

JEWISH JOURNAL

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TRUE GRIT

At the Los Angeles Jewish Home, Molly Forrest is relentless in her quest to provide better elder care

by Danielle Berrin

INSIDE: CONFRONTING THE EBOLA CRISIS

BUSINESS & FINANCE

JEWISH PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING ... WITH A SHMOOZE

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, *Contributing Writer*

Forget the gold watch for 50 years of service at one firm. For many baby boomers and Gen X-ers, starting one's own business has become more of a necessity than an alternative career path. As a result, professional networking groups have sprung up throughout the United States to help their members adjust to this new normal.

In 2005, Conejo Valley residents and emergent business owners Julie Marcus and Julie Perris became part of this movement when they founded JNET, a Jewish professional networking organization in which members support each other's businesses. At monthly meetings, members build relationships, share information about the products and services they provide, and offer testimonials for fellow members whose services they've used.

Marcus' and Perris' vision has since expanded from the Conejo Valley to chapters throughout the city and Valley. JNET has a diverse mix of members, in fields ranging from real estate, medicine, finance and technology to jewelers and auto mechanics. Although members join a specific chapter, they are encouraged to attend meetings of other chapters as well as multichapter mixers in order to get to know as many people as possible throughout the organization.

Chapter meetings typically consist of a couple of featured members giving 10-minute presentations about their businesses; 30-second introductions by all attendees; networking tips; and the opportunity to nosh, *kibitz*, exchange business cards and get better acquainted. There are also occasional small-group get-togethers, called JNET Connect.

According to JNET Chairwoman Jackie Mendelson, Marcus (owner of a contractor referral service) and Perris (owner of a printing company) believed that the best way to build a strong, stable organization was to affiliate with a local synagogue, so they selected Temple Beth Haverim as the first host location.

The group they founded remained small until 2010, when member Frank Tessel took over as board chairman, with the intention of getting more chapters established. He and his executive board spearheaded a growth campaign, encouraging members to form other chapters in their neighborhoods. The organization has since grown from a base of about a dozen members in the original chapter to 400 members throughout 10 chapters today — with plans for an 11th coming next month — all of which meet in temples.

The largest chapter is based in Thousand Oaks and meets at Temple Etz Chaim, ac-

cording to Mendelson, owner of Arabica-Dabra Coffee Co. LLC, who originally joined the West Hills Chapter and then switched to the Tarzana chapter.

Mendelson said that networking in a Jewish environment is not just professionally rewarding, but also deeply meaningful on a personal and social level.

"The heart and soul of our organization is at the various temples," she said. "All of our activities are developed in the chapters' meetings, which are shared with the entire membership using word of mouth, email, social media and our website."

Attorney Lisa Aminnia, who joined JNET two years ago and is the public relations officer for the Woodland Hills chapter, said the big draw for her was the notion of Jews helping Jews.

"The community at the meetings helped me establish personal connections that enable me to foster good relationships, essential in estate planning, my specialty," Aminnia said.

Like Aminnia, fellow lawyer Steven Mayer joined JNET in 2012 for the opportunity to develop and strengthen business relationships within the local Jewish community.

"I had just relocated my law practice to Encino and was looking for ways to network with other Valley business owners in a forum that was more welcoming than other professional organizations," Mayer said. "There is a certain innate warmth and camaraderie at JNET, doing business with those who share my Jewish culture and values."

Gail Meyer, operator of a business that helps senior citizens relocate from one residence to another, has been with JNET almost since its inception. "I use my JNET connections to refer members to other members," she said. "It keeps me in the thick of the Jewish community."

Although current members range in age from 35 to 60 years old, Mendelson hopes to attract more young professionals in the coming year. To facilitate this, JNET will be collaborating with Sinai Temple, known for its successful young-adult social programs, to establish a Westwood chapter.

Aminnia, who is on the younger end of JNET's current membership, welcomes this move.

"Having younger people will bring a lot to JNET, because they're going to be developing and running businesses for the next 20, 30 or 40 years," Aminnia observed. And, she added, "Young members will benefit from the experiences of the older members and deepen their bonds in their communities."

