

IN THE NEWS

Putin vows to work against terror

Vladimir Putin agreed to establish a task force to share terrorism information with Israel.

The Russian president made the pledge in Jerusalem on Thursday in talks with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Putin also vowed to intensify the fight against anti-Semitism in Russia. [Story, Pg. 3]

Rice: Syrian withdrawal just first step

Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon is positive, but Syria must ensure that Lebanese elections take place without violence, Condoleezza Rice said.

"Of course it's a positive step and you can see in the Lebanese people their great joy at the chance that they are about to get for, hopefully, free and fair elections that will allow them to choose a government for the first time without that heavy-handed foreign influence," the U.S. secretary of state said in an interview Wednesday with NBC News.

U.S. lauds P.A. security changes

The Palestinian Authority has improved its handling of security, the U.S. State Department said.

Spokesman Richard Boucher said Thursday that P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas had deployed Palestinian security forces effectively and shown a greater willingness to confront terrorists than had his late predecessor, Yasser Arafat.

Israel says Abbas has made some promising statements but has yet to meet the P.A.'s commitment to dismantle and disarm terrorist groups.

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REMINDER: In observance of Passover, the JTA World Report will not be published on Monday, May 2.



WORLD REPORT

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Sue Fishkoff

The executive director of the Jewish Outreach Institute, Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, right, presents the group's findings at the San Francisco JCC on April 20.

How to reach unaffiliated Jews? Go to them, community heads told

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (JTA) — To reach the unaffiliated, Jewish organizations will have to move their programs out of their institutions and into the streets.

At least, that's a key recommendation of the Jewish Outreach Institute, which just concluded a "community-wide scan" of the outreach potential of Jewish organizations in the San Francisco Bay area.

"Most Jewish institutions focus their energy on programs that take place within the walls of their institutions," the JOI's executive director, Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, told a group of 40 Jewish religious and communal leaders recently at the JCC of San

Francisco. That's no way to reach people who aren't already members, he said.

The findings — the result of interviews conducted with 98 professional and lay leaders at 130 Bay Area Jewish institutions — are the first step in a yearlong project sponsored by the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund.

The San Francisco survey was the fifth such community scan by the JOI, a New York-based nonprofit that advises and trains Jewish professionals and institutions how to better reach those on the community's periphery, including intermarried, multiracial and nontraditional families.

The institute has conducted similar studies in Washington; Tucson, Ariz; Columbus,

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ *If unaffiliated Jews don't go to programs, bring programs to them, leaders told*

Continued from page 1

Ohio; and Rochester, N.Y.

The effort comes after demographic surveys have shown an aging and shrinking American Jewish population, as well as high levels of intermarriage and of unaffiliated Jews.

The JOI next will provide practical advice and training to interested organizations in San Francisco, and hopes to create a community-wide network of Jewish professionals similar to those set up in Tucson and Washington.

The institute is interested in intermarried households "because they are the biggest subgroup in the Jewish population," Olitzky said, "and the way we respond to them will determine the American Jewish landscape we leave to our children. Intermarriage is not a disease, and it's not the end of Jewish continuity — not raising Jewish children is."

Unlike demographic studies, JOI scans are action-oriented: In each city, the group is invited by a funder to analyze demographic data and then work with local Jewish institutions to improve their outreach techniques.

Following a 2003 scan, the Jewish federation in Tucson created a new outreach department and an "outreach connections board" that meets regularly and includes representatives from every synagogue and Jewish organization.

"The JOI showed us we had 500 new Jewish families moving in every year, but 80 percent of our population is unaffiliated," said the federation's outreach

director, Rebecca Crowe, whose position was created as a result of the institute's work.

Institute staffers helped Tucson's federation set up methods for collecting names of unaffiliated Jews and suggested they hold those names in a separate database for at least a year before asking them for money.

During that year, the outreach department tracks the unaffiliated Jews' Jewish activity, notes who shows up for more events and sends them the local Jewish newspaper.

The idea is to focus on Jewish engagement rather than immediate affiliation, since engagement has long-range benefits for the entire Jewish community, explained Paul Golin, JOI's assistant executive director.

"Hopefully that will lead to affiliation, but that's not our immediate goal," he said.

