



HaKesher
(The Connection)
הקשר

September, 2015

President's Message

by Joel Kurtz

One year of my term as NNJR president down; one to go. The first year has been a wonderful experience. It is a real joy to be able to work with and to share experiences with all our clubs throughout the region. NNJR remains one of the strongest regions in the FJMC with 31 clubs, several of which just recently joined FJMC, and several more which are in the process of rejuvenating and reinventing themselves. Most of our clubs continue to do great work and are strengthening their synagogue communities.

We have high hopes for this coming year. We want to continue the hard work of strengthening and improving our clubs. We are continuing our efforts to add new clubs to our ranks. Once again, we are planning our successful signature events: the Man of the Year dinners and President's Dinner. We will again have our annual outing to a NJ Devils hockey game and participate in the Rutgers Fit 5K run/walk. We are in the early stages of planning another Israel Advocacy seminar, in partnership with Mercaz. We also have some new ideas which came out of the FJMC convention, which you will hear about as more definitive plans are made. And the grand finale will be the Multi-Region Retreat at Camp Zeke (formerly Block & Hexter) in the Poconos, from June 3-5, 2016.

My goal for the coming year is to make NNJR more accessible and helpful for our clubs. The relationship between NNJR and our affiliated clubs is a symbiotic one. NNJR helps to strengthen the clubs, and involvement by the clubs in regional activities helps strengthen NNJR.

Included in this newsletter is a SAVE THE DATES flyer for the coming years meetings and events. Please put the dates in your calendars and make an effort to attend as many of these as possible.

Let's have a great year. Enjoy the rest of your summer.

Joel

Convention!!

Wow!! FJMC International Convention at the Deauville Beach Resort in Miami Beach, Florida from July 8th -12th was a memorable event. Speak to anyone who attended, and they will ALL tell you what a great time they had. They might also tell you about the meals, but when surveyed, the NNJR board highlighted the following Convention memories:

- The absolute joy and ru'ach when hundreds of men are singing Birchot Ha-mazon, more than half standing on chairs and waving ru'ach rags...this links us all one to another in this huge brotherhood we call Men's Club; reconnecting with all my chaverim from all over the US and Canada and sharing "war stories" – *Al Davis*
- Havdalah services on the pool deck were great! - *Len Whitman*
- The alternative and learning services plus the outdoor Havdallah service. For me, the most meaningful part was leading the Maariv Service – *Harvey Hershkowitz*
- The Friday night service is the most powerful and moving aspect of convention. The venue is filled to capacity with 400 people, predominantly men, all singing in unison at the top of their voices, many eager to get out of their seats to dance in the aisles. The music and voices of the Hazzanim are beautiful to listen to. The ru'ach and kavannah in the room is palpable. Nowhere else have I experienced a prayer experience such as this – *Joel Kurtz*
- The camaraderie amongst men from all over the country is amazing and seeing guys like us going the extra yard in their neck of the woods to create programming and value to their clubs and communities is inspiring; it was great reconnecting friendships with guys from across the US and Canada, kindled at past FJMC events – *Rob Blitzer*
- The joy of reunion, meeting friends after a one (or more) year separation...is very satisfying, very emotional. I have compared convention to a Jewish "Brigadoon". It appears out of the mist once every two years, and then disappears...those who have visited long to go back; The Jewish experience, something I find almost nowhere else, not in any synagogue...being at convention is the next best thing to being in Israel; Holocaust programming was taken to the next level, with Menachem Rosensaft's moving keynote address. For the first time (I think) FJMC created an educational approach to the Shoah; Then there was the religious, or ritual aspect...I appreciated the meditative minyan and learned how transformative it can be. I observed how it can and should be done, to be effective; The "Guess Who's Coming to Shabbat" initiative has a great deal of promise for our communities; I participated in the "Minyan of Comfort" training (which will) change how I approach my own synagogue - and hopefully help to train new shlichim tzibburim in our synagogue; I derived a great deal of satisfaction from the FJMC Convention siddur, which was shepherded right here in northern NJ. In a word, *metsuyan*, which means, excellent – *Eric Weiss*

If you missed convention, not to worry. Next summer we'll have the Multi-regional **Retreat** to be held in Pennsylvania, which has been likened to a mini-convention, but much more relaxed. Mark your calendar now for **June 3rd – 5th, 2016** and don't miss out on a great experience.

Quality Club Award

The Quality Club Award was given to ten clubs from the Northern NJ Region at the FJMC Biennial Convention in Miami Beach this past July. The prestigious Quality Club Award is based on a number of criteria established annually by the FJMC and those clubs that receive the award are among the strongest and most vibrant. The 10 NNJR clubs receiving the award for 2014 – 2015 are:

Caldwell, Clark, East Brunswick, East Windsor, Fair Lawn,
Highland Park, Livingston, Marlboro, Metuchen, Wayne

What is the Quality Club Award (QCA)? The FJMC Quality Club Award was developed to strengthen and encourage member clubs to offer a variety of activities at the local level and to participate in regional and FJMC programs. The FJMC Quality Club Award is given each year to member clubs who meet established criteria at the International, Regional and local levels. The criteria also are a blueprint for a club to follow in planning its yearly programming.