For more information about JNET, visit this story at jewishjournal.com. ■

CELEBRATIONS

A DRESS TO IMPRESS ... AFTER THE WEDDING

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

You spent serious time and money picking out the right wedding dress, taking great care to ensure the perfect look. With that kind of commitment, it would be a shame to allow those investments to waste away after the big day, disappearing into the fashion graveyard of a dry cleaner's box or the back of your closet.

Instead, you can find many ways to say "I do" to recycling, repurposing, reselling or even donating that dress to someone else for their own special day.

Redress for success

One way to pass on the love — and recoup some of your costs — is to resell your wedding dress. While eBay and Craigslist are two familiar options, Tradesy (tradesy.com) simplifies the process, allowing a bride to list her dress in 60 seconds using photos of the dress on its own or from the wedding.

Founded by Santa Monica-based CEO Tracy DiNunzio, Tradesy reaches an estimated 2 million unique visitors monthly. It is the outgrowth of Recycled Bride, her previous site that focused on brides interested in selling their gowns in a safe, online environment.

One popular subcategory in the wedding section of the site is called "Modest," and it lists hundreds of gowns with high necks and full-length sleeves that are ideal for Orthodox brides. DiNunzio said she realized a significant number of her clients were Jewish, like her, when her sales dropped by 30 percent during this year's High Holy Days.

She said reselling a wedding dress can do more than bring a bride a little extra cash.

"Selling your dress can be a mitzvah in the sense that you are allowing another bride with a smaller budget to feel as beautiful and as confident on her big day as you did on yours," DiNunzio said. "Several of my bride clients have built friendships with their buyers and tell us they feel really good about the experience."

DiNunzio said if your own wedding dress was bought new, you can potentially recoup between 40 and 60 percent of its retail value by

reselling it within 20 days of the big day. The longer you wait to sell it, the more it will depreciate in value as brides seek out dresses from more recent seasons.

Other actions should be taken even more quickly, according to DiNunzio.

"I recommend brides get their dress dry cleaned within a week after the wedding by a dry cleaner specializing in fragile fabrics like silk and tulle," she said. "This is important because there are stains like white wine, champagne and sweat that are not immediately visible, but will set and be visible later on if not treated."

When listing a dress on Tradesy, brides provide information on the original retail price, the designer and if alterations have been made. Tradesy recommends a price based on the dress's market value, though brides are free to name their own price. If the dress doesn't sell within a three-week period, reducing the price by about 10 percent usually does the trick, DiNunzio said.

Bridesmaids dresses sell on sites like Tradesy, too, and can be repurposed to be worn at other weddings, school dances or other formal events. Although they often sell at 70 percent below their original retail value, DiNunzio said getting 30 percent back is better than having the dress accumulate dust in your closet.

A similar online marketplace, Borrowing Magnolia (borrowingmagnolia.com), plays up the green aspects of wedding dress resale and rentals, noting how a dress will see many ceremonies rather than take up space. The site's interface allows former brides and brides-to-be to specify their favorite designers, dress silhouette, size and retail price to match the right dress to a new owner.

The ultimate wedding (or prom) gift

For those who don't care about getting anything in return for their dress other than a "thank you" and a warm feeling (and maybe a tax write-off), there are numerous ways to donate wedding attire to women and girls in need.

Brides Against Breast Cancer (bridesagainstbreastcancer.org), based in Sarasota, Fla., finances many of its programs for patients and their families via an online store and its nation-

land, Ore., organization also accepts donated dresses.

Closer to home, the many thrift shops in Los Angeles operated by the National Council of Jewish Women (ncjwla.org) will gladly accept wedding and bridesmaids dresses. And the Los Angeles-based nonprofit startup All Good Things Inc. (allgoodthingsinc.com) promises satisfying future homes for used bridesmaids dresses. The organization's Project Prom Queen collects the dresses for a special day, where high-school girls from challenging personal or financial backgrounds can pick one out and then get accessories and hair and grooming services to make their big dance special.



Pronovias wedding gown that retailed for \$1,300 new was resold for \$650 on Tradesy. Photo courtesy of Tradesy.com

Being bold

Other brides take matters into their own hands after their wedding. Vanessa Hughes of West Los Angeles took the plunge into married life in 2007 in a Vera Wang gown. Determined to wear it again, Hughes took the dress to the shop where she purchased it and had their tailors repurpose it.

