



The CIRCLE

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Inspiring Banquet Touches Hearts and Leaves Lasting Impact

It's not every day that a 17-year-old can move an audience of 850 people to spontaneous applause and tears. But that's just what happened at this year's Friendship Circle Annual Banquet as Joseph Volfman recounted his own powerful story.

Speaking in front of the packed room, Joseph described how despite being born with cerebral palsy, he knows that he can accomplish anything. "I want to take the 'dis' out of 'disability' and focus on 'ability.'"

Joseph captivated the participants recounting how he got his first bicycle at age 11 from Friendship Circle and has since been inspired to master other sports. He even made the evening news in January when he used a specially designed recumbent bike to hand-cycle his way through the Miami Marathon—all 26.2 miles.

"After being involved with Friendship Circle as a recipient for so many years, I wanted to do something to give back," he said. "And so, on Jan. 29 of this year, I took on the marathon on behalf of Friendship Circle."

"... Had it not been for Friendship Circle, had it not been for that bicycle in 2011," he continued, "I don't see how all the wonderful things that followed would have ever happened."

His speech was, for many in the audience, the emotional highlight of the evening. As first-time FC banquet attendee Lynette Steckel said: "I just loved his speech and his outlook on life."

Those who came to this year's event agreed that it was beyond anything they

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Jewish Life Comes Alive

The preschoolers ran towards a table covered with rolling pins. They had just watched as two of their classmates mixed flour and water—the first step in making 18-minute handmade matzah, and they were eager to join in.

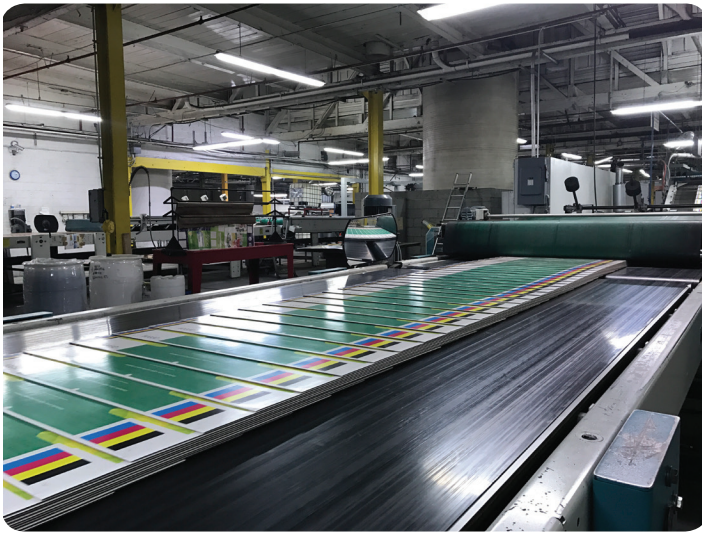
"Fifteen minutes left," called out Rabbi Yisroel Rosenblum, director of the "Living Legacy" workshop, as the children's little hands smashed little balls of dough before rolling it out flat with the help of their teachers.

It was a scene repeated at dozens of area schools that hosted the interactive matzah workshop from "Living Legacy," a sister organization of Friendship Circle. Other programs run by Rosenblum include the "Shofar Factory," "Olive-Oil Press" and "Model Matzah Bakery," in addition to a "Torah Factory" workshop and Havdalah classes.

"The goal is to make Judaism meaningful and exciting for children," says the rabbi. "When we are talking about a mezuzah, for instance, they should understand what it is and



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The Essential Shabbat Kit

A box full of goodness spreads light to those in area hospitals

The bright-green boxes have been popping up in hospitals throughout the area in recent weeks, providing a bit of warmth and comfort to people who find themselves in the hospital over Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest.

Formerly known as “Shabbat in a Box,” the revamped and renamed “Shabbat Kit” ensures that Jewish men and women in area hospitals and beyond can have all the ingredients to celebrate Shabbat, no matter where they are. Included in the kit are two electric Shabbat candles (safe to use in hospitals), a bottle of kosher grape

juice, a Kiddush cup, challah rolls and a Shabbat treat to add a bit of sweetness to a patient’s day.

“The new name better reflects what a Shabbat Kit is,” explains Friendship Circle Executive Director Zalman Grossbaum. “Like a first aid or sewing kit, the Shabbat Kit contains all the essentials for Shabbat, offering people a moment of spirituality and reflection.”

Designed by Chana Cohen Design, the first of the new green Shabbat Kit boxes began rolling off the printing line at Accurate Box in Paterson, N.J., in February and have already been well received.

Some recipients noted that the box represents the Jewish community thinking of them and wanting to help in their time of need.

Each week, nearly 100 patients at four area hospitals—Overlook Medical Center in Summit, Morristown Medical Center in Morristown, Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston and Hackensack UMC in Mountainside—receive Shabbat kits. That number is expected to grow thanks to the Shabbat Kit website (www.Shabbatkit.com), which allows people to order a kit to be sent to someone who will be in the hospital over Shabbat.