It has worked in Tucson, Crowe said: Out of 900 new Jewish names collected in 18 months, 110 have joined synagogues.

But the San Francisco Bay Area is not like Tucson, Olitzky said.

Its Jewish community is "dispersed and diverse," he said, with the nation's highest percentage of intermarried families — 53 percent, compared to the national average of 31 percent found by the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 — combined with a very low synagogue-affiliation rate of 22 percent.

While the city's Jewish institutions believe they are very open to intermarried and nontraditional Jews, they don't always translate that attitude into effective outreach, Olitzky continued.

Outlining the JOI's model of "public space Judaism," Olitzky urged Jewish leaders to "take your programs out where people can stumble over them."

Some at the presentation protested the suggestion. Rabbi Moshe Levin of Congregation Ner Tamid said it offends him when representatives of other religions proselytize in the street. Why, he asked, should Jews do it?

"Those who are uncomfortable with it,

don't do it," Olitzky said, citing an annual Jewish street fair in Palo Alto, Calif., and

the Israel Day held every May by San Francisco's Israel Center as other good examples of outreach.

But such events need "a collaborative, sustained approach" with "communal buy-in" from Jewish groups, working together across denominational and institutional lines,

to raise Jewish engagement, Olitzky said.

"There's no guarantee that a person who goes to a Jewish film festival will join your synagogue the next day," Olitzky said. He outlined a detailed follow-up program, starting with nonintrusive name collecting, the sharing of those names between Jewish organizations and a shift in Jewish institutional culture to become more pro-active and welcoming.

"That starts with the person who greets you at the front door," Olitzky said, noting that when he walked into the JCC that evening, he "walked right past the front desk and up the stairs, and no one spoke to me."

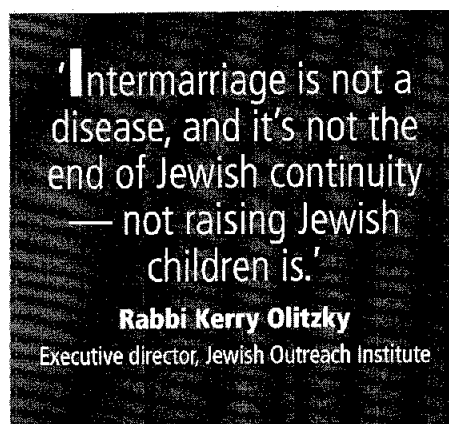
Judy Bloom from San Francisco's Jewish Community Endowment Fund said she didn't "have a problem" with Olitzky's recommendation that donations not be solicited from new names for a year.

"Our ultimate goal is to get them involved, but it's not very welcoming to put out your hand right away" for money, she said.

Asking Jewish institutions to set aside their immediate membership needs won't be easy, pointed out Carrie Rice of San Francisco's Congregation Sherith Israel.

"The fact is, if we co-sponsor an event, I want those names and you want those names," she said. "There's an undercurrent of competition, because we all need members."

But noting that she hoped to get her synagogue involved in JOI training, she said, "If you're not somewhat altruistic, you can't work in the Jewish community anyway."



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Putin visits Israel but tensions remain

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After months of talking tough about Russia's right to help Iran and Syria, President Vladimir Putin sought to mend fences a bit with a landmark visit to Israel.

Putin on Wednesday became the first Kremlin leader to set foot in Israel, making a series of high-profile appearances aimed at presenting an image as a friend of the Jewish state and an honest broker in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.

"Until not long ago, it would have been difficult to imagine a Russian head of state making an official visit to Israel," Putin said Thursday after being received by Israeli President Moshe Katsav in Jerusalem. "This is the best sign that things have changed."

In talks with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Putin agreed to establish a task force to share information on terrorism and to press the fight against anti-Semitism in Russia, causes especially dear to some 1 million Israelis who emigrated from the former Soviet Union.

"I am sure this meeting will deepen the relations between Israel and Russia," Sharon said.

Yet the visit was not without undertones of tension, caused by Russia's renewed support for Israel's archenemies, Iran and Syria.

The Soviet Union long was the benefactor of states and groups that attacked Israel both physically and diplomatically, but Moscow reduced its ties with radical Arab regimes after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In recent years, however, Putin increasingly has steered Russia on a course that again may conflict with Israeli and American interests in the Middle East.

