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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel briefly re-enters Gaza

Israeli soldiers with tanks and bulldozers briefly entered a Palestinian-ruled area east of Rafah in the southern part of the Gaza Strip.

In an operation that lasted less than an hour, the soldiers destroyed a police position that Israel said had been used as a base for gunfire directed at Israeli forces and Jewish settlers.

Wednesday's assault began several hours after Palestinians fired mortars at the Neveh Dekalim settlement.

In northern Gaza, Palestinians fired mortars from Beit Hanoun at the Erez Crossing, hours after Israel withdrew its forces from the area.

Sharon focuses on Shoah heroes

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President Moshe Katsav attended a ceremony marking the start of Holocaust Remembrance Day in the Jewish state.

In his comments Wednesday night at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, Sharon focused on the "supreme heroism" of those Jews who fought the Nazis. "We have forever inculcated the quintessence of the horror of the Holocaust, so that we will never forget. We were less successful in inculcating the Jewish heroism during the Holocaust," Sharon said.

Y.U. faces high court appeal

Gay medical students plan to challenge Yeshiva University's policy of barring gay couples from its married student housing at a hearing before New York state's highest court next week.

The university won in two lower courts in 1999 and 2000.

The plaintiffs say the policy is unlawful because it has a disparate impact on homosexuals, who cannot legally marry. **[Page 3]**

Youth group may lose funding

One of North America's largest Jewish youth groups may lose the bulk of its funding this summer, but no final decisions will be made until mid-May.

Regional leaders of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization recently received a memo warning them that the parent organization, the financially troubled B'nai B'rith, may pull its funding — which amounts to almost \$2 million — leaving local groups to raise money from other sources.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Women's foundations emerge as the vanguard of Jewish giving

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Counseling that helps fervently Orthodox high school girls prepare for careers compatible with an observant lifestyle.

Outreach programs that welcome lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Jewish women into synagogues.

A Web site that provides Israeli women — particularly low-income ones — and health professionals with access to medical information, especially on gender-specific diseases like breast cancer.

These are some of the new initiatives emerging from a burgeoning philanthropic phenomenon: Jewish women's foundations.

Since the establishment of the Jewish Women's Foundation of New York in 1995, similar philanthropies have cropped up throughout the United States, with a total of \$20 million in assets.

There are now 10 such foundations, with the largest ones in New York, Chicago, Detroit and Boston. Plans are underway for seven more foundations, including ones in Pittsburgh, San Diego, Miami and Broward County, Fla., according to the Washington-based Dobkin Family Foundation.

Most of these foundations fall under the auspices of Jewish federations, though the largest fund — worth \$10 million — is an offshoot of Hadassah: The Women's Zionist Organization of America.

Hadassah's foundation, which funds projects in Israel and the United States, emerged from a strategic plan aimed at making the group more relevant to contemporary women.

In a sign of the foundations' coming of age, 50 women gathered in Atlanta recently for a national planning session for Jewish women's foundations convened by the Dobkin foundation and the Jewish Funders Network.

For the most part, the new foundations focus on projects that improve the status and boost the self-esteem of Jewish women and girls.

The issues they tackle range from domestic violence to eating disorders to glass ceilings in Jewish organizations.

"I've been involved in Jewish philanthropy for a long time and knew all about raising money, but had no idea how exciting it would be just to concentrate on the issues out there confronting Jewish women," said Arlene Wittels, one of the founders of New York's foundation.

Jewish women "seem to be the most pampered and most petted population in the country, but there are a lot of fissures there," Wittels said. "Our foundation and other women's foundations are filling those cracks."

In addition to drawing attention and resources to Jewish women's issues, the new philanthropies also are attracting more women to the Jewish organizational world.

Laura Kaufman, the executive director of the Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, sees herself as an example.

A longtime activist in the women's movement, this job is Kaufman's first foray into Jewish communal work.

She was drawn to the new foundation out of an interest in reconnecting Jewishly, as well as a frustration that mainstream women's foundations — which often are willing to fund other subgroups — have been reluctant to support projects addressing Jewish concerns, Kaufman said. "The wonderful thing about the Jewish women's foundation

MIDEAST FOCUS

More U.S. involvement vowed

A U.S. assistant secretary of state said Washington will "be more engaged" in attempts to restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Edward Walker made the comment Wednesday during a visit to Jordan.

U.N. panel slams Israel

The U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved resolutions during a meeting Wednesday in Geneva condemning Israel for its actions in the current violence. Israeli envoy Ya'acov Levy denounced the resolutions as biased and said that they would hurt peace efforts.

