

## Canadian Jewish news

### B'nai Brith Canada withdraws human rights complaint against Concordia citing confidence in new administration

**MONTREAL** – In consideration of the positive steps being taken by Concordia University's new administration, the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada has withdrawn its 2004 complaint to the Quebec Human Rights Commission against the University. The following statement was issued by Gerry Weinstein, B'nai Brith Canada's National President, and Allan Adel, National Chair of the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada:

"Following a careful ongoing process of dialogue and consultation, we have come to the conclusion that our concerns are being met. We have therefore informed Concordia's President, Dr. Claude Lajeunesse, that we have withdrawn our complaint.

"We are pleased that our suggested recommendations are being taken into account as Concordia drafts a revised security policy that it plans to make public shortly. We have every hope that the new security protocol – unlike the previous one – will be non-discriminatory in both its conception and implementation.

"B'nai Brith continues to offer its expertise to Concordia's Risk Management Committee on security and safety issues. We will also continue to monitor the situation closely for any future contentious situations that might arise on campus."

### Rabbis withdraw from Yom Hashoah event

By FRANCES KRAFT

**TORONTO** – The Toronto Board of Rabbis (TBR), comprising mainly Conservative and Reform clergy, said it wouldn't take part in, or endorse, this year's community-wide Yom Hashoah commemoration after organizers decided the full Renanim Youth Choir couldn't sing at the event because the group has both boys and girls.

This year, for the first time, organizers decided to invite the Renanim choir to take part in the annual event, but only with its male singers. The decision was made out of deference to the Vaad Harabonim, the umbrella for some 70 Orthodox rabbis, in order to respect the traditional prohibition against men hearing women sing (kol isha).

The six-year-old choir is two-thirds female and its 25 members range in age from 10 to 18.

Although there are no formal, written guidelines for the event – held April 24 at Earl Bales Park – female clergy, female soloists and mixed choirs have not been on the program in past years.

Organizers wanted everyone in the community to feel comfortable, event co-chair Louis Greenbaum said.

Both rabbinic groups, along with about a dozen other organizations, have been longtime co-sponsors of the Holocaust Community Commemoration, which is facilitated by UJA Federation of Greater Toronto.

The TBR, whose approximately 40 affiliated rabbis are mostly Reform and Conservative, voted unanimously this month to withdraw its support from this year's event, said Rabbi Aaron Flanzraich, who will succeed Rabbi Daniel Gottlieb as president June 1.

"I think the exclusion of children is particularly painful, because children's voices were silenced in the Holocaust," said Rabbi Gottlieb, who was on the event's steering committee. He said the program, as it stands, does not "reflect the community," and that although he has asked for the inclusivity issue to be looked at in the past, it has not happened.

He said families who observe Judaism in an egalitarian way "feel excluded by communal programs that don't reflect their values. These are the values of the overwhelming majority of the affiliated community."

Rabbi Reuven Tradburks, who represents the Vaad on the steering committee, said not having women sing has been "the understanding" in the past so that the Vaad can endorse the program and the "average pious Jew" can feel comfortable attending.

"We all have different beliefs. We try to make our shuls handicap-accessible. We try to be as inclusive as we can in a lot of different areas," Rabbi Tradburks said.

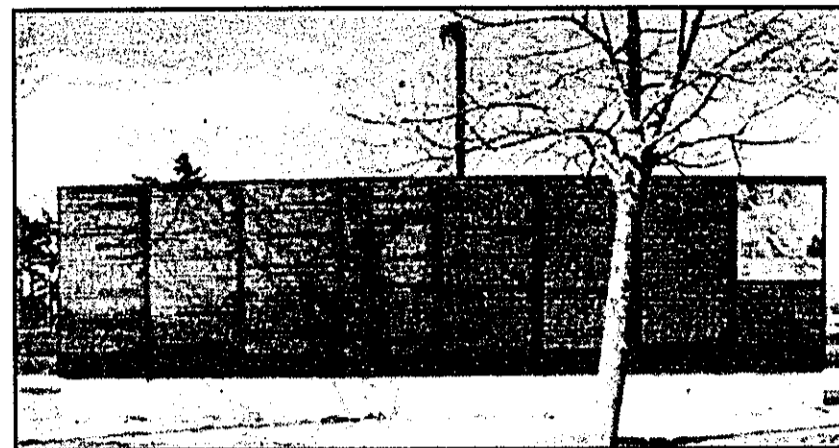
Likewise, he noted – as did Greenbaum and Morris Zbar, a senior vice-president of the federation – that organizers of the Yom Hashoah event have felt that it's important to make their commemoration inclusive.

