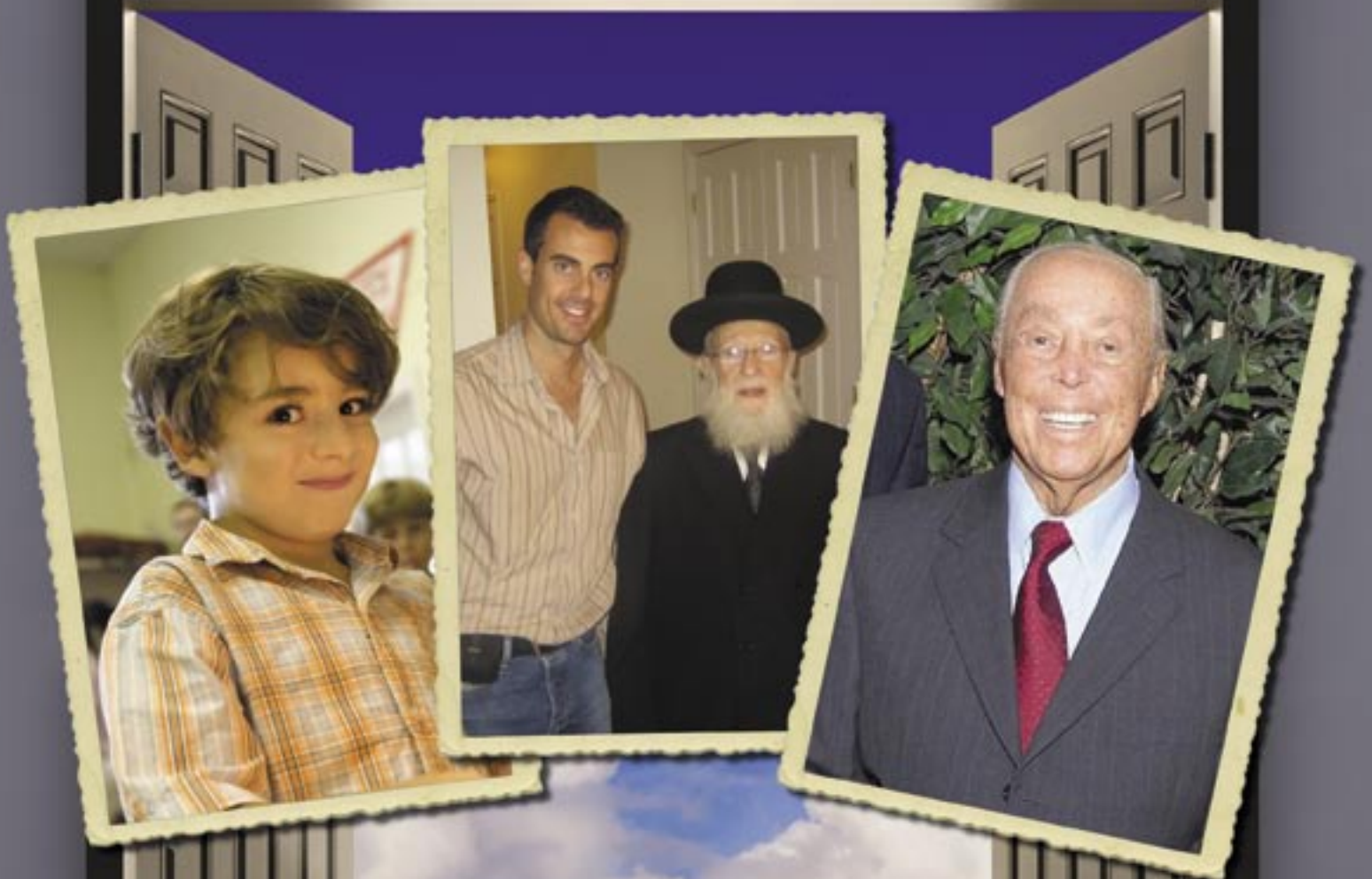


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JEWISH SPIRIT

Magazine of the Jewish Education Center of South Florida



**Looking Back
at 3 Years of
the JEC**

page 6

*Jewish Education Center
of South Florida*

Rabbi Avi Meth



How many times do we make a resolution or start a project only to abandon it a few days later? Whether it's a new diet or a new business, it's hard to maintain that same level of commitment we had when we began. The secret is the mindset we have when we begin. Are we really enthusiastic? Are we truly prepared for what lies ahead?

