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Living My Life in New Orleans

by Gail Chalew, Editor, Journal Jewish Communal Service

Gail Chalew has been the Editor of our Journal for two decades and has been living in New Orleans since 1998. Prior to Katrina, she also served as the Editor of The New Orleans Jewish News. As the second anniversary of Katrina passes, we asked Gail for an update on her experiences. To learn more of the Jewish community's response to Katrina, watch for the Fall issue of the Journal.

Anniversaries are times to remember the past, and I am luckier than most people because my memories are preserved in print. They can't be deluged by toxic floodwaters or spread to the winds.

I just have to read what I wrote one week after Katrina, or during that first year when I was living in exile in Baltimore, to churn up the emotion and passion that is life in New Orleans these days.

It is precisely this intensity that keeps me here. And the opportunity to use my professional skills, albeit in a volunteer capacity, to make a difference.

In the summer of 2006, I returned to New Orleans after spending a year in Baltimore with my school-aged son and learned that the Federation did not have the staff resources to work with the many Jewish volunteers who were coming to do the very unglamorous work of gutting and de-weeding and putting up sheetrock. I stepped forward and assumed responsibility for serving as an informal (and unpaid) liaison to these volunteers—taking them on disaster tours, explaining that Katrina is not a natural disaster but rather one caused by government incompetence, and helping find meaningful volunteer projects for them.

Two years out, the flow of volunteers continues in full strength. Several synagogues and communities are on their third trip here; others are using their professional skills as doctors, lawyers, and counselors to rebuild the city. And I have now enlisted the aid of a fellow volunteer with contacts in the local hospitality industry to create discounted hotel and restaurant packages for volunteer groups.

When my husband and I, after weighing for several months whether to accept a generous job offer for him in another city, made the decision to stay in New Orleans, a key factor was the great satisfaction I derive from my work with volunteers.

A theologian once said that spirituality is living in the more. By that definition, New Orleans is a very spiritual place.

But it is no longer "The Big Easy." We cannot take for granted basic services like water, electricity, streetlights and smooth roads. Insurance, utilities and rent have skyrocketed, as has crime. Mental health and day care services are a fraction of what they were pre-Katrina. Although much progress has been made in fixing damaged homes and businesses, there are still abandoned homes with weeds taking over the lawns and debris marring the streets of neighborhoods that flooded.

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Gail sitting in a Coffee Shop
in New Orleans

My governor has bungled billions in federal funds designed to help homeowners rebuild. My senator is in a call girl's phonebook, my congressman was caught with \$90,000 in his freezer and was indicted for bribery, and my at-large councilman just pleaded guilty to corruption charges. I used to criticize the mayor for not taking a leadership role in the recovery effort. Given his recent remarks lauding the city's high murder rate as keeping New Orleans' brand alive, I only want him to keep his mouth shut until his successor is elected.

So why did we decide to stay?

Put simply, life here seems richer, more vibrant, and more purposeful, and you cannot put a dollar value on that.

We who have chosen to stay and rebuild are like the chalutzim, the pioneers who built the modern state of Israel. We feel a part of both making history and making a difference.

Fixing up your home, helping others salvage their belongings, eating out in a restaurant, even buying tchotchkes in the French Market—all that makes a difference.

But what makes life even more meaningful is the opportunity that disaster has provided to reinvent an entire city and its institutions, from health care to education to neighborhood redevelopment. Dozens of idealistic young Jews -- including my 24-year-old daughter, who is working for a micro-enterprise project in the African American community -- are flocking to New Orleans to make that difference, enlivening the Jewish community in the process.

New Orleans has become an incubator for these young people and their non-Jewish peers, providing them an environment characterized by a combination of significant challenges and significant responsibility.

Just as a marker of Baby Boomer status was being at Woodstock in '69, this generation's credentials might be measured by whether or not they were in New Orleans after Katrina.