Russia is offering technical support to Iran's nuclear program; until now, Moscow has shrugged off allegations that Iran's reactors are intended to produce nuclear weapons, not just electricity. But now Putin took a slightly more conciliatory approach to Israel's concerns.

The Russian president called on Iran to "abandon all technology to create a full nuclear cycle and also not obstruct their nuclear sites from international control."

He also voiced dissatisfaction with a compromise deal under which Tehran agreed to return spent nuclear fuel to Russia that otherwise could be used for a weapons program.

But Putin stood firm on the Russian sale of anti-aircraft missiles to Syria. Israeli officials worry that the weapons could find their way to Syria's proxy militia in southern Lebanon, to Hezbollah or even to Palestinian terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Putin promised to do everything possible to stop such proliferation, but spoke of the sale to Damascus as a bilateral matter with no impact on Israel's defenses.

"The missiles we are providing to Syria are short-range anti-aircraft missiles that cannot reach Israeli territory," he told Israeli reporters. "To come within their range, you would have to attack Syria. Do you want to do that?"

Israeli officials, however, are skeptical about Russian assurances that Syria won't transfer the missiles to terrorist groups.

Russia also wants to sell armored personnel carriers to the Palestinian Authority security services. Noting that members of the P.A. forces frequently have joined with terrorist groups attacking Israel, Israeli officials said they would not allow the vehicles to reach the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

Though a member of the international "Quartet" driving the "road map" peace plan — other members are the United States, the United Nations and the European Union — Russia largely has taken a back seat in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. Signaling that he wanted to change that, just before he arrived Putin surprised Israeli officials by proposing that Moscow host a peace summit this fall.

The Palestinian Authority, which Putin was scheduled to visit Friday, jumped at the offer. But Israeli officials were cool, seeing a summit as something that could disrupt the road-map time line. The United States echoed the sentiments.

"We believe there will be an appropriate time for an international conference, but we are not at that stage now and I don't expect that we will be there by the fall," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said.

Despite his efforts against anti-Semitism, Putin has taken flak for championing the prosecution of Russian oligarchs — many of them Jewish — who are seen as challenging his rule.

In Jerusalem, the Russian president went out of his way — literally — in what appeared to be an effort to offset this image.

Shortly after arriving Wednesday, Putin toured Jerusalem's Old City. The Western Wall was not originally on the itinerary; Russian officials said this was for fear of offending Muslims, whose Al-Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount was not scheduled to be part of the visit either.

At the last minute, however, Putin redirected his entourage to the Western Wall Plaza. To the consternation of his guards, he got out there for a quick look around.

Putin also found time to see the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial and speak to Russian immigrants who had served in the Soviet military, contacts seen as especially significant given the 60th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany.

"The Jewish people and the State of Israel will never forget how the Soviet Union liberated the concentration camps," Sharon told Putin. "You are among friends."

'Until not long ago, it would have been difficult to imagine a Russian head of state making an official visit to Israel. This is the best sign that things have changed.'

Russian President Vladimir Putin

Seders in Russia move beyond the basics

By ADAM B. ELICK

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (JTA) — When Lynn Schusterman and her family first set foot in the Soviet Union in 1985, it was a heavy step indeed.

She and her daughter were layered in 12 pairs of control-top panty hose while her son and husband swelled in several pairs of jeans.

They shed the prized clothing inside the imposing Choral Synagogue, placing them into the arms of refuseniks for whom jeans and panty hose meant cash on the black market. Later in the trip, they handed over bags bloated with prayer books, maps of Israel and medicine concealed under such permissible literature as engineering books.

Twenty years and some 20 trips to the region later, Schusterman, one of the leading philanthropists involved with Jewish life in the region, has just completed a six-day return to Russia's cultural capital, St. Petersburg, with two granddaughters to witness the evolution of the very underground movements she supported through the 1990s Jewish rebirth to today's maturing Russian Jewish world.

"It all started here in 1985. To see what's possible 20 years later is a miracle," Schusterman said. "It's about freedom and coming out of slavery. The whole story of Exodus is here. And I wanted my granddaughters to see it, just as their mom was

with me in 1985."

