



### A PUPPET PASSOVER

At Community Learning Day on March 17, children from Temple B'nai Abraham made puppets, and then used their creations to re-tell the Passover story. For more on Passover, see our section beginning on page 20.

Courtesy photo

## NSTI Grows Up, Takes Next Steps

AMY SESSLER POWELL  
 Jewish Journal Staff

Four years ago, when Bettina Bucco of Wenham was about to start high school, she took a summer trip with the newly formed North Shore Teen Initiative to New Orleans to be part of an international teen arts festival, Maccabi ArtsFest.



Teens on the NSTI Loon Mountain trip

She made great friends and participated in a huge service project, repairing Hurricane Katrina damage to Storyland Park. It all made an impact and when she returned, she started attending whatever programs NSTI offered as a way to see those

friends again. Along the way she got connected to several community service projects and a wide circle of Jewish friends from all over the North Shore.

"It definitely broadened my horizons with the Jewish community and brought me closer to my Judaism," Bucco, 18, said.

A little over five years ago, the Jim Joseph Foundation (JJF) funded the North Shore Teen Initiative, a brand new entity to serve as the "connective tissue" between existing youth organizations and synagogues.

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A speech from 1969 still resonates today

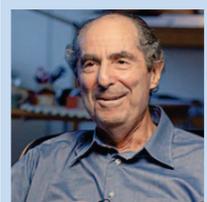
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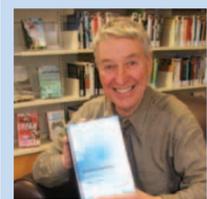


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## Marblehead Teen's 'Havayah' to Ukraine

MICHAEL KATZEN  
 Special to the Journal

When asked where I went this February vacation, it's hard to say. Dnep... Dnepro... Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. Believe me it's a mouthful, and even after spending two weeks there, I still have trouble pronouncing it.

The next question people ask is: What did you do there? The simple answer is that our group of teens from the Boston area worked with teen delegations from Haifa and Dnepropetrovsk to run a winter vacation camp at the Jewish day school in the city. However, the relationships we formed and the experiences we shared were so much more than that.

Dnepropetrovsk was part of the former Soviet Union, and a major industrial city for the development of nuclear weapons and the Soviet space program. In the 1990s, the city was in need of much repair and the Jewish community was just a handful of people. Today, with the help of CJP and the JCRC, the city is recovering, and there is a population of about 250,000 Jews living there.

The trip is called Havayah ("experience" in Hebrew). It sure was an experience! At a pre-trip meeting we were warned that the Ukrainian teens might be a little more reserved, and that we shouldn't be loud and obnoxious.

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Michael Katzen is pictured with first graders at the Jewish day school where he worked.

Courtesy photo

## Community is Invited to Zumba for Breast Cancer

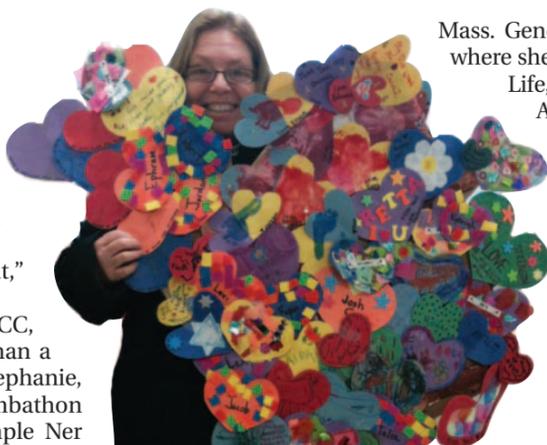
SUSAN JACOBS  
 Jewish Journal Staff

PEABODY — Whenever someone needs help, Loretta Band is always among the first to lend a hand. Now battling breast cancer, Loretta must learn to accept help from others. It is not an easy lesson for the North Suburban JCC teacher.

"I'm used to giving support — not taking it," admitted Loretta, 54.

Family, friends and colleagues at the NSJCC, where Loretta has taught preschool for more than a decade, are rallying around her. Her daughter, Stephanie, and co-worker, Jenn Pomerantz, are staging a Zumbathon on Sunday, April 14, from 1-2:30 p.m., at Temple Ner Tamid.

The suggested donation is \$20. Proceeds will fund two organizations close to Loretta's heart. One is the



Loretta Band and her Tree of Love, created by the NSJCC staff and students.

Susan Novak

Mass. General/North Shore Cancer Center in Danvers, where she is receiving treatment. The other is Relay For Life, a national fundraising walk that benefits the American Cancer Society. Loretta's supporters have formed a team named "The Band," and plan to walk in her honor in Peabody on June 14.

"My mom does so much for the Jewish community. She has always been a giver. We wanted to find a way to show her just how much support she has in the community," said Stephanie, 24.

Besides working at the JCC, Pomerantz is a certified Zumba instructor, and Loretta has taken her classes.

"When I found out that Loretta had breast cancer, it was a no-brainer for me," said Pomerantz.

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## NSTI Grows Up

from page 1

The goal was to produce broader social opportunities for teens across 23 North Shore communities.

Expenses minus earned revenue were \$250,348 in year one, \$331,123 in year two, and \$371,542 in year three. The NSTI raised just over \$10,000 from the community in those first three years.