As an aging Boomer, I cannot think of anything more rejuvenating than to be around these energetic, high-minded young people who believe they indeed have the power to change the world. They will be the political, education and community leaders of the coming decades, and their future leadership will be informed by their post-Katrina experiences.

My husband and I are staying in New Orleans also because of a sense of obligation. He is a pediatric specialist in a city with few health care resources; here he knows he will make an impact. And every volunteer that I take on a tour or educate about the true source of New Orleans' trauma is one more ambassador who will tell the Katrina story to their friends and relatives across the country.

We are staying also because the education that my 17-year-old son is getting by living in post-Katrina New Orleans is invaluable, despite the fact that his flooded high school is still not completely repaired.

He has learned the importance of self-reliance: if you see something that should be changed, then get involved and don't wait for government to help you. He has learned the importance of local community: the first businesses to reopen were ones owned by locals, and many of the chain stores have decided not to rebuild. He has seen villains and heroes in action, and now is better able to distinguish between the two.

From his parents, who have rejected an easier life for a more meaningful one, he has learned the importance of fulfilling one's obligations and valuing the intangibles of commitment and passion.

We are also staying for a less noble but no less important reason: New Orleans is fun!

We build into our schedule time to eat its great food, hear its great music, and savor its beautiful architecture. Just walking around the French Quarter makes us feel as if we are on vacation.

New Orleans stirs and then satisfies the passions; in the midst of tragedy, it celebrates life.

And what could be better than that.

A Message from JCSA's Executive Director, *Brenda Gevertz*

As Jewish communal professionals, we are fortunate-or *should* be fortunate—to participate in Jewish learning opportunities. We can hear a D'var Torah at a meeting, read a story off our agency's website, even light Chanukah candles with colleagues. What we don't often do, aren't really comfortable doing, is to talk about our beliefs.

Somehow, all the inspiration and inspiring work we do is just “out there” and we seldom talk about it at the gut level. Perhaps we're embarrassed or afraid or unsure of what we really believe. Perhaps we don't want to offend our co-workers and maybe we feel it is just a little too heavy for discussion over lunch.

I suspect that a lot of us—those who specifically went into Jewish communal service and were attracted by its Jewish ideals--or those who somehow fell into this Garden of Values—often stay in this sector out of a real commitment and *belief* in the work we do. We are motivated by *tikun olam*, a desire to repair our broken world, or a sense of social justice imbedded in our DNA. We know the world can and should be a better place. We may be working to bring the Messiah, the Messianic age, or just a change for the better—all with a profound sense of purpose.

I find that this is a common bond—usually unspoken—that we share. We seem to find each other in our professional associations and in our local groups. Perhaps we congregate in monthly lunch and learn sessions or are called upon to give the D'var Torah at meetings. We take our work seriously, if not ourselves. Our lives have meaning, even if the time to think about that meaning escapes us.

I have the opportunity to see this played out almost daily. Newer career professionals searching for the right balance in their lives, senior executives caught in ethical choices, middle managers wanting to do the right thing for those they supervise. So many people engaged in good work for the greater good. I know that I am extraordinarily fortunate, even blessed, to be surrounded by people who care passionately about humanity and the world around them.

At this start of the New Year and a renewed work cycle, I am thankful for the opportunities I have to work with each of you, connecting and enhancing a profession and its professionals who truly makes a difference.

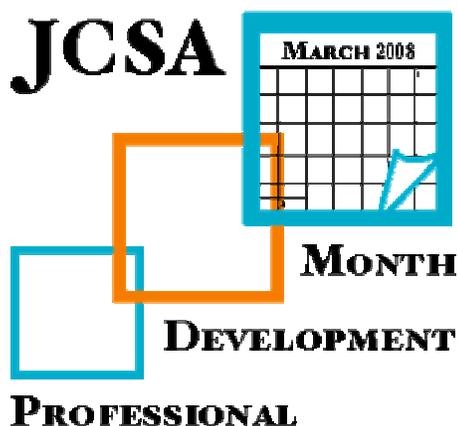
May you and those you care about enjoy a good and sweet New Year!

