

New OU President Looks Ahead

By Stephen J. Savitsky



This issue of *Jewish Action* is the last one to be published under the leadership of Joel M. Schreiber, chairman of the Publications Commission. Because of Joel's vision and persistence, *Jewish Action* is highly regarded in many segments of the Orthodox world for its insightful, intelligent articles on

This message was excerpted from Mr. Savitsky's Inaugural Address, which was prepared for delivery at the Orthodox Union Biennial National Convention 2004, held in Jerusalem.

issues of concern to the Orthodox reader. I would like to express the Orthodox Union's deep gratitude to Joel for his tireless efforts and ceaseless devotion to the magazine, and to the Orthodox Union.

There are presidents who are elected to lead organizations in crisis, in which their primary and immediate goal must be to right the ship. This is not my task. I take over from Harvey Blitz, a most extraordinary leader, who bequeaths to me a financially sound organization with enormous impact in North America and Israel.

Every president comes to office with his own agenda, and mine is both to build on Harvey's successes and to develop a new set of goals. I am deeply gratified that the new administration includes a substantial number of new officers and board members from all over North America. Our new leadership roster confirms the OU's national reach and perspective. Indeed, with our centers in Jerusalem and Kharkov, Ukraine, our West Coast regional headquarters in Los Angeles and our National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) regions all around North America (with more regions and chapters being added this year), we

have exploded the myth that the OU is only a New York-based organization.

My administration brings with it a strategic plan to achieve the OU's goals of enhancing the role of Orthodox Jews in the Diaspora and in Israel, and of strengthening our communities. Key elements of the plan include:

- To strengthen smaller Jewish communities and to have them feel a connection to the population centers where a greater number of Jews reside.
- To bring the hundreds of unaffiliated Orthodox synagogues in the United States under the banner of the OU. We have many services and programs that we can provide to these synagogues; we believe that they should not "go it alone," rather they should be part of the greater community. "*Berov am hadrat melech*," "The larger the attendance, the greater is the honor to God."
- To double OU membership by providing worthwhile programs and incentives to encourage every Orthodox Jew to be part of the OU family.
- To dramatically increase our *kiruv* (outreach) efforts. NCSY and the new Jewish Student Union (JSU) are models that work, but because of financial reasons, these programs unfortunately reach only five to ten percent of their

targeted population. Those numbers must increase to fifty percent and beyond if we are to make a dent in countering assimilation in this country.

- To utilize our web site, www.ou.org, for learning Torah, strengthening Jewish values and providing a forum for dialogue and for feedback from our members about key areas affecting Jewish life.

- To expand our Yachad program for the developmentally disabled and Our Way for the deaf and hard of hearing by establishing new chapters around North America.

- To expand our Institute for Public Affairs (IPA), which has been so successful in Washington, DC, and the international arena, by having it become a more effective political force at the local and state levels. To accomplish this, we are planning a liaison program so that all OU communities, large and small, will have an IPA chapter to deal with local issues.

- To be more aggressive in obtaining funding from government sources, foundations and private individuals. As they say at West Coast NCSY: "The needs are *urgent*; the time is *now!*"

- To expand the outreach programs of the Seymour J. Abrams OU Jerusalem World Center in Israel. The successes we have had with the Center's various *kiruv* initiatives such as Kehilot Yisrael, Makom Balev and Lichyot B'yachad compel us to open new centers for these programs throughout Israel. [See "The *Kiruv* Imperative" in this issue, which details the programs' phenomenal accomplishments.]

- To develop the concept of "inter-connectivity" at the OU, so that all of our divisions work smoothly together, thereby maximizing our strength.

- To begin a young leadership division to train future leaders of the *klal*.

Admittedly, these are very ambitious goals. We have set an aggressive agenda, but the stakes are high, with no margin for error. We will reach out—every Orthodox Jew who believes in Torah and *mitzvot*, regardless of background and education, should feel

welcome at the OU.

My administration will work hard to meet and exceed these goals and to break down obstacles that stand in our way. We have great plans. In the years ahead, the OU will be an even more powerful force in benefiting the Jewish people worldwide, and in this way, we will be doing our part *lebagdil Torah uleha'adirah*. **JA**

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