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# JEWISH SPIRIT

Magazine of the Jewish Education Center of South Florida



## The New East Boca Community

Finding Community, Connection and Caring  
in a Faceless Facebook World

By Miriam Stark Zakon

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*Jewish Education Center  
of South Florida*

# rabbi shimon feder & rabbi avi meth <sup>2</sup>



## A look back at the High Holidays with the JEC

Last year, about ten people attended the JEC's Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur Explanatory Program. This year was quite different. With over two hundred new participants, it was a challenge to fit everyone into the ballroom at the Embassy Suites Hotel! Despite the large crowd, so many people related how they felt very much a part of the prayer program and found it meaningful and inspiring. They were able to connect with us, and we have since followed up with them and even visited many of their homes.

Meanwhile, the JEC's second annual Rosh Hashana Retreat (also held at the Embassy Suites Hotel) once again was an enjoyable Holiday experience for the seventy people who attended. The retreat featured two days and nights in the hotel, kosher catered meals, uplifting traditional services and inspirational classes.

May we merit to see continued growth and success in all of our programs.

Warmly,

Rabbi Shimon Feder

Rabbi Avi Meth

Here is a beautiful letter from one of the participating families:

Dear Rabbi Feder, Rabbi Meth,  
and Rabbi Wealcatch,

Please accept our heartfelt thanks and sincere appreciation for the wonderful second annual Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur Retreat. Once again, you exceeded all expectations! The experience was truly exceptional...from the outstanding hospitality, the warmth and kindness of the entire staff as well as your families, to the attention to every detail. Most importantly, the atmosphere you provided through the spiritually fulfilling services and classes enabled our family to renew and strengthen our connection with Hashem on the holiest day of the year. We feel so blessed to know you and are grateful for your dedication and special neshamas which enhance our lives tremendously.

May Hashem bless you, and may you continue to grow from strength to strength!

With warmest regards,  
The Bieda Family,  
Mimi, Malka, Levi, & David



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
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# To “C” or Not to “C”

## *Finding Community, Connection & Caring in a Faceless Facebook World*

Miriam Stark Zakon

Poor Hal Niedzviecki. As he tells us in a recent New York Times article, Hal was one popular guy, with seven hundred friends on Facebook, the Web’s largest social-networking site. That’s seven hundred members of his own virtual on-line community, people who cared enough about him to “write on his wall,” to check out his posts and his pictures, maybe play some Texas Hold ‘Em with him.

Community is about connection, real connection between people. It’s about caring for each other, being there for each other when needed. Community is about sharing important values and respecting each others’ differences.

Feeling a little lacking in his own non-virtual social life, Hal decided to meet up with some of his Facebook community. He created a Facebook “event,” inviting the entire community to meet one evening in a local restaurant. Many of his Facebook friends didn’t live nearby, but there were enough who were in the region that he hoped for a good party. Fifteen friends said they’d come, with another sixty answering that they’d try.

Came the big night, and Hal, jaunty in his new pants and favorite shirt, went to meet up with the community that was beginning to mean so much to him. One Facebook friend showed up; 699 members of his community didn’t bother. Says Hal, sadly: “Seven hundred friends, and I was drinking alone.”



*The Wealcatch, Meth, Feder, Lyons and Bederman families  
of the new East Boca Community*

So where, in our busy, work-oriented lives, do we find that rare and important phenomenon, a community? It used to be that physical proximity was enough. You lived in the same village or neighborhood, you were part of a community. But now, with our suburban sprawl, with lawns that keep neighbors apart as securely as if they were castle moats, with twenty-five hour schedules in twenty-four hour days, how do we meet? How do we create communities, how do we become part of them?

For starters, let’s define just what a community is, and what it isn’t. As Hal Niedzviecki discovered, a community is not just a bunch of people who take occasional online peeks at each others’ lives. Community is about connection, real connection between people. It’s about caring for each other, being there for each other when needed. Community is about sharing important values and respecting each others’ differences.

Like the East Boca Community.

Adam Fleischer was one of the first to be a part of it.

*continued on page 58*



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### "The Art of Pediatrics"



A recent returnee to Jewish observance, he'd moved to the Boca area and found something missing. "I sensed a certain lack in my life," he remembers. "Coming from a yeshiva, I wasn't getting the attention I needed to try to acclimate myself to the non-yeshiva world." Together with Rabbis Feder and Meth, Adam began to form the nucleus of a community. "We went out, just a few of us," Adam says. "It gave me a place to keep Shabbos. It was great, being a part of it on the ground level."

Rabbi Avi Meth helps bring the concept of community into clearer focus. "It's a question of shared values," he says. "Being there in time of need. Giving a shoulder to cry on." When one of the participants in the East Boca community needed emergency hospitalization, other families immediately offered to take care of the children.

Community means helping in times of trouble, but it also means connecting in formal and informal events, building relationships through shared experiences. The Labor Day community barbeque brought together several families, close to two dozen kids. As they chomped on hot dogs and enjoyed the burger-shaped cookies that one of the families brought for dessert, participants were gaining more than just calories. They were connecting. They were caring. They were community building.

