



WINTER 2003

# THE INCLUSIVE PROFESSIONAL

## BUILDING THE PROFESSION AND EXPANDING THE FIELD OF JEWISH OUTREACH

HOW ARE YOU FULFILLING YOUR ROLE AS EMISSARY FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

# EVERY JEWISH COMMUNITY PROFESSIONAL IS AN OUTREACH WORKER

By Paul Golin, JOI Director of Communications and Strategic Planning

Adapted from a speech given at the Council for American Jewish Museums (CAJM) annual conference in Philadelphia, PA, on January 27, 2003.

These are paradoxical times for the American Jewish community. On the one hand, everywhere you turn there are signs of Jewish renaissance. New models of Jewish expression and identity continue to sprout up and grow. On the other hand, we are constantly being warned of “impending doom.” The Jewish population is shrinking, its aging...we’re all about to disappear! Sometimes it’s very difficult to make sense of the demographics. But an understanding of the larger picture is imperative if we are to put our work on the local level into perspective.

### THE CASE FOR OUTREACH

For the first time in U.S. history, the Jewish population has decreased. According to the National Jewish



JOI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RABBI KERRY OLITZKY MAKES THE CASE FOR GREATER OUTREACH EFFORTS AT THE UJC GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN PHILADELPHIA, PA, IN NOVEMBER 2002.

Population Study (the “mother” of all Jewish demographical surveys) ten years ago there were 5.5 million Jews in America, and today, from what little they’ve told us from the recent survey, there are 5.2 million Jews. We lost more than a quarter million Jews in a decade, and that was despite large Jewish immigration from the Former Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the overall US population grew by more than 30 million.

It’s what we should do about this decline—and *if* we can do anything—where the arguments begin. And this is actually the continuation of an older debate, one that exploded after the release of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study, mainly due to one finding in particular: the 52% intermarriage rate. This fifty-two percent is best illustrated not necessarily by saying that *half* the Jews who are getting married are marrying non-Jews (though

*(continued on page P2)*

# EVERY JEWISH COMMUNITY PROFESSIONAL IS AN OUTREACH WORKER

(continued from page P1)

that is an accurate way to describe it), but that *the number of intermarriages is double that of in-marriages*. Double because, for every two Jews who married each other, creating one couple, there are two Jews marrying two non-Jews, creating two couples.

As a result: Today there are approximately one million intermarried households, out of a total of three million married Jewish households.

In the last decade, there have been more children born to just one Jewish parent than born to two Jewish parents.

Of course, intermarriage is not the only factor for the shrinking Jewish population. Jews have too few children. Definitions of “ethnicity” in the U.S. have changed, as have definitions of “identity” and “community.” But the intermarriage issue is the most emotional for the Jewish establishment, it’s the most difficult, and it takes the most blame for our population crunch. There are still leaders within the Jewish organized world who would have us believe that the intermarried don’t deserve our time or resources; that intermarriage is an automatic rejection of Jewish heritage and an “opting out” of our community. Yet we know that this is untrue.

The vast majority of intermarriages are simply



JOI PROGRAM OFFICER HANNAH GREENSTEIN (CENTER) SERVES ON A PANEL ADDRESSING JEWISH PROFESSIONALS ABOUT INNOVATIVE JEWISH ARTS INITIATIVES—AND THEIR POTENTIAL AS OUTREACH VEHICLES—AT THE UJC 2002 GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

expressions of love between two people, period. They may have met at work, in school, or anywhere in our free and open society, and decided to follow the “pursuit of happiness”...and work out the details later. And make decisions later. We know this about the intermarried, not just as Jewish professionals in the

Others would have us believe that the 52% rate found by the 1990 study was overblown, and that the rate is closer to 40% and therefore, somehow, less of an issue! In reality, intermarriage (together with the equally widespread but more difficult to identify “disaffiliation”) is the single most important trend affecting the Jewish

**INCREASING THE NUMBER OF INTERMARRIED FAMILIES RAISING JEWS FROM 30% TO ABOVE 50% IS AN ATTAINABLE GOAL, AND SHOULD BE A PRIMARY MISSION FOR THE COMMUNITY.**

field, but because they’re our own family members! Our siblings, our children, our aunts and uncles.

population in America. Those who would play down its importance do so out of an

inability to address the issue constructively—to find opportunities in the challenge rather than just problems.