"When I made my long dress into a cocktail dress, other brides shopping for their dresses had their jaws on the floor as a seamstress cut the entire bottom of my dress off," Hughes recalled. "However, I knew I made the right choice as the dress was more cream than a true white, making it appropriate for many occasions. I wore it to a bat mitzvah and will wear it to a bar mitzvah this winter. Eventually I may look to dye the dress as well."

Local dress designer Gilbert A. Chagoury, whose atelier is known for its elaborate, custom, layered gowns, said if a dress is really well-engineered, it can live on as a dress while excess fabric can be fashioned into other objects.

"Some of my designs allow for a full gown for the [synagogue ceremony]," he said. "Afterward, she can remove layers to create a cocktail dress. Or she has three layers — one for the ceremony, one for the reception and one as a cocktail dress after the wedding. However from there, you've got options for what to do

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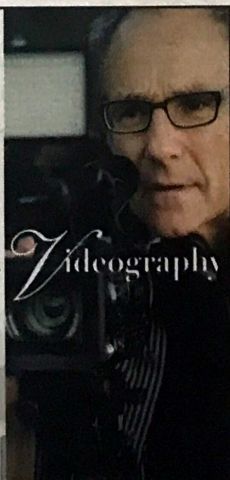
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A Dress to Impress

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with the extra fabric."

Brides intending to keep their dress for the sake of a daughter or daughter-in-law can cut a piece from it to incorporate into the

one the next generation will wear. This can be the "something old."

Chagoury also suggests using it to create the fabric elements of a bassinet for a child or transforming the dress into a blanket or quilt. Or the dress could be used for future Halloween or Purim costumes or even a party dress.

In San Diego, Lindsey Radoff and Jennifer Berman, twin sisters, co-owners and designers behind Old New Borrowed Redo (oldnewborrowedredo.com) built their business on changing the way women think of their "one-time dresses," including wedding and bridesmaids gowns, in a similar way to Chagoury.

The sisters transform the fabric from dresses into useful items such as baby blankets, pillows, throw blankets, picture frames and more. Their website allows brides to have a hand in the design process of the new item with forms and photo galleries that provide inspiration on how the fabrics from their dress can take on a new life. ■

HEALTH

L.A. CANCER CHALLENGE: RUNNING FOR LIVES OF OTHERS

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

When thousands of racers line up at the Veterans Affairs grounds in West Los Angeles on Oct. 26, it will be to raise awareness for a devastating type of cancer sometimes linked to mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes that are more prevalent in Ashkenazi Jews.

But it's not breast cancer; it's pancreatic cancer, which this year is projected to take the lives of nearly 40,000 Americans.

Last year's L.A. Cancer Challenge (LACC) benefitting the Hirshberg Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research attracted 4,000 participants and raised more than \$630,000. The goal of this year's 5K/10K walk/run is to boost that figure to \$750,000 or more.

"A huge part of our mission is to unite young and old through physical fitness as a way to create awareness of the disease," said Lisa Manheim, executive director of the foundation and stepdaughter of the organization's inspiration, Ron Hirshberg, who died of the disease. "Our event draws a lot of families and is one of the 5K races families will do together. For many of our younger runners, it is their first race and charity event they participate in."

defective copy of one of their two BRCA2 genes, which is associated with a three- to 10-fold increased risk of developing pancreatic cancer (not to mention increased risk of breast, ovarian and prostate cancer). BRCA1 gene mutations may also cause a small increased risk of developing pancreatic cancer, according to foundation officials.

Reber, however, stressed that the risk of cancer to Jews with a defective BRCA2 gene varies in different families, and is also dependent on lifestyle factors such as smoking, diet, the inheritance of other cancer susceptibility genes and a certain element of chance.

The work that Reber and his colleagues at UCLA conduct is a continuation of the vision of Agi Hirshberg. When her husband, Ron, died of pancreatic cancer, she realized there were no major pancreatic cancer centers in the United States. She vowed to take this formidable fight to the next level.