A good venture needs a good initiation, one that propels us to continue despite any obstacles we may face. We learn this idea from none other than the first test given to the first Jew. When Avram is commanded to leave his homeland, the verse says, "And Avram took Sarai his wife, and... they went forth to go to the land of Canaan; and to the land of Canaan they came." (Genesis 12:5) The Torah doesn't waste words. Why bother mentioning from where they go forth?

If we look a few verses earlier, regarding Avram's father, it says, "And Terach took Avram his son, and . . . they went forth . . . from Ur Kasdim, to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran, and lived there." (Genesis 11:31) Here they also go forth to Canaan, but they only make it to Haran. They never reach Canaan. So, while Avram is able to complete his mission, Terach fails. What is the secret to Avram's success and Terach's failure? Apparently, it has to do with how they "go forth." Terach's "going forth" was just not the same as Avram's. He was not as prepared for what lay ahead of him. He didn't go with the same fervor as his son Avram. You need the right mindset at the onset to bring a plan to fruition.

Three years ago, Rabbi Shimon Feder and I founded the Jewish Education Center of South Florida. The mission: to do our part to stem the tide of assimilation by connecting with all types of Jews, by creating programs relevant to all Jews, and by finding a home to create an outreach oriented community. These three years represent an enthusiastic "going forth" for our organization. In this issue of the Boca Raton Jewish Spirit, we invite you to view a lovely pictorial collage of the past three years so that you can join us and become more involved with the JEC.

*Rabbi Avi Meth
Director*



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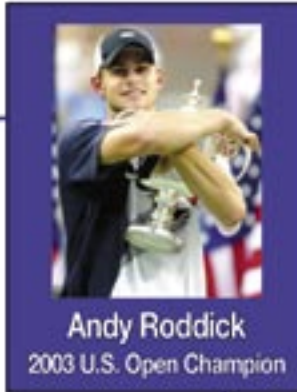
inside

6 From the Ground Up:
The inspiring story of the
JEC's creation and growth

58 Looking back at 3 years of the JEC:
A photo tribute

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From the Ground Up

6

The Inspiring Story of the JEC's Creation and Growth

Rick Adelman

With extraordinary personal commitment, Rabbis Avi Meth and Shimon Feder decided to establish the Jewish Education Center of South Florida (JEC) three years ago this month. Although they didn't have as much money or contacts as they would have liked, they did understand that because of the importance of teaching Judaism they could have faith that everything would work out.

It's safe to say that the JEC has exceeded the rabbis' expectations. From the adult education classes to the Fun Hebrew School to the High Holiday retreats, the JEC has created an entryway into Judaism for hundreds of children and adults in Boca Raton and the surrounding communities. Last summer, the JEC added Rabbi Avi Wealcatch to the staff to help handle the growing demand for the center's outreach services.

"It's always difficult to start a new venture," said Rabbi Feder. "Although we had friends in Florida, we didn't have a very large group of lay leaders to support this endeavor." In fact, Rabbi Feder pointed out, initial funding for the JEC came from individuals and institutions in Chicago

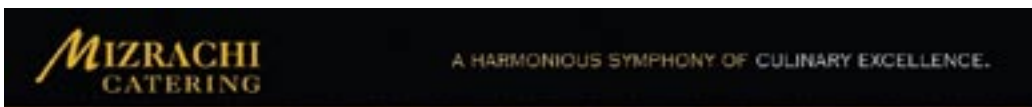
and New York. But now, as the greater Boca Raton community senses the importance, need, and success of the JEC, a growing number of local supporters are becoming involved.

The JEC is now operating out of its headquarters in Boca Raton. In the early days of the Center, Rabbis Feder and Meth would hold adult classes and one-on-one Torah study at Starbucks both in Boca Raton and Boynton Beach. These social venues attracted the Center's initial participants, but the content of the classes was really what made them stay.