To us at JOI, the intermarried actually represent a great, untapped potential. If we can reach this unaffiliated intermarried population and increase the number of them raising Jewish children, we could potentially *grow* the Jewish community. In other words, the population decline is not something we simply have to sit back and accept. If more than half of the intermarried raise their children as Jews, it could mean an increase in the Jewish population.

Currently, only about 30% of intermarried families are raising exclusively Jewish children, and about the same percent are raising kids exclusively in another religion. The majority—almost half—is raising their kids as either “both” or “nothing.” To us, this group in the middle represents the greatest potential for growth in the Jewish community. We believe that increasing the number of intermarried families raising Jews from 30% to above 50% is an attainable goal, and should be a primary mission for the community.

Another reason we put so much stock in outreach to the intermarried is that, if we can reach the unaffiliated intermarried population and engage them in Judaism, the

messages we use to achieve that will also speak to the *generally* unaffiliated, be they in-married, single, half-Jewish, quarter-Jewish, whatever. And it is essential for us to reach the unaffiliated, because they make up the single largest segment of the Jewish population, larger than the Conservative and Reform movements combined. More than half of all Jews have no connection to the organized Jewish community whatsoever. They don't go to temple or join JCCs, they certainly don't give to Jewish causes; they're simply not on anybody's lists. Unless we can engage them now, their children will be completely out of our orbit in one generation.

## NEW DEFINITIONS OF OUTREACH

So how *do* we pull these people in? Well, "outreach" is the Jewish Outreach Institute's middle name, so obviously we think outreach is the answer, and we believe the numbers I just went through make our case for greater outreach efforts. But our definition of outreach goes much further than, say, couples counseling or temple-based Intro to Judaism classes. We need to work together to develop

innovative programs that take Judaism to where the people are, rather than waiting for them to walk through our doors. We've looked at many different outreach program models—some that work better than others, some that work in one kind of city better than others.

For example, public spaces such as shopping malls and bookstores are familiar, low-threshold venues that are comfortable to nearly

**WE NEED TO... TAKE JUDAISM TO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE, RATHER THAN WAITING FOR THEM TO WALK THROUGH OUR DOORS.**

everyone. In towns where we know of many unaffiliated and intermarried families, public spaces can serve as a great background for outreach. Several years ago, JOI co-sponsored a project of public-space events called "Celebrations: Discovering Jewish Life In The Marketplace" in Suffolk County, Long Island, which is now being replicated in other cities across the country. The Celebrations program runs events like "Sukkot-Building In Home Depot" and "Passover Extravaganza" in Supermarkets. They

advertise in mainstream media and attract a crowd of both affiliated and unaffiliated to their events, and also get a few people who just happened to be shopping in those stores at the time. Participants are greeted on a warm and personal basis by the Celebrations staff, *who are trained to do so.*

The Celebrations programs are mostly fun, with a tiny bit of education. So while it's not life-transforming, at least it's one positive contact with the Jewish community. It's a baby-step along the continuum of Jewish life. And it works, because it targets the right people at the right time: young families with children, right before or during the Jewish holidays. We know that the main points of entry into the Jewish community are at the holidays and through children.

This is one way that institutions can extend beyond their own walls, to engage the unengaged and make positive initial contacts.

## JEWISH IDENTITY

### From Celluloid To Synagogue?

One recent Sunday, 1,200 people at the vintage Coolidge Corner Cinema in Brookline, Mass., nibbled Jewish-flavored barbecued wings. Film screenings sandwiched around the chicken, coleslaw and cornbread included "Shalom, Y'all," and "Kinky Friedman: Proud to be an Asshole From El Paso."