Timing of Israeli retreat debated

A spokesman for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israel decided to leave a section of the northern Gaza Strip it had taken hours earlier on Tuesday long before U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's strong criticism of the Israeli action. The spokesman, Ra'anun Gissin, also criticized the Israeli commander in Gaza, Brig. Gen. Yair Naveh, for saying Tuesday that Israel planned to remain in Gaza "for as long as it takes — days, weeks, months."

Meanwhile, a Palestinian peace negotiator gloated over the Israeli withdrawal, saying U.S. criticism had forced the humiliating move on the Jewish state.

Calling Sharon "politically stupid," Hassan Asfour said Wednesday that tough talk from Washington had forced Sharon "to order his army to retreat with its head in the ground."

P.A. daily calls Shoah a 'fable'

An article published in the April 13 edition of the official Palestinian Authority daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* describes the Holocaust as a "fable," the Jerusalem Post reported.

"Jewish-controlled media" are responsible for perpetuating Holocaust myths, according to the article.

in Chicago is we're getting just about every kind of woman you can think of — ones who've been active in federation for years and women who've never been involved and may never have made a gift to the annual campaign and see the foundation as a new entry to Jewish communal life," Kaufman said. "It's exciting for women to sit in a room that's multigenerational, where women come from different experiences, but are all Jewish."

Some federations feared that women's foundations would compete with their annual campaigns, but the foundation leaders — and some major federation heads — say such worries have not materialized.

Steven Nasatir, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, proposed the idea of a local Jewish women's foundation after hearing about New York's.

"I was convinced an initiative of this sort would have no negative impact on the campaign," Nasatir said. "Not only hasn't it had a negative impact, it has had a positive impact. It's attracted the attention of strong women involved in federation and also people who are less involved. Once they have a positive sense in one thing it often carries over into another."

New York's Wittels said many of the trustees who joined her foundation were not federation donors, but 95 percent now give to the federation campaign.

Nonetheless, tensions could emerge between the upstart foundations — generally oriented toward social change — and their host federations, which Nancy Schwartz Sternoff, director of the Dobkin Family Foundation, described as "male dominated," "risk-averse" and "more focused on direct services than social change."

"When your host is all those adjectives, how do you as a foundation within that organization" stay "edgy, how do you push the envelope"? Sternoff asked.

"When the women's foundation funds a lesbian-empowerment project, how does that resonate with the board of the federation?" she continued.

Still, she said, "what we've heard is there has never been a 'You can't do that' " from the federations. "There may have been a few raised eyebrows, but so far their autonomy has been respected."

Those involved say the new foundations have supported projects that were unlikely to win enough backing from mainstream funders.

Sally Gottesman, chair of a pilot project organizing Rosh Chodesh groups for teenage girls, said the project — funded primarily by Hadassah and the Chicago foundation — probably would not have been able to get off the ground without Jewish women's foundations.

"I really think women's foundations get it, in a way others don't," Gottesman said.

However, Chicago's Kaufman said she does not want "Jewish women's foundations to become an excuse for no one else funding these things."

Rather, she hopes the new initiatives will get funding from federations and mainstream philanthropies as well. That has happened with Girls Informed for Tomorrow, a project offering career counseling to Orthodox girls.

But is there a danger that the foundations will make women too narrow in their philanthropic outlook, funding only issues of concern to women and girls, when the Jewish community faces broader concerns?

Barbara Dobkin, a longtime donor and champion of Jewish feminist causes, said the women's foundations are a small redress to the fact that the vast majority of Jewish women don't fund Jewish women's causes at all.

"It's very, very difficult to get money for women's and girls' issues in the Jewish community, especially if they're feminist issues," Dobkin said. "To start a women's organization and not do an endowment is irresponsible, because people aren't standing in line to follow you."

And do men now need their own foundations? After all, several new books have been published about Jewish men, and some Jewish leaders are raising concerns that boys, particularly teen-agers and college students, are far less active in Jewish life than girls.

According to Kaufman, new foundations focusing on male issues would be fine.

"The most productive way to benefit everyone is to start asking the gender question about women," she said. "We're not going to fund programs for boys, but if others start asking about that and funding that, I'd be thrilled." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Yeshiva U. back in court soon for appeal on gay housing case

By Julie Wiener

Group weighs in for estate tax

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism is asking the U.S. Congress to defeat legislative efforts to repeal the estate tax.

The group's executive vice president, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, who is the first Jewish organizational official to call for such a move, said elimination of the estate tax would remove an enormous tax incentive for the wealthy to give donations to charitable, philanthropic and educational organizations.

Spain won't move Goussinsky

A Spanish court ruled Wednesday against extraditing Jewish media magnate Vladimir Goussinsky to Russia to face fraud charges. The court said the grounds for Russia's case against Goussinsky would not amount to a crime in Spain, a key criterion for extradition decisions.