“If people know someone will be staying in a hospital over Shabbat, a kit can be sent to the patient in advance,” says FC Director Toba Grossbaum. “People at area hospitals we serve can get them delivered in person, but we can also ship the kits nationwide.”

The “Shabbat Kit” program, launched in early 2015 by Dara and David Orbach, is offered in memory of David’s mother, Jocheved Orbach, and administered by Friendship Circle. 🌱



Smiles Abound as FC & JCC Team Up for Sunday Fun

It was a day full of sunshine—literally and figuratively—as more than 50 children with special needs and their siblings enjoyed a morning of music, art and gym, followed by a pizza lunch. Just as important, their parents got a morning out, thanks to the generosity of one amazing woman and the hard work of many others.

Dubbed “Torah Circle/Parents Morning Out,” the April 23 program was held at the Jewish Community Center of MetroWest in West Orange, and was a project of the JCC and Friendship Circle.

“This is the definition of community,” said Barbara Drench, a longtime volunteer and activist who helped underwrite the program. “It’s a win-win for everyone. I applaud everyone involved for making this happen and for having such a sophisticated program for the children.”

“And we can’t thank Barbara enough for this wonderful morning,” replied FC Director Toba Grossbaum. “This was an amazing gift for the children to be able to enjoy a Sunday morning with friends, and an amazing gift for the parents who enjoyed a much-needed respite.”

Marisa Cohen, director of special-needs services at the JCC, said: “I think

it’s wonderful how our two agencies have been able to work together to provide a meaningful program for the kids.”

The morning program was a labor of love for Drench, who manages a special-needs endowment at the JCC that her late husband Dan started decades ago. “Dan believed in the community and was as generous as could be,” she said. “It’s been important to me to continue his caring for, and sense of, community, which I share wholeheartedly. I am so glad that Marisa and Toba were able to make this happen. I hope there will be many more events together.”

The timing of the program could not have been more meaningful, noted Drench, as it coincidentally came just a day after Dan’s *yahrzeit*, the fourth anniversary of his passing at the age of 91.

With tears in her eyes—“happy tears,” Drench called them—she couldn’t help but feel a sense of joy as she watched the children go from activity to activity. “There’s not a face here without a smile . . . the volunteers, the participants, the parents. It’s a beautiful day in a beautiful place with beautiful people. Dan would have been very pleased.”





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could imagine. Held at The Grove in Cedar Grove, N.J., it featured an outstanding array of food and drinks, and great company.

But it was the formal program that really gripped people's attention. The multimedia presentation helped transport the audience into the world of Friendship Circle.

Joseph's inspiring words were followed by a video presentation called "Then & Now," which told the story of two of the earliest children to participate in Friendship Circle programming: Max Lerner and Hannah Solomon, and their families.

Both the Lerner and Solomon families spoke about how, over the past 17 years, the Friendship Circle has impacted their family and the community at large. They shared how much they cherish the sense of belonging and hope they feel at Friendship Circle. They stressed that Friendship Circle is where their children, now young adults,

are always welcomed and loved.

Among the attendees at this year's event was former New York Gov. David Paterson, who served as a banquet chair and was there to support one of the evening's honorees, his friend Robert Slopovsky.

The governor said that those who were being honored that night didn't accept the awards on their own behalf, but in honor of the many people who "come and give of their time, money and service."

No one does this to win an award, said Paterson; they do it "because it's the right thing to do." They do it, he emphasized, "to enlighten all of us as to the benefits" of being involved with a worthy cause.

The evening's other honorees were Jennifer and Christopher Johnson, and the team at Hollister Construction; Maxine Murnick and her family; and Jamie and Adam Altman.

The honorees represented a mix of

philanthropists and business people committed to Friendship Circle, and especially, to its LifeTown project. Now under construction, the 53,000-square-foot center will provide social programming, job training and life skills to children and adults with special needs.

"This was our most successful banquet ever," declared Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum, executive director of Friendship Circle. He added that Friendship Circle is now entering its *chai* year—its 18th anniversary—offering programs and services to families with children with special needs.

While that is a true milestone, he said, there is still work to be done.

Noting that more than \$12.6 million has been raised to build LifeTown, construction will actually cost closer to \$15 million. The goal, he said, is to close that \$2.4 million gap so that the center will be able to open mortgage-free.

Grossbaum made a specific request to the evening's participants. "As we



enter our *chai* year—and *chai* means life—give the gift of life to the children and families with LifeTown.”

For business partners Tom Van Geldren and Mike Garrett, who came to support their associates at Hollister Construction, the evening exceeded their expectations. “I thought this was fantastic, very inspiring,” said Garrett, co-owner of Patriot Sawcutting. “It makes for a great, great night.”

Van Geldren acknowledged that “it makes you want to do more, to do good.”