Those two documentaries about Jews and the South were among dozens of offerings at the 14th annual Boston Jewish Film Festival in November.

Though not exactly glatt kosher, the films — and meat — were "a fun way to do something more" at the festival, executive director Sara Rubin says.



**Director David Bencherit: His film "Kaddim Wind: Moroccan Chronicle" was screened at the recent Boston Jewish Film Festival.**

Perhaps much more, when it comes to filling Jews' appetite for greater identity, according to a new report by the Jewish Outreach Institute in New York.

The study, "Can Watching a Movie Lead to Greater Jewish Affiliation?" insists that the burgeoning Jewish film festival scene holds not only big box-office potential but the possibility of moving unaffiliated Jews "along the continuum of Jewish involvement."

The institute examined 46 festivals. One-quarter of them are independently run, while the others have some kind of sponsorship from Jewish community centers or federations.

"Film festivals serve as an entryway into the Jewish community," institute spokesman Paul Golin says.

Hannah Greenstein, the Institute's program officer and co-author of the film festival report, says festivals should view their audiences the way advertisers would target buyers.

"Jewish film festivals must have an outreach goal; they must seek out marketing opportunities to the unaffiliated or the disengaged," she says.

Those opportunities are booming. The pioneering Jewish film fest, launched in 1980 in San Francisco, has spawned more than 60 similar events annually in the U.S., from Fairbanks to Philadelphia. Another half dozen are held

in Canada, and about two dozen globally, from London to Hong Kong to Sao Paulo, Brazil.

In one sure sign that the festivals have arrived, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture sponsors an annual Jewish Film Festival conference. The third such conference, set for San Diego next month, will explore issues such as curating films about Israel in the diaspora.

The foundation also receives up to 70 applicants each year for the \$150,000 it awards annually for Jewish documentary filmmaking. Jewish "film festivals are one signal of a Jewish renaissance" culturally, says Richard Siegel, the foundation's executive director.

The box office is heating up too, opening the doors to even wider Jewish involvement, the report says.

San Francisco has grown into the biggest event, attracting 34,700 people watching nearly 50 films in 2002. Toronto is next with some 15,000 people seeing over 60 films, while Boston drew a record 13,000 people this year, up 18 percent from the previous year.

"The festival is a comfortable place to be uncomfortable about your Jewishness," she says.

But Gail Quets, the institute's director of research and co-author of the study, says anyone expecting people to walk out of such events with a new Jewish identity is kidding himself.

"Outreach is a sequence of activities. People don't see a Jewish film and run out and join a synagogue," she says.

The institute's report urges fests to program "next steps" to greater Jewish activity. Ideas include information tables and panels of experts around film topics. Synagogue affiliation or ties to organized Jewish might come later.

But Sharon Pucker Rivo, executive director of the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University, sees a downside to the Jewish film explosion.

The center, which with more than 200 titles is the world's largest distributor of Jewish film and video, represents 108 filmmakers seeking distribution through the Jewish festivals.

Whether such festivals can raise Jewish consciousness remains an "amorphous" equation, says Pucker Rivo, who doubts that 40 good Jewish films are produced each year.

Whether film festivals can raise Jewish consciousness depends on where they're held, she contends. The most effective use of Jewish films as a hook for Jewish involvement is to show them in venues "that have an ongoing mission which is not just entertainment but life cycle, whether a synagogue, or a Jewish community center, or a university," she says.

