

U.S. Jewish news

New York university becoming 'swastika capital' of higher ed?

By JULIE WIENER
NEW YORK (JTA) - Several months after a spate of anti-Semitic vandalism, Binghamton University in upstate New York has been hit again, this time with 23 swastikas in one day.

A state university, Binghamton has an estimated Jewish body of 3,000 to 4,000 students. Scrawled with a felt-tip marker, the swastikas were found March 28 on various buildings, including the student union.

University officials alerted the FBI and local police to the new round of graffiti, and reported that university police believe the van-

dalism is the work of one individual. The swastikas were removed within hours.

In a public statement the day the swastikas were found, Binghamton's president, Lois DeFleur, denounced the vandalism and reiterated the offer of a \$5,000 U.S. reward for information leading to the conviction of the perpetrator.

In an official statement, Richard Joel, the president and international director of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, described the pattern of anti-Semitic incidents at Binghamton as "deeply disturbing."

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Mubarak opposes racist cartoons, but says he will not ban them

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) - Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak told a group of American Jewish and American Arab leaders last week that he had repeatedly spoken out against anti-Semitic cartoons in the Egyptian media but would not make a new public appeal to stop them, Jewish leaders told JTA.



HOSNI MUBARAK, Egyptian president: Will not make a public appeal against anti-Semitic cartoons in the Egyptian press.

be some kind of mea culpa or an epiphany is

absurd. He was very frank and very honest," Epstein said. "He was willing to engage in a dialogue."

The April 4 private session took place before Mubarak attended a luncheon with a broader group of American Jewish and American Arab leaders. Mubarak also told the private meeting that he had received assurances from President Bush that the United States would play a role in improving Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Behind the headlines

In Rich scandal, Holocaust museum head finds support

By PETER EPHROSS

NEW YORK (JTA) - Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg has built a reputation as a man of letters, but not of the kind that have swirled around him lately. In the latest volley in an escalating war of words, a majority of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council is defending Greenberg, the em-

battled council chair, against a campaign to unseat him over his role in the Marc Rich pardon scandal.

Thirty-five members of the 50-plus-member council were preparing a letter last week backing Greenberg, who is under pressure to resign for lobbying on Rich's behalf.

Even his backers admit that Greenberg made a mistake when he sent a letter on museum stationery in December asking President Clinton to pardon the financier.

Yet last week's letter went on to say, "We have complete confidence that the museum will continue to flourish under Rabbi Greenberg's leadership."

The pro-Greenberg letter came in response to another letter, signed by 18 current and former members of the council, that was made public two weeks ago. That letter recognized Greenberg's "long and distinguished career as an educator and as a leading proponent of Jewish thought."

But it called on him to resign for his role in the Rich pardon, saying he had unintentionally "entangled the museum in a political controversy inimical to its mission."

U.S. Jewish news

Focus on issues

Group to focus on social justice, but some worried about partisanship

By JULIE WIENER

NEW YORK (JTA)

- According to a popular joke, a group of American Jewish tourists in Israel ask their tour guide, "How do you say tikkun olam in Hebrew?" Tikkun olam, of course, is a Hebrew term, one that describes the Jewish obligation to repair the world. The joke's humor lay in the fact that many American Jews are more literate in social activism than in Hebrew.

According to a new study, however, most American Jews not only don't know it's Hebrew, but aren't even familiar with the term tikkun olam. And with only 31 per cent reporting that Israel is personally very meaningful to their Jewish iden-

tity, chances are they won't be asking Israeli tour guides much of anything.

The findings were two pieces of a recent study measuring American Jewish attitudes toward "social justice," a somewhat vague term that can fit a variety of causes, depending on the speaker's politics.

The study's major finding - that American Jews remain strongly supportive of predominantly liberal social justice causes - is being used to promote the new organization that commissioned it.

Amos: The National Jewish Partnership for Social Justice, was officially launched two weeks ago. It aims to place social justice

higher on the Jewish communal agenda and to provide training and other support for Jewish groups that want to address social justice issues. Amos' founding comes as a number of people tout social justice and community service as a means of engaging unaffiliated young Jews: * A new organization in its planning stages, Partnership for Service, seeks to increase community service rates among young Jews while teaching what Jewish tradition has to say about volunteering.