Last year, however, as NSTI begins a journey toward self-sufficiency, they raised \$82,201 and are well on their way toward the \$150,000 goal this year. By August 2016, they hope to raise \$275,000 on their own and recently received an additional matching, dollar for dollar, grant from NSTI for just over \$400,000.

“NSTI was an experiment. Could a community approach youth engagement in a different way, with collaboration, not supplanting or shutting down existing youth groups?” asked Adam Smith, NSTI executive director.

They started with a few key

programs, including the Maccabi Arts delegation in the summer of 2009. They also provided grants for first time campers, service learning, and spent time working with existing providers of youth services and programs to build relationships and find ways to enhance opportunities.

Over the last five years, the group has grown both in the scope of programs they offer, the number of agencies they work with and the number of teens being reached uniquely, as well as those who attend several programs.

The opportunities range from the purely social, such as a recent ski trip to Loon Mountain, to service opportunities — many co-sponsored with other agencies and synagogues, such as the weekly L’Shaper with Temple Sinai, the annual J-Serve — the community’s local version of a national day of Jewish service, to the annual Habitat for Humanity trip taking place during the February vacation. There are opportunities for teens to get together to make music, to learn with the monthly Torah

Hub for Teens, and for leadership. Bucco, for example, is now doing her senior internship from Hamilton-Wenham High School with NSTI. Her job is to organize the J-Serve projects and recruit.

As NSTI matures, it is also subject to independent evaluation. The JFF hired Summation Research Group, Inc. to evaluate the project, and recently presented them with a favorable report.

At the same time, the JFF released its own study, “Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens,” focusing on key themes for successful teen engagement. NSTI was one of several JFF-funded projects held out as a positive example in the report.

One of the goals of all the research was to determine whether JFF was spending money wisely, and whether there are opportunities for this type of model to be replicated around the country.

“On any given Sunday, there are hundreds of kids doing something,” said Smith.

On a random Sunday in March, he realized that large number of teens were involved in activities. More than 20 teens attended the Loon Mountain ski trip, another 30 to 40 served as madrichim in religious school classes in several synagogues, and more than 80 teens attended the Youth to Israel pre-trip program. The following week, about 45 teens attended the Monday evening, Torah Hub for Teens program.

Additionally, teens are attending service activities on an ongoing basis at the Ford School in Lynn and Haven From Hunger in Peabody, and they are doing service projects such as helping with Purim parties, Soup-er Sunday and so on.

### A CHANGING MODEL

The model for youth engagement has changed over the last 50 years because there are so many ways for teens can get involved. NSTI does not want to make them choose, but instead to find ways to be part of their lives in meaningful ways, Smith said.

“Today, the Jewish community does not have to be your



Teens learned strong life lessons during the third annual NSTI Habitat for Humanity trip during February vacation.

everything because teens have so many things to do. But we want to make sure there are cool opportunities here as well, within their tradition. We want to be part of their lives and we want them to have balanced lives,” Smith said.

Michael Lann, 18, of Swampscott got involved with NSTI after he went to Israel on Y2I. At first, it was a way to do things with all the new friends he made on the Israel trip. But after he went on the Habitat for Humanity trip last year, he found himself more interested in helping others.

“It was a really powerful experience that just felt good and teaches you life lessons,” he said.

As a result, he got much more involved in community service opportunities that ultimately helped him get accepted to college.

Gayle Rubin, an NSTI board member from Swampscott and mother of two teens, believes that service opportunities attract teens who need the hours for their Y2I trip requirements or school service requirements.

“They need community service and find it palatable at J-serve with another group of teens, but when they get there, it’s awesome and they meet people and connect,” Rubin said.

That gets them to the next event. “It grows from them coming and reaching out to each other,” she said.

Going forward, Smith sees several challenges for the NSTI. The first will be through outreach. Each year, NSTI has reached more unique teens,

starting with 140 their first fiscal year, running from September 2008 to August 2009. This year, they have reached 542 unique teens so far, but the goal is to continue to grow to at least 760 unique teens by August 2016.

Smith believes they have reached most of the teens who are easiest to reach — those that are affiliated with Jewish agencies and synagogues, and who are looking for opportunities. But, using the teens already engaged, he hopes to reach those that are not involved Jewishly at all.

One key to that future is working more closely with other agencies to share data so they have a better sense of how they are doing. He recently worked with Debbie Coltin, executive director of the Robert I. Lappin Charitable Foundation, who agreed to share demographical data with NSTI and anyone else in the community.

Through the PJ Library program, administered locally by the Lappin Foundation, there is good data on children when they are born. The PJ Library gives free monthly books to children ages six months to eight years. People tend to sign up for the free books and it connects them to the community as well.

Smith believes that with better data, better research and new models for working with youth, the future holds so much potential.

“It’s lofty, but with the public relations backing of a large foundation, we have an opportunity to change the course of Jewish youth engagement,” Smith said.



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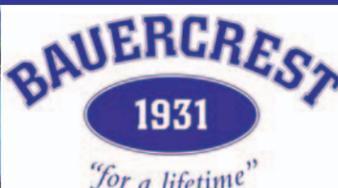
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