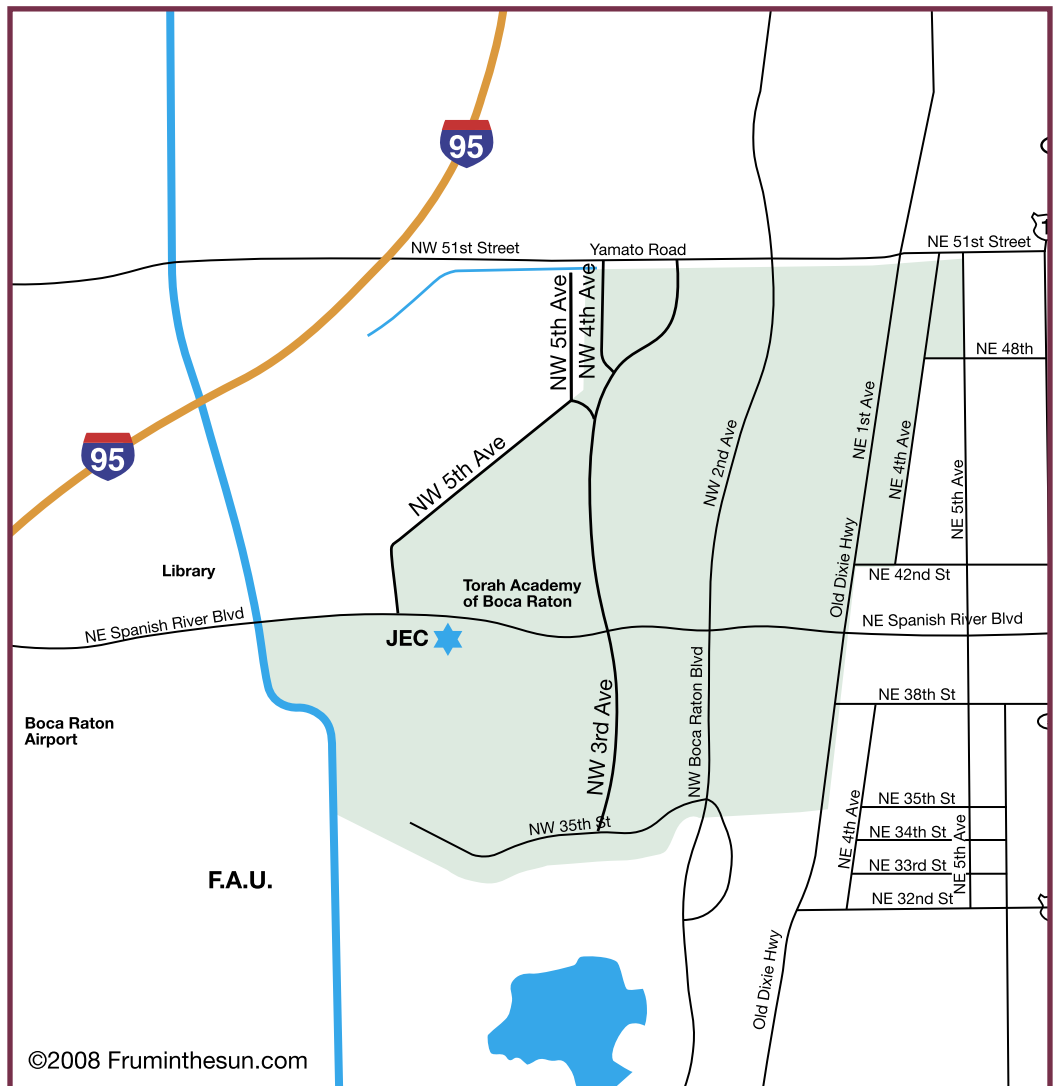
Recently, Rabbi Avi Wealcatch did some community building in a really literal way, constructing an eiruv around the area. Eiruvim (the Hebrew plural of eiruv) are complex halachic constructs – indeed, an entire tractate of the Talmud is devoted to the subject -- but to put it simply,

an eiruv creates a clearly defined area surrounded by halachically acceptable walls (a string can be enough, if

properly mounted) in which Sabbath-observant Jews are allowed to carry on Shabbat. As he put up the poles that would hold the eiruv, Rabbi Wealcatch was enabling young families with children in strollers to visit each other on Shabbat. He was making it possible for students to bring gifts of wine or cake to their hosts for Shabbat meals. He was thinking about others, thinking outside of himself. That's classic community building.

The East Boca community can boast many amenities and features that make it an attractive place for both committed and searching Jews to settle into. There's a fine local day school, affordable housing, and close proximity to Florida Atlantic University. The ocean is a quick

The East Boca community can boast many amenities and features that make it an attractive place for both committed and searching Jews to settle into.



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mile away, kosher restaurants are close by, and there's even a kosher bakery and café run by French émigrés who really understand French pastries! But most of all, there is this strong sense of community, of building something worthwhile, and building it together.

Time was, when people lived in small towns, where everybody knew each other. Time was, when three generations of families shared a common courtyard, or grandparents, parents, and grown-up children lived on the same street. Those times are gone, but that doesn't mean we don't need communities anymore. As a matter of fact, in our overloaded, over-stimulated, and overworked days and nights, we desperately need a sense of community, a sense of belonging, maybe even more than our grandparents did.

And you know what? If we work on building relationships, if we make the "c" words – caring, concern, connection – a priority in our lives, we can find that community, right in our own backyard.

*East Boca is a new, close-knit community dedicated to Jewish outreach. For more information about joining the community, to arrange a visit, or to experience a Shabbos with the JEC "family", please contact the JEC at (561) 544-2854.*

*Miriam Zakon is Acquisitions Editor for ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications Ltd. She is the author and translator of many books of Jewish interest for both children and adults. She can be reached at zakon@artscroll.com.*

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