* Through a project called Tzedek Hillel, several campus Hillels are focusing on volunteer efforts, including spring break programs in which students do things like build houses for the poor.

Months after HUC resignation, Zimmerman hired by Birthright

By JULIE WIENER
NEW YORK (JTA)

- A rabbi recently suspended from the Reform movement's rabbinic organization because of sexual impropriety has been hired to a top position by a program that sends thousands of young Jews on free trips to Israel.

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, who resigned as president of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in December,

will become executive vice-president of Birthright Israel USA, Inc., based in New York. He was recruited for the position by Michael Steinhardt, the hedge fund manager-turned-philanthropist who co-founded the Birthright program.

Zimmerman's hire is raising some eyebrows in the Jewish community, though many leading figures praised the appointment. Steinhardt, for example, said he is "extraordinarily thrilled" to have Zimmerman on staff. Charles Bronfman, another major



RABBI SHELDON ZIMMERMAN: Suspended for sexual impropriety last December.

philanthropist and Birthright co-founder, called Zimmerman a "terrific, terrific catch for Birthright." "He is a dynamic educator and leader whose talents will be a great blessing for Birthright Israel," Bronfman said.

Others in the Jewish community feel less blessed. Susan Weidman Schneider, editor of the feminist Jewish magazine *Lilith*, said, "Although the specific nature of

Zimmerman's actions have not been made public," his hire "seems to repeat a pattern in Jewish life where male rabbis known to have transgressive behaviors in their past have not often suffered professionally for it."

Zimmerman led the HUC from 1996 until last December, when he resigned after being suspended for a minimum of two years from the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis on the recommendation of its ethics committee.

New study shows U.S. Jews proud about link to social justice

By JULIE WIENER

NEW YORK (JTA) - The following number are some of the highlights of a new study on American Jews and social justice: * 94 per cent agree that "social justice work by Jewish organizations makes me proud to be a Jew." * 85 per cent disagree that "Jews have enough problems of their own without worrying about broader society." * The social causes that the largest number of respondents "strongly favor" are assuring freedom of choice for women seeking abortions, ensuring access to affordable health care and fighting anti-Semitism.

Of the predominantly left-wing causes examined by the study, "declaring a moratorium on" capital punishment was the only one that a majority (53 per cent) opposed. * More than half are not familiar with the Hebrew phrase "tikkun olam." Literally, the phrase means repairing the world, and has been loosely interpreted to mean a Jewish obligation to work for social justice.

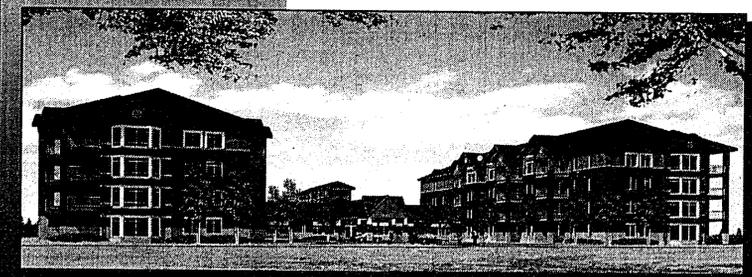
* Asked if they would rather volunteer to help needy Americans with a Jewish group or a nonsectarian group, only 15 per cent chose a Jewish group, while 73 per cent said it would not matter. * Sixty-nine per cent associate the term "social justice" with both Judaism and Christianity, while 8 per cent associate it only with Judaism and 23 per cent associate it with neither.

Of the 49 per cent who said they had participated in a social justice activity, 24 per cent had participated in one sponsored by a synagogue. * Making the world a better place ranked highest as the activity most personally meaningful for being Jewish, followed by belief in God and celebrating Jewish holidays. Ranking lowest were keeping up with Jewish art, music or literature, and studying Torah and other Jewish texts. * Asked to choose which is more important as a Jew - studying Torah or working for social justice - 56 per cent chose social justice, while 36 per cent said both are equally important.

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