A quintessential example of this remarkable transformation is the Pesach Project, an initiative of Hillel in the former Soviet Union that offers seder tutelage for young Jewish university students. Those students have taken their new knowledge and run communal seders since the program's 1996 inception, as a form of local empowerment.

FSU Hillel runs on a \$1.5 million annual budget, supported in equal thirds by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Hillel International and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation. The foundation pumps about \$1 million into the region each year, supporting non-sectarian "joys of Jewish living, giving and learning."

The Pesach Project is not the only U.S.-based program that organizes seders in the former Soviet Union. Both the Reform movement, which this year sent 50 students from its Hebrew Union College, and Chabad, which sent 200 rabbinic students, ran seders in the region this year as well.

This year, St. Petersburg was home to the only international Pesach Project, hosting 24 young adults from its cohesive

partnership communities — the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County and Israelis from the Safed region, who share a Partnership 2000 affiliation with Palm Beach. Those groups have come to Russia annually since 1997, and this year co-produced more than 30 seders in St. Petersburg, known as the Venice of the North for its extensive canals.

The Pesach Project, mirroring Russian Jewry at large, has seen a gradual professionalism since 1996 when unaffiliated Russian Jewish participants offered sausage sandwiches to a visiting Chabad delegation from England.

"One Chabad boy cooked an egg over the fire with two spoons," said Misha Levin, director of Hillel in St. Petersburg, explaining that the boy didn't want to use nonkosher cookware. "It was a shock from both ends, but now we know" more about the laws of kashrut.

Each of the 27 cities in the region that houses a Hillel also has a Pesach Project, but in such cosmopolitan centers such as Moscow and St. Petersburg Jewish knowledge is commonplace. In smaller, more remote places, though, where basic resources are hard to find, the project remains elementary.

In other words, Jewish knowledge is distributed across Russia in a pattern similar to the way the country's wealth is distributed. There's Moscow and St. Petersburg — and then there's the rest of this sprawling nation, which spans 10 other time zones.

"In the start, every little act was a miracle. We went to community seders, showed matzah and people were amazed," said Anna Purinson, 27, the director of Russian Hillel, who first became involved in the project as a student in 1996. "Now, in big cities they're no longer satisfied with basics. They don't want to consume, they want to produce" their own seders.

When the project started, "everyone thought we didn't have enough skills and knowledge," Levin says. His Hillel chapter, in St. Petersburg, is one of the organization's most vibrant, with 600 ac-

'It all started here in 1985. To see what's possible 20 years later is a miracle.'

Lynn Schusterman
Philanthropist

**ACROSS THE
FORMER
SOVIET UNION**



Adam B. Ellick

Philanthropist Lynn Schusterman, second from left, takes part in a seder with students from abroad and local Jews in St. Petersburg, Russia, in April 2005.

tive student members. "They weren't only proven wrong, but now Jewish communities can conduct seders without us."

"We were like angels for these communities and now we're just counterparts. In some ways, it's now more important for us than for them."

One of the more warming outcomes of the project for Levin is a seder to which he has never gone. He heard about it from Vera, a Hillel graduate he hadn't seen since 1997. "She's been making seder in her grandmother's home each year since," Levin said.

That's no faint accomplishment in this vast nation, where Judaism still is mainly confined to festive communal settings. Because Russian Jews are still recovering from the fear of Soviet oppression that once haunted them, the seder has not yet been brought into most homes.

Purinson's not impressed even by the largest gatherings — several hundred convened for one of Hillel's showcased seders. She says, "These are amazing numbers — but knowing the number of Jewish students, it's a poor number."

For Schusterman, who spent her visit discussing texts with students and shuttling around to various Jewish centers as the April snowflakes fell, the visit provides a glance at the results of her philanthropy.

Take Alyona Arenkova, 26, who had no connection with her Jewish identity until her 2000 birthright Israel trip. Birthright is another program partly funded by Schusterman. When she returned to St. Petersburg, Arenkova joined Hillel, founded a klezmer band and played piano tunes at seders for the project. Such dedication earned her a Charlie award — the honor was named after Schusterman's late husband, Charles — that recognizes distinguished birthright alumni.

"I look at them as my children," said Schusterman. "I used to dream about these seders. We Americans have a tendency to get blasé or take Jewishness for granted."