But Sylvia Cohn perhaps best summed up the night, looking towards the immediate future: “I don’t know how they will be able to top this, other than by celebrating the actual opening of LifeTown.”

Plans for that event are already in the works, with a grand opening expected this fall. 🔄

To see videos and photos from the evening, visit www.fcny.com/blog.

Honorees Share Personal Connection



ADAM ALTMAN

“Jamie and I have been inspired to get involved and support Friendship Circle because the interaction occurs at an intimate level so we know a difference is being made with those who need it most. Friendship Circle is like the farm-to-table of helping those who need it most. The giving that takes place is direct, pure with no intermediary or red tape.”



CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON

“After telling my 11-year-old daughter what we are building and showing her the drawings and the virtual reality video explaining the facility and how the dinner would raise money for kids that need a place like LifeTown, she ran to her room and came down with her little safe. She opened it and counted out her money donate to LifeTown.

It was a very proud moment; LifeTown teaches life skills in my home as well!”



MAXINE MURNICK

“All of our children have their own needs, but fortunately for most, love and nurturing will guide them through. But for some of our children, special needs require special attention. Friendship Circle’s teen volunteers become an important part of these children’s lives. They become buddies for children who don’t necessarily have the

socialization skills and opportunities. This is a win-win situation. The children have a friend to spend time with them and the volunteers learn that not everyone is as fortunate as they are and they learn how to be kind and understanding of differences.”



ROBERT SLOPOSKY

“When I was in the sixth grade, a teacher asked if anyone would be interested in mentoring a new student who would be joining our class part time. She said it would require patience and a desire to help someone be part of our class. I raised my hand and soon met Jerry—who I didn’t know was autistic. I learned a lot that year about myself. I found a talent

within me and a courage as I stood up to other kids who picked on Jerry. ...When I first came to Friendship Circle all these childhood memories came rushing back and I felt like it was a homecoming. Thank you for that.”

Fashionably FC

Moms got a sneak peek at spring fashion while enjoying a wine-and-cheese-mixer at Chari Amster boutique in Livingston. The program is part of the expanded Mom's Event calendar of activities, such as the yoga and relaxation class held earlier this year.



Friends in Uniform

A group from Special in Uniform recently visited Friendship Circle to share ideas and discuss collaboration. Special in Uniform integrates individuals with unique abilities into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and assists in preparing them for careers following army service. Special in Uniform is a project of Yad LaYeled in partnership with Jewish National Fund. (From Left) Anna Richlin, Campaign Executive at JNF; Riki Golan; Tiran Attia, Executive Director at Special in Uniform; Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum, CEO Friendship Circle and Shmuel Altras.

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why it's important. Similarly, they should know how matzah is made and why we continue to eat it at Passover today."

"Living Legacy" workshops are hands-on, allowing kids to be completely engaged in the learning. In addition to the finished product, the workshops include creatively designed handouts or a holiday magazine to take home and share with their families.

"Rabbi Rosenblum makes sure each child is given the opportunity to experience and construct the building blocks of their own Jewish foundation," says Rachelle Zomick, early-childhood director at the Iris Berman Early Childhood Center. "They get to smell and taste fresh matzah that they make with their own hands. They make memories of writing Torah letters on parchment paper just like a real scribe."

"We value Living Legacy's Matzah Factory experience for our preschool students," says Randi Cohen, preschool

director at Temple Beth Shalom. "It provides them a hands-on opportunity to be involved in the process of making matzah and helps them better understand its significance in the Passover story."

Originally aimed at children from preschool through eighth-grade, Rosenblum also offers similar workshops for those in other demographics. Before Passover, he even offered an intergenerational class at a local synagogue that brought together preschoolers and senior members of the congregation.

"The workshop was geared to the kids, but the adults were having just as much fun," Rosenblum says, adding that it was wonderful to see the two groups interacting and enjoying each other's company. ♻️

For more on the "Living Legacy" program, email Rabbi Yisroel Rosenblum at: yisroel@fcnj.com.



FC Basketball Stars Shine

It was the culmination of months of practice and preparation as Team Friendship took on students from Golda Och Academy for their annual crosstown basketball game. For more than one hour, the two teams displayed incredible sportsmanship and camaraderie.



Juggling For Purim

There were princess and superheroes; gumball machines and storybook characters—all gathered together for the annual Friendship Circle Purim celebration. Held this year at the Alex Aidekman Family Jewish Community Campus, the program was attended by more than 40 families and friends of Friendship Circle and featured a reading of Megillat Esther, dinner and a performance by a fire juggler.





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Many consider spring a time for renovations and that can certainly be said about LifeTown as the rebuilding phase of the project is well underway. Hollister Construction crews are busy at the site with the goal of getting LifeTown up and running by late fall.



Rebuild Underway!



Keep up to date with LifeTown construction at www.LifeTown.com/updates

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