Shana Tova U'Metukah!



Brenda Gevertz

March is Professional Development Month!



National Professional Development Month. This is a unique opportunity to harness the energy of the local groups, professional associations and agencies to make a statement in our field about the value of learning opportunities for Jewish communal professionals.

Mark your calendars for March 2008. If your local group or organization already has a fabulous program planned for that month, great. If not, we can work with you to provide topics and resources so you can develop a program that will appeal to your group.

Please let us know the date and topic for your program by February 15th. We will be highlighting these programs on-line and in a press release to the local and national Jewish press. We want to show off all that JCSA and our field have to offer.

If you have any questions, or would like to help us with marketing, public relations, or programming ideas, please e-mail us. We look forward to your involvement.

Programming Co-Chairs, **Audra Berg**, audraberg@juf.org and **Larry Nathan**, nathanl@ujafedny.org.

JCSA Member Agency Spotlight: JOI

By Paul Golin, Associate Executive Director, Jewish Outreach Institute

All Jewish communal professionals have the potential to reach and engage unaffiliated Jewish households. That's why the **Jewish Outreach Institute** (JOI.org) recommends all communal professionals regardless of job title also consider themselves "outreach workers"—and JOI provides free resources to help (them) get started.

At any given time, in almost every local Jewish community, there are more **un**-affiliated than affiliated Jewish households. It's easy to forget this when our day-to-day responsibilities of serving the already-affiliated can overwhelm us. But reaching the unaffiliated and unengaged is imperative if we hope to experience continued growth and vibrancy in the North American Jewish community.

So how do we do it? Outreach requires us to refine both our sensitivity and our methodology.

Sensitivity means putting ourselves in the shoes of those we are trying to serve. For example, does our marketing make assumptions about what a Jewish family "looks like," which may not be relevant to the growing numbers of intermarried, multiracial, or same-sex Jewish households?

Methodology means identifying "barriers to participation" that keep the unengaged from involvement. Such barriers may include cost, Jewish literacy, and lack of meaning. Location as a barrier is something addressed by JOI's Public Space JudaismSM program model, and JOI's definition of outreach as "taking the Jewish community out to where people are, physically and spiritually, rather than waiting for them to come to us."

To grapple with these and other issues around outreach, you can sign-up for the Jewish Outreach Professionals' Log-In Network (JOPLIN) at <http://joi.org/joplin>, which offers a free email listserv (with currently over 1,000 professionals and lay leaders subscribed) and free access to online articles and documents. Quarterly conference calls are also included. For a free one-hour outreach phone consultation for your organization, contact JOI's senior program officer Eva Stern at EStern@JOI.org or (212) 760-1440. Together, we can expand the reach of our community.



Jewish Communal Service Association of North America

JCSA

Connecting & Enhancing Professional Leadership

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Mission

The Jewish Communal Service Association of North America supports the enhancement of professional Jewish communal leadership, uniting a broad spectrum of individuals, entities and disciplines sharing a commitment to advancing their communities guided by Jewish values.

We're on the web: www.jcsana.org

Ellie Aronowitz, President Brenda Gevertz, Executive Director

To subscribe directly to this newsletter simply go to www.jcsana.org, enter your email address in the space provided and click "go". Your e-mail will be automatically added to our listserv through Constant Contact. It is free, fast and easy!

Local Group Events & Mazel Tovs

The Jewish Home and Hospital Present their Fall Conferences:

Elder Falls Prevention Research Tuesday, September 25th. Our objective is to identify and share best practices in fall prevention and to help communities and long term care facilities offer fall prevention programs to elders.

Emergency Preparedness Long Term Care Thursday, October 11th. Our objective is to share principles of emergency management in and how they apply to all hazards, including those due to disasters, terrorism, and public health emergencies.

