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NEWS FROM THE JEA FOR ITS MEMBERS

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MIDWEST REGION HOSTS GALA CELEBRATION HONORING JEWISH EDUCATION

Our **Midwest Region** hosted a gala evening celebrating and honoring Jewish education on Thursday evening, May 14 at Beth Hillel Congregation Bnai Emunah in Wilmette, IL. More than 125 people attended the elegant, catered affair on a beautiful spring day. Eight synagogues and agencies from the region participated by honoring a teacher from their faculty or staff and a lay person from their education committee. Each honoree was called up individually and presented with a certificate and a Mordecai Rosenstein print to commemorate the occasion. The guests were in a festive mood and cheered vigorously when the honoree from their synagogue was called.

The attendees were greeted by **Edward Edelstein, JEA Executive Director**. **Rabbi Allan Kensky, Spiritual Leader of Beth Hillel Congregation Bnai Emunah** delivered a D'var Torah. **Alicia Gejman and Sally Brown-Winter, Dinner Chairs** presided over the program and **Alicia Gejman and Esther Weiss, Regional Co-Presidents** joined in making the presentations to the honorees. **Cantor Stewart Figa** also performed during the program accompanied by **Howard Pfeiffer**. Table centerpieces were made by the children of the participating schools.

It takes a real team effort to plan and prepare for such a festive evening. Many thanks to **Alicia Gejman** and **Sally Brown-Winter** and all the members of the Midwest Region who worked so hard to make this evening a success. Special thanks also to **Yaffa Fuchs** who helped out with the invitations and the certificates.



PLACEMENT 2009 – A MOST CHALLENGING SEASON

Each and everyone of us has felt the impact of the economic crisis in our work. We may have experienced budget cuts, staff cut-backs or loss of hours. Those who have been seeking new positions this year have had an especially rough time. As the placement season comes to a close, I recently shared these thoughts with those who were still seeking positions. It is NOT meant as a reflection on “the sorry state of Jewish education.” Rather, it is meant as a reminder that these are tough times for everyone and some will have to make some difficult and painful choices. I share it with everyone as a report on the state of placement for this year. We all look forward to brighter times and renewed growth in our chosen profession.

Clearly, Jewish education is not exempt from the tremendous economic crisis facing our nation. Synagogues and schools alike have faced declining enrollments, dramatically reduced contributions and increased needs for scholarship funds and assistance. Governing boards have responded by cutting budgets, eliminating positions, reducing salaries and turning full-time positions into part-time. Our role at the Jewish Educators Assembly is always to advocate for you, the educator, and to press for higher salaries and increased benefits as well as the respect and status that you so richly deserve. In reality, we have had to be a bit more flexible this year, as our institutions face these severe and genuine economic challenges.

Let me share a few general observations from this year:

- Overall, we have had fewer positions available than in recent years, most particularly and dramatically in the Day School world.
- We have seen an increase in educators who have not had their contracts renewed, most notably those who have served in their positions from 5-10 years.
- As all fields of Jewish communal work are contracting, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people who have come to us for placement. We have seen pulpit rabbis, folks from social work and community service agencies, new graduates, retirees wishing to return to the work force, those who have been cut from Day School positions, and more. It all makes for a very crowded field and we have served more than double the average number of candidates this year.
- Synagogues and schools are also getting a greatly increased response from newspaper and online advertising, so it is not unusual to have as many as 50-70 (yes, fifty to seventy!) responses to an opening. While it does not justify poor behavior on the part of search committees, it does explain why some applicants simply never received a response from places to which their resumes were sent. Every candidate feels “If they would just interview me...” But in fairness to the search committees, they cannot interview that quantity of candidates. There had to be a vetting of resumes and some of our candidates just didn’t make it to the gate.

While we always strive to be positive and encouraging, it is also our job to help you be realistic about your chances. Clearly, not everyone is going to find a position this year. It hurts to say those words to a candidate, but as the placement season draws to a close, that is the harsh reality.

Where do we go from here?

Our job at JEA is to encourage professional growth and to draw talented and passionate people into the field of Jewish education. Reluctantly, this year we must counsel some of you to look beyond the field of Jewish education to provide sustenance for yourself and your family.

Assess Your Own Skills

We don’t always give ourselves credit for the many things that we do in Jewish education. Think about the many skills you employ in your job and, most particularly, the ones you enjoy and do well. These might include:

- Organization and management
- Scheduling and coordination
- Writing and editing

