



HaKeshet  
(TheConnection)

December 2014

## President's Message

by Joel Kurtz

Shalom chaverim,

In the speech I gave at this year's President's dinner, I said that I would make it a priority of my term as President to grow the size of our region. I wanted to emphasize the need to increase the membership of our clubs, and to increase the number of clubs in NNJR. There are many Conservative synagogues in northern New Jersey which have active Men's Clubs, but which have yet to see the value and benefits of joining the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs At NNJR, we've thought long and hard about this, and we've generated a document listing all the very concrete benefits of affiliation. You can view this document, '**What's the Value of FJMC Affiliation? Why Bother?**', at the end of this newsletter.

There is one overarching reason that it is so important for Men's Clubs to belong to FJMC, which can be summed up by one word, UNITY. Our synagogues and our Men's Clubs can often seem as isolated bastions of Jewish life, with little connection to the wider Conservative Jewish world. By affiliating with FJMC and NNJR, an immediate connection is made with Jewish communities throughout our state, North America, and the world.

Our communities are all, in many ways, very much alike. We all share the common challenge of how to involve our members more in Jewish life and in the lives of our synagogues. In NNJR – FJMC we share ideas, work together, and learn from each other to find ways to meet out challenges, solve problems, and improve our synagogues.

Earlier this month, NNJR held its yearly Man of the Year dinners, with most of the clubs in our regions honoring a Man of the Year and/or a Youth of the Year from their clubs. Over 600 people from Conservative synagogues throughout northern NJ attended, and the sense of unity, of being part of a much larger community in which the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts, was palpable and inspirational.

### *President's Message continued...*

My wish is that many more individuals will recognize the great personal benefits of becoming active members of their Men's Clubs, and that many more Men's Clubs will recognize the profound value and benefits of belonging to and participating in NNJR - FJMC.



## Yellow Candle Program

Between 1942-1945, the German Nazi regime and their collaborators systematically persecuted and exterminated six million European Jews: men, women, and children. The majority of the Jews perished in the Nazi death camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sobibor, Treblinka, and others between 1942-1945. This period of persecution and annihilation of Jews has come to be known as the *Holocaust*, derived from the Greek word "holokauston," a sacrifice by fire.

Jews were not the only victims of the Holocaust. The Nazi war machine destroyed millions of others because of their ethnicity, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or physical and mental disabilities. But, anti-Semitism was the motive of force of Nazism; as Elie Wiesel observed, "Not all victims were Jews, but all Jews were victims."

The Holocaust stands as one of the greatest crimes against humanity, and as such, it is a powerful testimonial to the price the world pays for moral indifference in the face of injustice. The Nazi doctrine was racism brought to its logical conclusion. We best honor the memory of the victims of the Holocaust by steadfast vigilance against racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice.

The FJMC honors all of the victims of the Holocaust by providing Yellow Candles for your congregants to light on Yom HaShoah. Please take advantage of our early pricing by ordering your candles now. Click here for information and an order blank. Contact my co-chair, Steve Pardes, if you have any questions. His email is [stevepardes@gmail.com](mailto:stevepardes@gmail.com).

In brotherhood,

Bruce Pomerantz

*NNJR Yellow Candle Co-Chair*

## Sefer Haftarah

In past years when the Sefer Haftarah arrived at Temple Beth Shalom in Livingston, New Jersey, a member of the Men's Club was given the honor of reading the Haftarah from the Sefer Haftarah on Shabbat. This year, at the suggestion of our spiritual leader Rabbi Geoffrey Spector, and coordinated by Men's Club Officer Paul Brownstein, the Men's Club did something very different. We recruited a full dozen members of Men's Club to share the reading of the Haftarah. Most of the recruits had not read a Haftarah since their Bar Mitzvah. Each man agreed to learn and read two verses of the 24-verse Haftarah. Rabbi Spector believed this was the perfect opportunity to have a large number of Men's Club members, who might not otherwise have ever read a Haftarah again, to experience a Haftarah together with their fellow Men's Club members.