For more information regarding these conferences please call: **Rebecca Lazinger** at 212-870-4783 or **Patrice Gordon** at 212-870-4702

The **Wiener Educational Center** will be hosting a Profession Development Series with topics that range from Interviewing Skills to Advanced Supervisory Skills. If you would like more information regarding this series, please contact **June Fortess** at FortessJ@UJAFEDNY.ORG

Mazel Tov to **Diana Einstein**, founding member of Advancing Jewish Professionals in NYC and **Heath Einstein**, Solomon Schechter Day School of Westchester, on the birth of their daughter.

Next Newsletter Deadline: September 25th!

If you have something you would like to see in the September issue of the JCSA Newsletter please send it to info@jcsana.org by Monday, August 27th.

Notes from Bert Goldberg, JCSA Insurance Committee Chair

When a prolonged disability strikes, it often means that financial security is dealt a crippling blow. It is difficult, if not impossible, for most of us to build up a sufficient cushion of emergency funds to see us through a long period when we are unable to work.

We are pleased to offer a *New Group Long Term Disability Income Plan*.

Mortgage Payments.....Auto Loan Payments.....Tuition Payments.....Saving for Retirement.....**Who will pay your bills and how will you accomplish your goals if you are disabled?** There is a lot depending on your paycheck. That's why Disability Insurance is so important.

The new JCSA Disability Insurance Plan Features:

- Short 1 page application
- Coverage for 60% of your salary (to a maximum benefit of \$6,000. per month)
- Flexibility: This Group Plan provides a choice of premium rates, based upon the selection of a 90 day or 180 day elimination period.
- Portability: There is no need to file a new application for coverage if you move to a new employer within 31 days of leaving prior position.

Call for a Brochure and Application!

Contact our administrators for JCSA Benefit Plans, Brian and Irving Silberberg at:

Telephone: 1-800-597-9245 **New!** E-mail: bsilberberg@multifin.com

JCSA Benefit Plans offers the following plans and services to our members on an individual and agency basis:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| ◆ Long Term Disability | ◆ 529 College Fund Plan | ◆ 24 Hour Accident Plan |
| ◆ Tax Sheltered Annuities | ◆ IRA Plans | ◆ Agency Pension Planning |
| ◆ Retirement Disability Plan | ◆ Long Term Care Plans | ◆ Executive Top Hat Plans |
| ◆ Life Insurance Plan | ◆ Fixed Index Annuities | ◆ Mutual Funds |

Save the Dates!!!

Local Groups Leadership Retreat

March 30-31, 2008

Pearlstone Conference Center —
Baltimore, MD



Current and Future Representatives of Local Jewish Communal Groups across North America are invited to participate in the first continental retreat to network and support each other, learn best practices, share experiences and develop resources to support their initiatives.

For More Information contact info@jcsana.org



"Current Trends in Jewish Philanthropy Conference Call"

JCSA National Conference Call

Oct. 10, 2007

@ 2 PM, Eastern ~ 1 PM, Central ~ 11 AM, Pacific

Private Foundations have grown and are taking leadership in the Jewish communal world. What is the impact of donor advised funds and supporting foundations on the federation system? Who is driving the process? What are the funding trends? What are the career opportunities in private foundations and what are the skills needed?

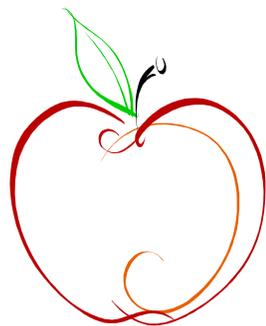
Listen to our expert panelists provide their insights!

Panelist:

Marjory Kaplan, CEO, Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego

Dr. Jeffrey Solomon, President, The Andrea & Charles Bronfman Philanthropies

Moderator--**Sherri Greenbach**, Executive Director, Jewish Women's Foundation of New York



JCSA wishes you
a Shana Tovah U'metukah.

Have a sweet and wonderful New Year!