Joe Berkofsky/JTA

### 'OUTREACH POTENTIAL OF JEWISH FILM FESTIVALS' REPORT IN THE JEWISH WEEK NEWSPAPER

We need to provide many more positive first-contacts with the Jewish community. Successful new venues of Jewish expression attract the unaffiliated through what we call "outreach methodology." Included in this methodology are programs that:

- **Are easy to participate in;**
- **Do not involve any prerequisite knowledge for participation;**
- **Require no further commitment;**
- **Advertise in secular media;**
- **Are held in comfortable, open settings;**
- **And attract a diverse crowd by being welcoming to all who would participate.**

(continued on page P4)

# EVERY JEWISH COMMUNITY PROFESSIONAL IS AN OUTREACH WORKER

(continued from page P3)

Even when organizations decide to incorporate outreach methodology to draw in the unaffiliated, in order to truly move this audience along the continuum of Jewish life we need to provide them with a “next step.” What is their *next* positive contact with the community? Outreach cannot be an end unto itself. If there are no welcoming institutions to receive the “graduates” of outreach programming, even the most innovative efforts will be stymied because the ultimate goal—deeper Jewish involvement—will not be met. At the same time, we must keep in mind that the unaffiliated we do reach may be three or four steps away from joining a JCC, and many more steps away from joining a synagogue. Is there something else going on in our communities that outreach programs can partner with, that will serve as the next step?

The goal is not *just* to get people through our own institution’s doors. We need to build bridges into Jewish life, and for that we need to build bridges between Jewish organizations and programs. What I’m suggesting is that to engage a growing unaffiliated Jewish population, institutions must find where they fall along the continuum of Jewish life, identify nearby institutions, and create partnerships that move people along the continuum. This is a community-wide approach

to outreach. If we increase the number of people participating in Jewish life, we all benefit. (A rising tide raises all boats.) We’ve got to work across institutional and denominational lines to give people what they might need now, and let them know that there’s more for them when they’re ready.

This is a long-term investment. We can’t expect that someone whose first and only contact in Jewish life is a walk through a Jewish museum or attendance at a Jewish film festival is then a good target to be solicited for

a capital campaign! It’s not realistic, and worse, it can drive people away. This isn’t to say we shouldn’t still try to find out who’s coming through our doors; we should—and there are a variety of ways to do so unobtrusively, such as raffles and giveaways—but drawing people in is a challenge, because it’s a very fragile process. If we know they are not otherwise involved in Jewish life, let’s keep them on a separate list and let a trained outreach worker contact them and offer them a personal welcome and some potential next steps, without obligation

or pressure. We need more dedicated outreach workers who can handle these pivotal first contacts. But we also must recognize that there is a role for *every* Jewish professional to play.

## WE ARE ALL GATEKEEPERS

An unaffiliated, intermarried Jewish woman recently e-mailed JOI to let us know that our on-line directory of outreach programs mistakenly listed her local JCC as offering Intro to Judaism classes. [The listings are voluntarily generated by

All of us would say, “Oh, I would never be so rude,” but sadly, this woman’s story is in no way unique. Jewish professionals, even those not directly engaged in “outreach” in the traditional sense, must see themselves as emissaries of the Jewish community and make time for courtesy. We must recognize that every contact with a newcomer is a make-or-break moment for this person’s involvement in Jewish life. And we must pass this lesson on to all of our staff, especially those on the entry level who are usually the first to greet newcomers.

We work in the Jewish community because we agree that Judaism has something special to offer. A more welcoming attitude is one very simple step we can all take to make sure we’re offering that something special to everyone, including this new, growing, and difficult-to-engage population. For years, the exit doors from the Jewish community have been wide open and people have been walking out in droves. Let’s see if we can’t open a lot more doors *in* to the community and grow the future population.



*Paul Golin spearheads JOI’s advocacy efforts, which includes helping Jewish communal professionals think more often and more strategically about reaching the huge and grown unaffiliated intermarried population.*

**WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT EVERY CONTACT WITH A NEWCOMER IS A MAKE-OR-BREAK MOMENT FOR THIS PERSON’S INVOLVEMENT IN JEWISH LIFE.**

the institutions themselves, but may become outdated.] She told us that when she had called the JCC to inquire about taking the class, the receptionist (or whoever answered) curtly said, “We don’t offer that!” And hung up on her. Considering that this woman may have been trying to connect with the Jewish community for the first time in decades, maybe even for the first time in her life, it was a stingingly unwelcoming initial experience. As a community, we are lucky if she made a second attempt.