On August 30, 2014, at Shabbat services, it all came together exactly as planned. All twelve men ascended the bima, received the maftir aliyah together, recited the blessings before the Haftarah as a group, formed a line and passed the yad from one man to the next as each read his verses of the Haftarah, and then recited the blessings after the Haftarah together. Everyone in the congregation could feel and share in the accomplishment of these men, and a great feeling of warmth and ruach filled the sanctuary. Rabbi Spector delivered a sermon based on the day's Haftarah and the Sefer Haftarah, and explained how the twelve men of Men's Club furthered the purposes of the Sefer Haftarah: to create a sense of pride and accomplishment among the FJMC member clubs and create opportunities for club members to experience, first-hand, such a rich part of our tradition.

We are already looking forward to the next time the Sefer Haftarah returns to Livingston so that we can continue what is sure to become a cherished part of our Men's Club calendar.

Jeffrey Greif

*Men's Club President, Temple Beth Shalom Men's Club*

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## Quality Club Award

Have you been working towards having your Men's Club recognized as a "**Quality Club**"? The awards will be given at the upcoming convention in Miami Beach next July. Most of our clubs are already doing most of what is required. To get your club over the hump, check the criteria and score sheet for the Quality Club Award. Please review the criteria carefully, and in preparing your calendars, make sure to include the necessary programming to qualify your club for the award. Last year there were 11 Quality Club Award winners in NNJR - - in 2015, let's all try to be Quality Clubs!

## 2014 NNJR Man of the Year Dinner

The 2014 Man of the Year dinner is now in the books. Mazel tov to Stu Mantel, the Regional award winner and to all the men and youth selected as award winners by most of the clubs in NNJR.

The Southern dinner took place on Wednesday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, this year at Congregation B'nai Tikvah in North Brunswick. The northern dinner was again held at Temple Beth Ahm Yisrael in Springfield, on Wednesday, November 12<sup>th</sup>. Once again we thank our Southern and Northern Dinner Chairpersons, Dave Yellin and Harvey Hershkowitz.

As those who have attended this event know, it is always 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 people; men, women, and children, as they can to the dinner.

Kudos to Jeff Schulman and Dave Millman on a truly successful Man of the Year Ad Journal, which included bios and messages to the honorees. One quarter (25%) of ad funds raised by a club is refunded back to that club, making the ad journal an excellent fundraising opportunity not only for the region, but also for each individual club. The old adage is true here - - it pays to advertise (in the MOY Journal).

## World Wide Wrap – Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>

The World Wide Wrap (WWW) is a program developed by FJMC, the goal of which is to highlight and promote the mitzvah of wrapping tefillin. Every year, the wrap is held on Super Bowl Sunday. On that day, we aim to get as many men and women as possible to learn about and to put on tefillin. We also include children through a program called "Build A Pair". (Click here for information -- <http://fjmc.org/content/build-pair/>)

On this day, Men's Clubs throughout the US, Canada and the world, hold events teaching about and spotlighting the mitzvah of tefillin. Through these programs, Conservative Jews learn to *don* tefillin, many for the first time in their lives. All participating clubs register on the WWW website (<http://fjmc.org/content/registration>) and can post pictures of their wrap on the site.

There is something very meaningful that happens when a Jewish person puts on tefillin. It's as if, when the straps are tightly wrapped around ones arm, the grip of ancient traditions and practices of our people are felt. Wrapping tefillin can be a transformative experience.

Before the advent of the world wide wrap and promotion of tefillin by the FJMC, the mitzvah of tefillin was becoming extinct among Conservative Jews. The common wisdom was that tefillin was just something that Conservative Jews don't do. Not so long ago, many FJMC

### *World Wide Wrap continued...*

leaders did not know how to put on tefillin. Today, at FJMC conventions and NNJR retreats, hundreds of men in attendance wear their tefillin. Even in our own synagogues, the increased numbers of our members wearing tefillin may be attributed to the WWW.

With the WWW wrap again approaching, let's all experience the spirituality of wearing our tefillin, of being part of the Jewish people and community, and being a link in a chain which dates back thousands of years. I pray that we continue to see more and more Jewish men and women take on the mitzvah of wrapping tefillin and becoming more involved in Jewish life.