The commemoration, which Greenbaum believes is the largest of its kind in the Diaspora, began about a decade ago after Jehudi Kinar, then Israel's consul general in Toronto, approached the federation about organizing a community-wide event. Last year, more than 2,200 people attended.

Kinar "felt it was important for the community to be united in memorializing the Holocaust," said Zbar, recalling the variety of commemorative events that existed at the time.

But, at least this year, the community was not united.

"There are things we (Orthodox) try to participate in on a community basis, but they're becoming fewer," said Rabbi Tradburks, who



**A Wall of Remembrance to Holocaust victims at Earl Bales Park: Orthodox rabbis objected to girls from a Jewish youth choir singing at a Holocaust commemorative event in the park this year.**

noted there are other federation-sponsored community events he won't attend because they have female singers.

Despite the dispute, "we remain committed to the vision of a single community-wide commemoration, but it has to reflect the community. We hope the matter will be resolved," Rabbi Gottlieb said.

"If there is any possible way to arrive at a scenario where both (groups) feel comfortable, that's what we would do," Greenbaum said. "The event will go on. It's very meaningful, very important."

The Toronto Council of Hazzanim, which consists of 34 Conservative, Orthodox and Reform cantors – including women – considered following the TBR's lead, but remained as a sponsor and participating group after one executive member said it would not be right to pull out at such a late date, said Marshall Loomer, the group's president.

Greenbaum noted that, although females do not sing at the community event, there were females on the program. The keynote speaker this year was a woman, Sara Ginaite-Rubinson, a former partisan, he said. Also, females would read names of those who perished, and there would be female students in the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto's presentation.

Ironically, the Renanim choir's "whole purpose" is to unite the community, said its director Susan Michaels. Her choir members – eight boys and 17 girls – range from observant to unaffiliated, she said. "And everybody gets along."

The choir would be taking part in another commemorative Yom Hashoah ceremony, the Megillah Hashoah reading at Adath Israel Congregation on April 23.

But when Michaels received a call this past winter inviting the males to take part in the community commemoration, she said she had mixed feelings.

As a child of Holocaust survivors, she "profoundly wanted" to participate because she felt the music could provide catharsis and healing, but she didn't want to exclude some of her singers.

"We have eight boys. That would mean two thirds of my choir would not be singing. What is that saying to my girls?"

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## Canadian Jewish news

### CJC objects to Bibles being distributed to students

By LAUREN KRAMER VANCOUVER

Canadian Jewish Congress has added its voice to parents' objections that the Gideon Society's distribution of Christian Bibles to students in a Vancouver-area public school system is inappropriate.

The Gideon Society, a lay association of Christians, has offered free Bibles to Grade 5 students across Canada since the 1940s, and in the Richmond School District since at least the 1960s.

But last month, a handful of parents objected to Richmond's school trustees, saying the distribution of the Bibles is inappropriate in a school system populated by children of many religions and denominations.

Typically, 50 students in the district's 38 elementary schools request a Bible in any given year, while the rest pass on the offer, said Richmond School District superintendent Bruce Bearsto.

In an interview with the Richmond Review, school board chair Linda McPhail said the Bibles are not handed out to students. Parents who want their children to receive one must fill out a form that the board includes in newsletters, and return it to their child's school.

She added that most e-mails she's received on the issue support the practice.

Nevertheless, CJC is against it. "We don't see that there's any benefit in not communicating a very firm boundary when it comes to the public school system and the ability of certain denominations to effectively proselytize," said Mark Weintraub, chair of Canadian Jewish Congress' Pacific region. "A position which is not firm will encourage the most aggressive religions to promote their particular sacred texts."

But Bearsto insisted that the Gideon Society's offer to distribute free Bibles is no big deal.

"I don't believe anyone here is passionately wedded to the idea of distributing Bibles through the school district, but we just didn't see any reason to oppose it," he said. "The practice is longstanding and has not previously been raised as contentious."

"We have no particular axe to grind or position to defend, but at this time, our best judgment about how to live our inclusive ideals suggests that past practice is acceptable and there's no compelling reason to change it," he added. "That is not to say that we will not do so in the future, but to be honest, there are far more urgent challenges vying for our attention."