"Russians didn't always have this, so they're bringing a joy to celebrating the holidays that we've lost in a way. It's contagious. I love it. It's so rewarding, and very emotional," she said.

The lesson was hardly lost on Schusterman's 10-year-old granddaughter, Abby Dow of Tulsa, Okla., who perhaps provided the most concise summation of the week. "In 1985 they were here helping Jews and now we're just here celebrating with them," she said.



Adam B. Ellick

Philanthropist Lynn Schusterman lights a candle at a Passover seder in St. Petersburg, Russia, in April 2005.

Jews learn from each other at Passover seders in Russia

By ADAM B. ELICK

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (JTA) — Jennifer Phelps is especially sympathetic when she listens to her Russian counterparts share stories of a suppressed Jewish childhood under Soviet rule.

It's a rather unexpected connectedness for a military kid who spent her 1980s childhood hopping around American air force bases with her parents during the final years of the Cold War.

Phelps, now a 29-year-old Cleveland, was always the lone Jew in school, and her Jewish upbringing never left home.

Her first visit to a synagogue came when she was a junior in college, an experience similar to that of some Jewish students in St. Petersburg.

"I was never able to share it openly, just like the Jews here. I tucked in my Star of David on the military bases. There are so many commonalities between my life and theirs, bound together by oppressive backgrounds."

Phelps is just one of 18 American and six Israeli young adults on a week-long Passover visit to St. Petersburg, where for the eighth consecutive year a partnership of several North American Jewish federations fosters Jewish learning.

The Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, the Jewish Federation of Palm

Beach County, Florida, and Israelis from the Safed region, who are linked by a Partnership 2000 affiliation with Palm Beach, came to join in the Pesach Project, a Hillel program that sees hundreds of seders in 27 cities across the former Soviet Union.

The partnership, which includes such year-round programs as medical exchanges that send Russian doctors to the United States, involves more than simply giving money. It emphasizes sharing experiences. Federation organizers often find themselves with more worthy applicants than they can handle.

"Word is out," says Scott Brockman, young leadership division director of the Palm Beach federation.

After two days of training and preparations, the group performed more than 30 seders in a week, flooding Jewish community organizations, the homes of elderly Jews and satellite communities encircling St. Petersburg.

The role of the American and Israeli delegation has drastically changed over the years, illuminating the growth of the Jewish community in Russia. The program was launched when foreigners brought seders to a land that was virtually seder-free, but today seders are shared by two groups equally fluent in Passover traditions.

Russian leaders say two-thirds of their participants are seder veterans.

Democrats in Congress reach out to Jews

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It's like a political take on the old wedding consolation: The professional Jewish world is losing a favored daughter, but it's gaining a solid entree into the Democratic leadership.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the U.S. House of Representatives' minority leader, this week hired Reva Price, a veteran Jewish professional who is now Washington director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, to lead congressional Democrats' Jewish outreach.

The departure of Price, who has 22 years of experience working for Jewish organizations in the capital, comes at a sensitive time for the JCPA: It has yet to choose a new executive director since Hannah Rosenthal resigned in January.

"Pelosi's gain is JCPA's loss," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. "But it's a positive sign; it shows that the Democrats are taking the Jewish community seriously."

That's especially significant, said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, given the fact that Jews already support the Democrats, voting for John Kerry by a 3-1 margin in the 2004 election. "This is a wonderful recognition" of the community, he said.



JCPA

Reva Price will leave the Jewish Council for Public Affairs to lead Democrats' Jewish outreach.

In fact, while the overall numbers remain solid, close readings of recent surveys show shifts away from the Democrats among some segments of the Jewish population, particularly among regular synagogue-goers and men under 35.

Democrats recognized the dangers after the 2002 midterm elections suggested a Jewish turn toward Republicans, and they launched an effort to make sure Kerry maintained traditional levels of support. The Massachusetts senator lost the election, but his 77 percent showing among Jews showed that the campaign in the community was a success.

Price's hiring is the latest sign that Democrats are not going to rest on their Jewish laurels. Last week the party's congressional campaign named Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.), a skilled fund-raiser and a graduate of Jewish communal work, as the chairman of its Jewish outreach council. And in February, the Democratic National Committee elected Susan Turnbull, who is active in the community, as vice chairwoman.