"Before we even moved (from New York and Providence) we had a lecture series in Boynton Beach," Rabbi Meth recalled, "and the reporter who was covering the event said that people were waiting for us. People here are very receptive; they are genuinely interested in learning about Judaism."

All of the center's programs have been well received, but the Fun Hebrew School has turned into quite a phenomenon. Designed primarily for nonobservant families, the school opened in February 2006 with one student; his father attended a concurrent adult education class with Rabbi Feder. The school finished the year with six students and four families. In September 2006, 22 students were enrolled. A year later, 30 students representing 23 families attended and the JEC expects the numbers to continue to rise.

Also this past year, the JEC was asked to be the after-school provider for the Ben Gamla Charter School in Hollywood – to make Judaism come to life for hundreds of Jewish students. Rabbi Avi Meth rose to the occasion, providing excellent teachers and scheduling. Right before Passover, Rabbi Jay Lyons moved in from Queens (NY) and took over the Ben Gamla program.



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Whether it's Hebrew school or the other JEC programs, the rabbis present the material in a non-threatening, non-judgmental manner. The JEC provides a warm environment where all Jews, regardless of their knowledge or religious practice, are welcome. Many classes address topics that are relevant to daily life such as love & relationships, anger management, and parenting.

Two years ago, before the High Holidays, the JEC initiated a Hebrew/English explanatory user-friendly class for 45 people interested in learning the main prayers and their meaning. An open forum discussion covered topics such as "Why G-d Needs Our Prayers" and "What's the Purpose of Rosh Hashanah." In addition, the JEC, for a second year, is sponsoring a Rosh Hashanah-Yom Kippur Retreat at the Embassy Suites in Boca Raton that will include kosher catered meals and explanatory and regular services.

The JEC recently took a huge step in its effort to establish a Jewish community in East Boca

Raton. Rabbi Wealcatch completed an Eruv, which allows individuals inside of its perimeter to carry on Shabbat and push baby strollers. There are five families in the community now, including the two that moved in over the summer, and promises from still others to "check it out" over the next few months. Weekly Shabbat services, followed by a hot Kiddush, are held at JEC's Headquarters.

"I'm certainly happy with the way things are progressing," Rabbi Meth said. "We'd love to see more people move in." A major aspect of the Center's outreach efforts is the Shabbat experience. As more families join the community, the capacity for entertaining Shabbat guests grows significantly.

Another indication of how well the JEC has been received is the response of the entire Boca Raton community to Jewish Unity Live, a special event held in 12 cities across the U.S. and Canada. Jewish Unity

continued on page 62



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JEC EVENTS

In the three years since its inception, the JEC has run numerous events and classes covering many community interests. Fascinating speakers, childrens' events, study groups and unifying gatherings have been the JEC's way of reaching out to enrich and strengthen Jewish identity in South Florida.



Paul Zuckerman meets Rabbi Henach Leibowitz zt"l in New York



Murray and Floris Leipzig accept the Am Echad Award at Jewish Unity Live 2007



Hebrew School Fun at Boomer's



JEC hosts Jewish Unity International Affiliate Conference at the Polo Club





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Enjoying a JEC Chanukah Carnival

Who's Really Pulling the Strings?



Rabbi Avi Meth's popular Daf Yomi class in Deerfield Beach



Saturday night fun at a Hebrew School Shabbaton

Journey to Spiritual Growth

continued from page 7

Live celebrates "Building Jewish Unity Through the Study of Torah." (The JEC is privileged to be the affiliate member of Jewish Unity International for the South Florida region.) In 2007, 175 people listened to the world renowned Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis and paid tribute to honorees Murray and Floris Leipzig, Rabbi Mordechai and Shevie Yachnes, and Paul Zuckerman. This past year, Gavriel Aryeh Sanders, a former minister turned observant Jew, entertained some 200 attendees. Warren Factor and the Kaufman family were the event honorees.

As the JEC embarks on its fourth year of operation, the hopes are high for continued growth and success in Jewish education.

For more information about the JEC of South Florida's programs, to join a class, participate in one-on-one study, or to partner with the JEC by sponsoring a program, please contact the JEC office at (561) 544-2854, email info@jecsl.org, or visit www.jecsl.org.

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