Bearsto said that if other religions come forward and wish to offer students their respective holy books, he would welcome it.

One Muslim parent in Richmond, Abdullah Ali, is reportedly doing just that – he is obtaining Qur'ans to distribute to students who request them.

But Weintraub said that unless they're being used as part of the curriculum, religious texts only belong in a public school's library.



**MARK WEINTRAUB, chair, CJC Pacific Region: The action paves the way for proselytizing in public schools.**

### PM condemns Iran

**OTTAWA** – Prime Minister Stephen Harper has strongly condemned the latest threats to Israel made by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

At the opening of a three-day conference in Tehran in support of the Palestinians April 14, Ahmadinejad called Israel a "permanent threat" to the Middle East that will soon be eradicated, and he questioned the validity of the Holocaust. "The Zionist regime is a rotten, dried tree that will be eliminated by one storm," Ahmadinejad said.

"Canada vigorously condemns the recent call by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for the annihilation of Israel, and his continued denial of the Holocaust," Harper said in a statement on Saturday. "The Canadian people reject the hatred that underlies such appalling and irresponsible statements."

"It is particularly disturbing that these remarks are being made at a time when Iran is in serious violation of its international obligations with respect to nuclear non-proliferation."

"Canada continues to believe that these outrageous comments by the president of Iran do not reflect the traditions and values of the Iranian people," Harper said.

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### JEWISH NATIONAL FUND TO HONOUR PREMIER GARY DOER AT NEGEV GALA 2006

Graham Dixon, President,

Jewish National Fund of Canada (JNF), Prairie Region, is pleased to announce that Mr. Gary Doer, Premier of Manitoba, is the honoree for Negev Gala 2006. This year's Negev Gala is set for Tuesday, June 13, 2006, 8:00 p.m. at the Centennial Concert Hall.



**GARY DOER**

"Israel has a partner and friend in Premier Gary Doer," said Dixon. "Time and again he has displayed support for the State of Israel and its people. The JNF is delighted to recognize the Premier's commitment to Israel and to Manitoba," added Dixon.

JNF's Israel Emissary, Rami Kleinmann, says that the JNF and the Province of Manitoba have been working on a partnership focusing on forestry and water innovation and improving the environment. "Mr. Doer has shown leadership in developing a relationship between the JNF and the Province of Manitoba," said Kleinmann. "Water is a precious resource for both Manitoba and Israel. This partnership will establish links to share information, expertise, and best practices related to the environment," added Kleinmann.

Gary Doer was re-elected Premier of Manitoba on June 3, 2003 and was first elected in September 1999 as the province's 20th Premier. Under Mr. Doer's leadership, the Manitoba Government has focused on supporting education, improving health care, making communities safer, keeping Manitoba an affordable place to live, and investing in alternative and clean energy.

Premier Doer has served as past President of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg, past

vice-president of Manitoba Special Olympics, and has also served on several boards including Prairie Theatre Exchange and the University of Manitoba. Mr. Doer is married to Ginny Devine and they have two children.

The Negev Gala honors outstanding community leaders and significant events in Jewish life and in so doing, gathers support for development of the Negev desert region, which constitutes 60% of all land area of Israel. The Negev Gala is the single most important fundraising event of the year for the JNF. The event combines world-class entertainment with awards recognition and celebrations. Proceeds from the Gala go to support the JNF-Province of Manitoba initiative on environmental projects.

Headlining the Negev Gala entertainment is the world premiere of The Voices of Israel, five internationally acclaimed vocalists, all women, based in Israel. Accompanied by five talented musicians also from Israel, The Voices of Israel blends the best of Jewish and international classics for an unforgettable performance. The Negev Gala is the Jewish community's single largest fundraising event.

The Jewish National Fund has assembled a strong organizing committee for the Gala, lead by Co-Chairs Bob Silver, Co-owner, Winnipeg Free Press and former Winnipegger and international businessman, Nathan Jacobson.

The Jewish National Fund of Canada is a non-profit organization founded in 1901 to serve as a caretaker for the land of Israel. Over the past century, the organization has planted over 220 million trees, built over 150 reservoirs and dams, developed over 250,000 acres of land, created more than 400 parks, and established five research and development farms. The JNF is also an official United Nations non-governmental organization.

For more information about Negev Gala 2006 or to order tickets, phone the JNF office at the number on the last page of this week's Jewish Post & News or online - www.jnf-winnipeg.org

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