"We don't cede an inch when it comes to the Jewish community and we take nothing for granted," Israel said.

In a statement to JTA, Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), the House minority whip, said Price's hiring was of a piece with the party's intensive Jewish outreach.

"Jewish Americans and the Democratic Party have long shared common priorities, domestically and in maintaining a strong American-Israeli relationship, but it is still very important to demonstrate in multiple ways that we share the same values and appreciate their support," Hoyer said.

Price's experience at the JCPA dovetails with the Democrats' agenda. Since creating the Washington office eight years ago, she has guided its emphasis on lobbying on poverty issues, which often has placed the umbrella organization of the nation's Jewish community relations

councils on the wrong side with the Bush administration.

A recent instance is the tension between the Jewish community and Republicans over proposed cuts to Medicaid, the federal program that subsidizes medical care for the poor.

On the other hand, JCPA operates as a consensus organization, and Price's experience in navigating a diverse and often contentious community should stand her well in reaching out to segments of the community, such as the Orthodox, that have drifted away from the Democrats in recent years.

"Reva is the perfect choice for this role; she knows the entire spectrum of the community," said Nathan Diamant, the Orthodox Union's Washington director. "She will be especially valuable in helping national Democrats find issue and message points that transcend the segments of the community. Reva is expert at finding the common ground among American Jewry's many segments and organizations."

But Price's departure leaves the JCPA with its two most important posts vacant.

Martin Raffel, the group's interim executive director, said JCPA would not consider a replacement for Price until Rosenthal is replaced, which is likely to take several more months. Until then, he said, the JCPA's Washington staff would be able to function on its own.

"Reva's put together a very good team," he said. "We're going to make sure the JCPA's effective in Washington and around the country."

Other Jewish groups said they are confident that JCPA's Washington office would weather the interim period.

"Martin is doing a very fine job; we see everything moving at JCPA," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, a JCPA constituent and one of Price's past employers. "I haven't noticed any diminution of activity."

Price, who also will handle women's issues in the leadership office, remains with the JCPA until the end of May.

'We don't cede an inch when it comes to the Jewish community and we take nothing for granted.'

Rep. Steve Israel

(D-N.Y.)

**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

YOM HASHOAH FEATURE

Conductor reprises Terezin Requiem

By CHANAN TIGAY

THE NEW YORK (JTA) — As the Holocaust raged around them, 150 Jewish inmates at Theresienstadt joined together in song.

Under the direction of Raphael Schachter, an energetic young conductor, the unusual chorus — which had to be replenished several times as its members were shipped off and murdered by Nazis — performed Giuseppe Verdi's "Requiem Mass" 15 times between 1943 and 1944.

The Christian liturgical text may seem an odd programming choice for a group of Jewish singers incarcerated in a Nazi labor camp. But for Robert De Cormier, who has conducted the piece at Carnegie Hall, performing the Requiem was a bold act of defiance by a group of doomed artists.

"When the mezzo sings, 'On that day the book will be opened and no crime will go unpunished' — the whole idea of the Jews singing this incredible statement and hurling it in the face of the Nazis was overpowering," he says.

At 83, De Cormier is notable for both his longevity and his continued vigor: he is the musical director for the singing trio Peter, Paul and Mary; performs 25 to 30 concerts a year with his Counterpoint vocal ensemble and is choral director of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra.

But as the conductor and arranger of dozens of pieces of Jewish and Israeli music throughout his long career, some from the repertoire of the Theresienstadt choir, the Belmont, Vt., resident is also notable for something else. He is not Jewish.

"I love that music, the culture, the stories," says De Cormier, who counts among his friends Theodore Bikel and Herschel Bernardi.

Earlier this month, Counterpoint put on a concert of Israeli folk music in Montreal.

They'll be recording an album of Hebrew music in May.

"We had wonderful help with the Yiddish pronunciation," he says. "And we're now getting help with the Hebrew, which is easier than the Yiddish."

Artist who survived camp looks back

By SUE FISHKOFF

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (JTA) — If Dina Babbitt hadn't been such a talented artist, neither she nor her mother would have survived Auschwitz.