## What's the Value of FJMC Affiliation? Why Bother?

For over 80 years, Conservative Jewish men have belonged to men's clubs in their synagogues. These groups have been the foundation stones of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, or FJMC. Its mission is to involve Jewish men in Jewish life.

At present, about half of all "CJ" clubs belong to FJMC's international organization, which covers all of North America as well as Masorti communities in Europe, Israel, South America, Australia and India. It is FJMC's goal to affiliate all CJ kehillot and to reach every Jewish man who is a part of the greater CJ movement.

What does affiliation have to offer? There are ten basic middot, or values, associated with joining FJMC:

- 1) FJMC enables individual clubs to grow. They obtain help with nuts and bolts topics such as membership, finance, leadership development and more. This comes from local regions and other nearby clubs, and from FJMC trained consultants. There are organized training and educational materials. Also, by developing relationships with other local men, your club events will attract a wider audience.
- 2) FJMC engages in leadership development. It has been in the forefront of creating programs which focus on developing new leaders for the future, not only for the men's club but also for the entire synagogue. FJMC's Executive Director, Rabbi Charles Simon, literally wrote the book on building successful volunteer leaders.
- 3) FJMC provides and sponsors award-winning and time-tested programs which are developed in the "incubators" of hundreds of clubs, and then spread out to others all over the world. If you have a great program, other clubs need it (and your group can earn a national award for it). If you have a program which is so-so, chances are somebody else has come up with a solution or a new twist. If you are looking for a new idea, the number of programs is almost endless. Ask for our Program Guide to find out more.
- 4) FJMC is a Jewish Geography engine. It creates the circumstances and means for men to find and renew relationships all over your state, the region, the country and beyond. FJMC club members are welcomed like long-lost souls by groups of total strangers, if they are travelling and need to say Kaddish. One New Jersey FJMcer found a family Pesah seder for his son in the middle of California. Our network is wide and deep; we are truly a band of brothers.
- 5) FJMC enhances the financial strength of its member clubs. Participation in multiple fundraising opportunities is offered at the regional level. In the Northern NJ Region over a recent two-year period, affiliated clubs spent an average of \$1200 to belong (\$600 per

year) but took in \$1600, not including the sale of Shoah Yellow Candles. Some did far better. Clubs can join FJMC for as little as \$250.

- 6) FJMC has created an opportunity for high-level funding development. It is available to our clubs and synagogues. It involves a ritual object. Some of our kehillot have raised over \$100,000 with this effort.
- 7) FJMC offers events which focus on and promote Kovod (respect/recognition). In New Jersey, the annual Man-of-the-Year Tribute events are the largest gatherings of Conservative Jews in the state. Each fall, over 700 turn out to celebrate honorees (men and youth) from 30 congregations. Clubs return to their congregations with a "buzz" that persists for the entire year.
- 8) FJMC creates and reveals ruach (inspiration, divine wind). It holds an annual convention in the July of odd-numbered years. FJMC regions generally hold Shabbat retreats in the even-numbered years. The ruach experienced at these events is indescribable. If you want to see grown men cry, come to Convention. The next one is July 24 – 28, 2013 in Danvers, Massachusetts.
- 9) FJMC elevates spirituality. It is the living embodiment of "Hinei Ma Tov u'Manayim, Shevat Achim Gam Yachad". Turning that around, one can say, "Brothers Sitting Together, How Pleasant it is to Dwell Together in Unity". In FJMC spirituality is experienced, and comes back to your own community.
- 10) FJMC can put you in the vanguard of the Conservative movement. It provides an opportunity for you to directly influence the future of CJ/Masorti Judaism with opportunities to know and meet leaders from all branches of the movement. Invest in CJ and give your kids the Jewish home they deserve.

You can learn more about FJMC by visiting its website at [www.fjmc.org](http://www.fjmc.org). Here in Northern New Jersey, the website address is [www.nnjr.org](http://www.nnjr.org).

Eric Weis

*NNJR Past-President*

*Current Men's Club President, Shomrei Torah Men's Club, Wayne*