Goussinsky's camp hailed the decision, but a spokeswoman for the Russian Prosecutor General refused to accept defeat, saying, "ways of securing Goussinsky's extradition still exist." Russia has three days to appeal the ruling.

Swiss fund faces new delays

An attorney representing Holocaust victims said he is frustrated that litigation is delaying the payment of \$1.25 billion from a fund created by Switzerland's leading banks. Just the same, Burt Neuborne said Tuesday he hopes the litigation can be settled by summer and that payments can begin soon thereafter.

In the meantime, groups overseeing the settlement are mailing eligibility forms to Holocaust survivors and their heirs. Individuals who believe they may be eligible to file a claim can receive further information at several Internet sites, including: www.claimscon.org, www.swissbankclaims.com as well as www.dormantaccounts.ch.

Nazi prosecution records weighed

The Simon Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office issued a report card of countries' willingness to find and prosecute Nazi war criminals. In the worst category were Syria and Sweden, which, the group charged, have refused to investigate — let alone prosecute or extradite — Nazi war criminals.

It also criticized Austria and Australia for their limited prosecution efforts. On the other end of the spectrum, the report praised the U.S. Office of Special Investigations for taking legal action against Nazi perpetrators living in the United States.

Irish kosher eaters dealt blow

The last kosher butcher shop serving Dublin's 1,100 Jews is about to close. The closing comes after the lease on Erlich's store ran out.

NEW YORK (JTA) — In a case that could have implications for other universities and institutions, gay medical students are returning to court next week to challenge Yeshiva University's policy of barring gay and lesbian couples from its married student housing.

Yeshiva University has argued that its policy is not discriminatory because it applies equally to unmarried heterosexual couples as it does to gay couples, who cannot legally marry. It has won the last two rounds in court.

The New York State Supreme Court sided with the Bronx-based medical school in 1999, stating in its opinion that the plaintiff's real dispute was not with Yeshiva University but with a state legislature that does not sanction same-sex marriages.

The students' appeal to the appellate division of the New York State Supreme Court was denied last year.

However, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer backed the plaintiffs, and asked the New York Court of Appeals — New York state's highest court — to hear the case.

The court agreed and will hear the students' appeal on April 25 in Albany. It is not expected to rule on the matter for several months.

The plaintiffs' case is being argued by the American Civil Liberties Union and has the support of numerous Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.

Among the Jewish organizations filing briefs for the plaintiffs are the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the National Council of Jewish Women, and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice.

In addition, several civil rights groups — including the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Asian American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Educational Fund — collectively filed an amicus brief supporting the plaintiffs.

Gay and lesbian students are eligible for Yeshiva University housing, but their nonstudent partners are not.

The students had claimed that requiring a marriage certificate for nonstudent partners is discriminatory because gay couples can not legally marry.

According to the ACLU and its backers, the housing policy violates city laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and state laws that ban discrimination on the basis of marital status.

Because gay couples cannot marry, they argue, the policy has a "disparate impact" on them.

According to the memo issued by the civil rights groups, "facially neutral practices that disproportionately deny opportunities to members of a protected class" are unlawful.

Yeshiva University officials and their attorneys declined to comment on the case. No organizations are filing briefs on Yeshiva University's behalf.

Yeshiva University is generally perceived as an Orthodox Jewish institution. It was founded under Jewish auspices, runs Jewish undergraduate colleges and a rabbinical school, and its president, Norman Lamm, is an Orthodox rabbi.

However, Yeshiva University's graduate schools, including the Albert Einstein College of Medicine where the plaintiffs were enrolled, are nonsectarian and receive government funds — and thus must comply with all anti-discrimination laws.

At times, the nonsectarian status has put Yeshiva University in conflict with the religious sensibilities of Orthodox alumni and donors. In the mid-1990s, the university refused demands from some donors, alumni and others in the university community to ban gay student groups at the medical and law schools.

According to the ACLU, American universities are almost evenly split between those that offer married housing to same-sex couples and those that do not.

Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Columbia, for example, offer housing to same-sex couples, while the College of William and Mary, University of California at Berkeley and University of Rochester do not. □

ARTS & CULTURE

Hollywood director, Jewish group spar over film on Jewish neo-Nazi

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Henry Bean can barely contain his anger when he talks about the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

He blames the Nazi-hunting center — and particularly its associate dean, Rabbi Abraham Cooper — for spoiling a possible deal with Paramount Classics to distribute his prize-winning film “The Believer.”

The film is based on the true story of a young Jew who becomes the leader of a virulently anti-Semitic neo-Nazi gang and then kills himself when his background is revealed.