Wielding her paintbrush as a talisman against evil, the young Czech Jew kept herself and her mother from the gas chambers by painting portraits of Gypsies for the notorious Dr. Josef Mengele, who was studying the camp's 13,000 Roma inmates as part of his so-called "racial research."

Seven of the 11 portraits Babbitt completed are today in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, grim reminders of the horrors of the camps.

Now 82, Babbitt lives in Santa Cruz, Calif., and is writing a book about her experiences.

Born Dina Gottliebova in the former Czechoslovakia, she was studying art in Prague when her mother was ordered to report for transport to the east in January 1942. The young Babbitt volunteered for the transport to stay with her mother, and the two were sent to Theresienstadt on the girl's 19th birthday.

In September 1943, Babbitt again volunteered to join her mother when 5,000 Jews were transported out of Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. The Czech Jews were not gassed immediately. Instead, they were held in a family camp in case of future Red Cross inspection.

Babbitt's artistic talents were soon discovered and she was asked to paint a mural for the children's barracks. The children asked her to paint Snow White and the seven dwarves — which many had seen before deportation.

One day in late December, an SS officer appeared and ordered Babbitt to get in his jeep.

"I thought for absolutely sure he's taking me to the gas chamber, or I'm going to be shot," Babbitt recalls. Instead, he brought the young artist to a Gypsy camp.

Mengele was standing there, leaning against a tripod, peering through a camera lens at some Gypsies. He asked Babbitt whether she could paint their skin tones accurately.

Babbitt said she could try.

She was sent back to the family camp to wait. Three months later, the 4,400 survivors from her Theresienstadt transport were sent to the gas chambers. Among them were her estranged father and his new family.

Babbitt and her mother were among just 26 people hand-picked from the transport to remain alive.

The next day, the summons came from Mengele: Babbitt was ordered to the Gypsy camp to begin work. At first Mengele al-

lowed her to choose her own subjects, but after she chose two pretty young women, the Nazi doctor stepped in and began choosing elderly, less healthy-looking people.

He took painstaking interest in her work, Babbitt recalls, telling her to emphasize facial features that supported his racial theories.

Her first portrait was of a 20-year-old Gypsy named Celine. She told Babbitt that her 2-month-old baby had just died, because Celine was too starved to produce breast milk.

"I asked if I could help, and she said, 'You can get some white bread,'" Babbitt recalls. Babbitt asked Mengele for the bread, which she passed on to Celine.

"One evening Mengele kept me late," she says. "He brought me a little boy, totally emaciated. He was 10 years old, but the size of a baby. The orderly holding him had to open his mouth, and the flesh around his teeth was all pus, from a starvation disease. It must have been of interest to Mengele, and he wanted me to paint him."

Babbitt demurred, saying the orderly would have to hold the boy's mouth open the entire time, and Mengele eventually sent the child away.

In the end all the Gypsies were gassed, including the 11 whose portraits Babbitt painted over an eight-week period. She painted slowly, fearing that once her task was completed, she and her mother might not be allowed to live.

"I signed my name to each painting, only because Mengele told me to," she says. "I have no idea why."

**'I thought for
absolutely sure he's
taking me to the gas
chamber, or I'm going
to be shot.'**

Dina Babbitt
Artist, Holocaust survivor

**YOM
HASHOAH
FEATURE**

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

State: Bolton didn't bolt on Israel

The U.S. State Department denied that John Bolton met top Israeli security officials without permission.

A story in Thursday's International Herald Tribune said Bolton, the undersecretary of state for arms control who is facing a tough Senate confirmation battle to become U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, met with Israeli, French, Russian and British officials without clearing the meetings with State Department officials.

In Israel he met with top Mossad agents, the Herald Tribune reported, citing three sources.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the reports were unsubstantiated.

Hadassah opposes abortion act

A bill that would criminalize adult assistance to minors who cross state lines to get an abortion is "deeply disturbing," Hadassah said.

"The bill would make it a federal crime for any adult — including a grandparent or sibling — to accompany a girl to another state for an abortion without parental consent," a Hadassah statement said Thursday, a day after the U.S. House of Representatives approved the Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act.

"The bill provides no protection for girls who cannot obtain parental consent because they live in abusive families. The passage of the bill represents another chipping away of reproductive choice in this country."