Over the years, as many as 16 clubs from the Northern NJ Region have received the Quality Club Award. Is your club one of them? The criteria for 2015 – 2016 are being finalized right now but if you want more information, you can go to the Northern NJ Region Website (www.nnjr.org). Of course you can also ask anyone on the Regional Board for more information as well. Let's make this the year that all of our clubs get the QCA!

2015 NNJR Man of the Year Dinner

Plans for this year's dinner are in full swing. The dinner for clubs in the southern part of NNJR will again take place on Wednesday, November 11, 2015 at Congregation B'nai Tikvah in North Brunswick. The northern dinner will again be held at Temple Beth Ahm Yisrael in Springfield, on Wednesday, November 4, 2015.

As those who have attended this event in the past can attest, it is a wonderful evening to honor an adult and a youth from your synagogue, to enjoy a fantastic spread of delectable kosher food and to schmooze with fellow Jews from throughout the Garden State. Each of our clubs are encouraged to bring as many men, women and children as they can to the dinner.

If you haven't already, now is the time to select your Man and Youth of the Year. Publicize it to your community and rally your troops to come to the dinner. Well-wishers may purchase an ad in our **Man of the Year Ad Journal** to send a message to your honorees. One quarter (25%) of the ad funds raised by a club are refunded back to that club, making the ad journal an excellent fundraising opportunity not only for the region but also for each individual club.

If you have any questions, contact Harvey Hershkowitz – hshinc@aol.com (Northern Dinner Chair) or Dave Yellin - dyellin@directmaildepot.com (Southern Dinner Chair).

The logo for the Torch Awards, featuring a stylized torch with a flame at the top, followed by the word "Torch" in a bold, sans-serif font where the "T" is orange and the rest of the letters are yellow.

Clubs from the NNJR submitted applications for Torch Awards to recognize programs held over the past two years. Many of those programs were worthy of a Torch Award and two of our clubs, from East Windsor and Toms River, brought home the hardware to prove it.

Here is a case study from Congregation B'nai Israel Men's Club (Toms River), which after more than a decade in existence submitted their first application. The possibility of winning a Torch Award would mean the Club attained a higher level of achievement than the Quality Club Award (of which they have consistently been a recipient).

Back in 2013, the Club initiated a program called "Students for Israel". Its objective was to prepare Hebrew High School students for the anti-Israel campaign prevalent on many college campuses -- the so called "BDS" movement. The program was presented during regularly scheduled Hebrew High School class time and parents of college-bound high school students were invited to attend. We screened the film "Crossing the Line-the Intifada Comes to Campus" followed by a speaker knowledgeable on the topic. The graduating high school seniors were presented with the book "Myths & Facts -- A Guide to the Arab-Israel Conflict Campus".

Thus the program "Students for Israel" was begun, without any notion of a Torch Award; however, because of its success the seed was planted that this was a program that could be of interest to clubs throughout the FJMC. The club was too late to submit an application for the 2013, successfully repeated the program in 2014 and 2015, with variations in the content. By the time this year's convention was on our radar, the club was ready to submit an application, which resulted in a Silver Torch Award.

It was not anticipated they would apply for more than one Torch Award, but in 2014, the Club began a student essay contest. Age appropriate essay topics were given to students in various grades of the Hebrew School. The student essays were then judged anonymously by members of the congregation with teaching experience. Barnes & Noble gift cards were given as prizes to the winners. In 2015, the club repeated the contest with a new wrinkle: the winners were announced and prizes awarded at Men's Club Shabbat. Aliyot were given to parents of the winning students. Involving the winning students and their parents in Men's Club Shabbat became the added factor that resulted in a Gold Torch Award in the Men's Club Shabbat category.

After taking stock of their efforts over the two years leading up to the 2015 Convention in Miami Beach, noting with pride the extent and variety of the club's activities, the club decided to apply for a third torch award in the category of overall programming. That submission resulted in the Bronze Torch Award.



Steve Pardes from Congregation B'nai Israel in Toms River provides some lessons learned from his club's trifecta of Torch Awards: First, the effort that goes into any innovative program deserves the small further effort involved in applying for a Torch Award. It serves to spread the word about the program to other clubs that can then replicate it. Second, it's not necessary to reinvent the wheel. As our Gold Torch Award shows, sometimes adding a new twist to an existing program, as we did by adding the final part of the essay contest to Men's Club Shabbat, can win a torch award. Third, just applying motivates a Club to innovate and gain recognition and you gotta be in it to win it! Congregation B'nai Israel Men's Club already has an idea that could bring them a torch award at Convention 2017.

Regional Board Meeting - Oct. 12th



Our first scheduled event of the new NNJR year will be the Central **Regional Board on Monday, October 12th**. Save the date!

Dinner starts at 7PM, with the meeting from 7:30 – 9:30. There will also be a training session. Don't miss this opportunity to acquire valuable information for your club, connect with the other club leaders in our region, and get value for your club's affiliation with NNJR/FJMC. Hope to see everyone there.

New NNJR Regional Banner

The new NNJR Regional Banner is a replica of the current New Jersey license plate and features the NNJR logo with the updated FJMC logo (initials). . .

