Samuel Ross

The holiday of Shavuot, which this year begins on Friday, June 2, 2006 (erev June 1), has several names, reflecting its celebration as both a holiday of nature and of history. Shavuot means weeks, because the holiday is celebrated seven weeks after Pesach. The holiday is also called Zeman Matan Toratenu, the time of the giving of the Torah, and is sometimes referred to as Atzeret, the closing festival. Shavuot is seen as the culmination of Pesach, as the Exodus from Egypt was for the purpose of receiving the Torah. Other names are Yom Habikkurim, the season of the first fruits, and Chag Hakatzir, the festival of the (wheat) harvest. In Israel it is traditional to celebrate Shavuot Hasefer, book week around the time of Shavuot. All over the country children and adults browse the many shops, kiosks and book-stalls to buy books for summer reading. And from our family to yours may you enjoy this holiday of Shavuot and read a good book.



Mark Samuel Ross

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## MIDDLESEX

### Article #2

# Personal growth, step by step

AN EFFORT AMONG six Raritan Valley synagogues to promote character development was launched May 14 with a speech by a rabbi versed in the integration of Jewish law, healing, psychology, and spirituality.

Rabbi Jay Yaacov Schwartz, rabbinical director of the Nachal Novea Tsfat Fund — a New York-based group that supports the work of the Brestlav hasidic community in Tzfat — spoke to a crowd of about 150 at Congregation Ohav Emeth in Highland Park at the kick-off event for the ACTT (Achieving Change Through Torah) program.

Schwartz praised the Raritan Valley Jewish community for its support and dedication to the program, which he termed "remarkable."

Although a last-minute fill-in for the scheduled speaker, Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union — who cancelled because of an illness in his family — Schwartz captured the crowd's attention by citing examples from Jewish text and holding up as examples renowned figures in Jewish history who developed

self-improvement plans through meaningful study.

Schwartz, who maintains a private social work practice in Lawrence, NY, specializing in marital and family therapy, told those gathered that "success and all the good things we want for our family, friends, and us" are predicated on *ratzon*, or the will to move forward.

"We have to embrace the ability to make change," said Schwartz.

Schwartz said the Mishna, the foundational document of talmudic law and lore, provides 48 steps, divided into four stages, that guide learners toward self-improvement. By the time the last half of the steps is reached, a student of Torah will note a change in himself, according to Schwartz.

"It is starting to impact a person's personality," he said. "As the person goes higher, his personality is going to become more sophisticated. He has reached the level where he has become beloved by others. He has become involved with charity. By the last 12, he has become concerned with the plight of oth-



Rabbi Jay Yaacov Schwartz speaks at Congregation Ohav Emeth in Highland Park during the kick-off event for the Achieving Change Through Torah program.

People must have an ongoing commitment to the process to make it worthwhile, said Schwartz.

The kick-off speech and the concept of the ACTT program were warmly received by those in attendance.

Marion Pianko of Edison said she found the program "very inspiring and spiritually uplifting."

"It's something a person can do step by step, and it's not overwhelming," she explained. "People who do it can grow spiritually."

Keren Avery of Highland Park said the size of the crowd and the reaction to Schwartz's speech demonstrated the community's unity.

"I felt the excitement from a group of people in the community coming to work together," she said. "My husband and I both signed up [for ACTT]. It just sounded like such a good moral venture and spiritual effort. I think it will foster a sense of community that in this day is very unique and important."

— DEBRA RUBIN

ers. He has reached the level where he seeks truth... he seeks out the good things in life."

However, at the end of this path, people must still repeat the cycle of Torah study to continue to learn and grow and progress still further in their character development.

### EFFORT

## Article #1 continued

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"We need to make changes in the physical to face a change in inertia as human beings," said Luban. "That is what ACTT is about, utilizing the power of Torah to channel that power and overcome inertia in our behavior. If a person makes a small commitment every day, it may not change the world, but [he or she] will be learning something powerful."

The program also has implications between the local communities.

"This is an idea to provide a system where we connect ourselves to Torah, to Hashem," said Kaufman. "We are taking positive action as a *zechus*," or merit that contributes to the welfare of others.

This merit will benefit those who are sick or are experiencing other hardships in their families and communities and *klal Yisrael*, or the Jewish people, in the face of worldwide anti-Semitism, Kaufman explained.

In fact, Rosen said, a national organization, which he declined to name, was keeping its eye on the Raritan Valley program. If ACTT works as well as its organizers hope, it will be used as a model by the organization to implement a similar program nationally.

Aviva Siegel, Ohr Torah's lay committee member, said she became part of the program because she thought it was "fascinating and wonderful."

"I just thought it was the best way for people to improve and would be a wonderful thing to be a part of," she said. "My husband [Barry] will be signing on as well, and I hope our kids will join us."

Siegel said she has six children ages eight-20, and although her youngest may be too small to join in, she hoped the others would make the program a family project.

She has her own reasons for participating. "Probably it was to change as a person," Siegel said. "I think that is a goal for all of us. People will not only be helping others, but they will be doing it with a better attitude, even in my own family. Instead of making my kids lunch and doing it begrudgingly, I'm doing it anyway — so why not make it in a nicer family atmosphere that will allow us to

keep growing.... I was thrilled to be asked to be a part of this."

Rosen said the program was open to anyone interested in increasing his or her level of observance, and because much of the work will be done individually and on-line, those outside the Raritan Valley can also make the commitment.

"Our rabbis tell us that what we do on Earth can influence what goes on in the heavens," said Rosen. "There are so many people not well in the Jewish community and families living with hardship, such as unemployment and poverty. Through this program we can not only improve ourselves but help our fellow Jews."

To register or for more information, contact 732-993-5376 or [info@actt613.org](mailto:info@actt613.org) or visit [www.actt613.org](http://www.actt613.org).

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