Jewish-Latino group created

The American Jewish Committee is launching a Latino and Latin American Institute.

The goal of the institute will be to further American Jewish relations with the American Latino community and Latin American countries.

Ambassador Luigi Einaudi, acting secretary general of the Organization of American States, will address the institute's first board meeting May 3.

That coincides with the opening of the AJCommittee's 99th annual meeting, which features Chile's foreign minister, Ignacio Walker Prieto, as a keynote speaker.

One of the institute's key missions will be helping to combat the threat of terrorism in Latin America.

Ethics up in smoke?

An embattled Republican congressman smoked a Cuban cigar in Israel, although he backs U.S. regulations banning sales of the product.

Time Magazine published a photo this week of Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas), the U.S. House of Representatives majority leader, puffing a Hoyo de Monterrey double corona in July 2003 during a visit to Israel, where the import and sale of Cuban cigars are legal.

Backing existing sanctions that ban the sale of such cigars in the United States, De Lay warned last year that "every dime that finds its way into Cuba first finds its way into Fidel Castro's bloodthirsty hands."

The picture predates new regulations that go as far as banning Americans from smoking Cuban cigars overseas, Time said.

DeLay is reeling from accusations that he accepted favors from a prominent Washington lobbyist, Jack Abramoff.

Yarmulkes lead to suspension

Two non-Jewish students in Michigan were suspended for a day for wearing yarmulkes to school.

At least one of the students at Avondale High School in Auburn Hills, Mich., says a Jewish friend gave him the yarmulke.

"My rights are violated and stuff, and I think it's stupid," ninth-grader Michael Stevens told local media this week.

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon to skip Warsaw Ghetto

The site of the Warsaw Ghetto was struck from the itinerary of Ariel Sharon's upcoming trip to Poland.

The Israeli prime minister is to take part in the March of the Living at Auschwitz next week as part of ongoing ceremonies to mark 60 years since the Nazi death camp's liberation.

But a visit Sharon planned to the remains of the Jewish ghetto in the Polish capital, famed for its final uprising against German troops, was cancelled on the recommendation of Israel's Shin Bet security service.

Israeli media said the site, now surrounded by high-rise buildings, is impossible to secure properly.

Group takes on lecturer

The Anti-Defamation League criticized as racist an Israeli professor's remarks on Arabs.

Ha'aretz reported that the ADL's associate national director, Ken Jacobson, told the newspaper that David Bukai of Haifa University's political science department had made "very troubling generalizations that express prejudice and could be very destructive."

The daily cited an article in which Bukai wrote that anthropologists "agree" that Arabs vacillate "between submission to those they perceive as strong, and violent and cruel rampages."

Bukai stood by his statements, but allowed that they "might have been phrased in a less generalizing manner."

Haifa University said it had no control over what staff members publish.

WORLD

Czech coalition wants march banned

A coalition in the Czech Republic petitioned a mayor to ban a scheduled neo-Nazi march.

Jewish community representatives, a senator, a German culture association and Gypsies, or Roma, together handed the mayor of Brno a petition asking him to prevent a May 1 march by a neo-Nazi group.

The mayor, Richard Svoboda, said it is illegal for him to prevent the event.

Ukrainian rabbi attacked

A Ukrainian rabbi was attacked on the street as he left a Passover seder.

Two young men assaulted Rabbi Shlomo Wilhelm, his son and two other members of the Jewish community on Sunday evening in downtown Zhitomir in central Ukraine as the men were heading home on the second night of Passover.

Police arrested the attackers, who reportedly were intoxicated.

Estonia struggles with past

Estonia won't build a controversial monument to honor its men who fought for Nazi Germany, a government office said.

The Estonian government said Wednesday that earlier reports about an upcoming opening of the monument to the Estonian pro-Nazi forces, reportedly set to take place in Tallinn on May 8, are wrong.

At the same time, according to some media reports, Estonia will unveil a more general monument to citizens who fought against the Soviet occupation of Estonia during and after the war.

Israel Bank head makes aliyah

The incoming governor of Israel's central bank immigrated to Israel. Stanley Fischer, who served as vice chairman of Citigroup Inc., left for the Jewish state Thursday.