Cooper denies Bean’s charges. Paramount Classics, for its part, says its decision to pass on the movie was not related to the Wiesenthal Center’s opinion.

In any case, the spat over “The Believer” illustrates the increasingly intense pressure on Hollywood studios to kill controversial projects that may anger special interest groups.

Bean — whose screenwriting credits include “Mulholland Falls” and “Enemy of the State” — won the prestigious grand jury prize for “The Believer” at the recent Sundance Film Festival.

In the early part of February, the Wiesenthal Center was contacted by an intermediary and asked to watch the film.

Cooper, who is used to such requests from directors whose films deal with Nazis or the Holocaust, gathered a group of eight or nine people.

Bean spoke to the group for 10 minutes about the making of “The Believer,” then left before the film was screened.

From this point on, the stories diverge.

Cooper said his group felt the film just didn’t work.

“It’s not a good script, and we don’t learn the motivation of the protagonist,” he said.

Cooper was particularly put off by one “problematic and disturbing” scene in a synagogue, during which skinheads rip a Torah scroll into shreds.

“That scene alone could be a primer for anti-Semitism,” he said.

The following day, Paramount asked Cooper for his opinion. He explained his reservations, illustrating them by contrasting “The Believer” with the 1999 film “American History X,” which also dealt with American neo-Nazis.

Bean, who has gone through his own Jewish evolution from agnostic to maintaining a kosher home, disagrees with Cooper’s assessment.

Reached at his home in New York, Bean described “The Believer” as “philo-Semitic” and “really a sabotage of bigotry.”

Bean sees the reaction of the Cooper group as a form of “Jewish paranoia.”

He was particularly agitated by criticism of the Torah-ripping scene.

“This scene was crucial because it triggers a change in the main character,” he said.

Bean said he was approached by a Paramount representative at Sundance, and thought he was “on the verge of a deal” to distribute the film.

Cooper’s criticism scared off the decision-makers at Paramount, he said, or at least gave them an excuse to back off from a controversial project.

“You know how frightened people in the entertainment industry are of any opposition,” Bean said. “In one of my previous scripts, I mentioned gays — not in a derogatory way — but after protests, the producer took them out.”

In retrospect, Bean thinks it was a mistake to show the film at the Wiesenthal Center.

“I wish I had never heard of Rabbi Cooper,” he said. “These people can’t help a film, but they can hurt it.”

The Anti-Defamation League also reviewed “The Believer” — and praised it.

“The Believer is a provocative film on a subject that has special resonance for the Jewish community,” the ADL’s statement read.

“The film is gripping and raises troubling issues. While some may find it objectionable, the filmmaker succeeds in his portrayal of this disturbing subject, without legitimizing or glamorizing the hate-filled protagonist, anti-Semitism, or the lifestyle of skinheads,” it continued.

The third party in the controversy is Paramount Classics, a Paramount subsidiary that specializes in distributing pictures that are outside the Hollywood mainstream.

“The Believer is a very good film, but we pick only six to seven films a year, and our slate was full,” said David Dinerstein, the co-president of Paramount Classics.

“We talked to Bean at Sundance, but we never had a deal on the table.”

One strike against “The Believer” was Paramount Classics’ perception that promoting the controversial film would be too “labor-intensive” for its small staff.

Dinerstein acknowledged that the studio, when deciding which films to distribute, may take into account whether a given film is likely to offend powerful pressure groups.

“But in the case of ‘The Believer,’ that didn’t play a part,” he said.

Nevertheless, the extent to which special interest groups — be they Jewish, Arab-American, gay or animal lovers — affect the content and distribution of movies and television programs remains a valid question in Hollywood.

Recently, for example, the producer of the upcoming thriller “Sum of All Fears” changed Arab terrorists into neo-Nazis after protests from Arab American groups.

“Pressure by outside groups has always been a factor, but it’s becoming more intense,” veteran television director and screenwriter Lionel Chetwynd said.

“The real pressure comes after a film is completed, to keep it from being shown. Particularly in TV, protesters have found the soft underbelly of the industry by organizing market boycotts,” Chetwynd said.

“With all major studios owned by large corporations with diversified products, people who don’t like, say, a film by Columbia, which is owned by Sony, can threaten not to buy any Sony TV sets.”

Ivor Davis, who has been writing a weekly Hollywood column for The New York Times Syndicate for 15 years, says religious organizations are particularly effective pressure groups.

During the last decade, Disney dropped two films from its roster — “Dogma” and “Priest” — after strong protests from Catholic organizations, Davis recalls.

In 1988, Christian fundamentalists took to the streets of Beverly Hills to denounce “The Last Temptation of Christ” as blasphemous. □