"[Agi] decided to start a definitive pancreatic cancer organization with the rationale that if she couldn't give to a pancreatic cancer organization, she would start one," Manheim said. "She chose to partner with UCLA because it was where [her

"The way the L.A. Cancer Challenge is staged brings into focus families of patients and patients who survived the disease."

— Dr. Howard Reber

The cause is a deadly serious one. Pancreatic cancer has the highest mortality rate of all major cancers — 94 percent of patients die within five years of diagnosis, according to the American Cancer Society.

"The frequency of pancreatic cancer is increasing," said Dr. Howard Reber, distinguished professor of surgery, chief of gastrointestinal surgery and director of the Ronald S. Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory at UCLA, which the foundation and annual run help sustain.

"Right now, pancreatic cancer is ranked the fourth most common cause of death from cancers in the U.S., and in a few years will be the second most common cancer killer. While research and efforts leading to earlier diagnosis and more effective treatment expended by scientists and researchers are working well to reduce the numbers of colon, prostate and other cancers, they so far are not yet able to bring the numbers of pancreatic cancer cases down," he said.

While Manheim and Reber stress their commitment to patients from all backgrounds, the foundation's signature event holds particularly strong meaning for members of Los Angeles' Jewish community. Despite the fact that the causes of pancreatic cancer remain unclear, it is documented that 1 percent of Ashkenazi Jews has a

husband] was treated, close to home, and [she] could regularly meet with doctors and researchers. It's been a wonderful partnership for the last 17 years, and the outcome of the race will hopefully set the course in the years to come."

Reber said that the money raised by the race allows researchers to do more than just combat medical challenges posed by pancreatic cancer.

"The way the L.A. Cancer Challenge is staged brings into focus families of patients and patients who survived the disease," he said. Money raised "benefits the patients and their families, who need all the help they can get, not only with medical care but with psychological support and other services beyond medicines and procedures."

Online registration for the L.A. Cancer Challenge (LACancerChallenge.com) ends Oct. 24. This year's race will have added features.

"We decided to add on-course entertainment to make the experience more enjoyable for those participating in the race," Manheim said. "We have two live bands, three on-course DJs, hula dancers, a barber shop quartet and a slew of entertainers to keep up morale."

Participants can also enjoy the event's Fit Family Expo, which includes a main stage, Halloween zone and special displays from sponsors emphasizing fitness and maintenance of good health habits. ■

50 PLUS

PHIL STERN: FROM SHADOWS TO ENLIGHTENMENT

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

Some life journeys are so epic, it seems there's no way they could be captured, even in a Hollywood movie. And yet, as it turned out, all photojournalist Phil Stern needed was his trusty camera.

A heralded chronicler of World War II and Hollywood icons such as James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, Stern celebrated his storied life in style on Sept. 6, when the Veterans Home of California-West Los Angeles unveiled 95 prints he donated for his 95th birthday. Stern is a resident of the home.

The show included war portraits, images of the likes of John Wayne, Marlon Brando — whom Stern once photographed reading the Yiddish-language newspaper *The Forward* — Audrey Hepburn and Louis Armstrong. They will be displayed throughout the Veterans Home and become part of its permanent collection.

Director/producer Brett Ratner ("Rush Hour," "X-Men: The Last Stand"), the event's keynote speaker, talked about the times he visited Stern to peruse his collection.

"He started pulling out photo after photo after photo. What was so amazing about this was not only that every photo had one of my heroes in the movie business, but also there was a story behind every single photo," he said. "I lost count of the number ... of times I went back to Stern's house to get all the stories. But what I left with was [the sense] that Phil Stern was as much of a director as I was."

Consider his work on the set of Ratner's "Rush Hour 2" set, where Stern snapped five photos that Ratner believes were the best photos ever taken of him and stars Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan, all in a moment of deep thought.

"He made Chris Tucker look like Sammy Davis Jr. and Jackie Chan look like the Chinese Frank Sinatra," he said.

But there was more to Stern's work than glitz and glam. Born in Philadelphia in 1919, Stern enlisted in the U.S. Army and became a member of the elite fighting unit known as Darby's Rangers, using his photographic skills to capture some of the most brutal battles in North Africa and Sicily.

Even after being wounded during the Battle of El Guettar, he became a staff photographer for Stars and Stripes.

Julian Manalo, deputy administrator of the Veterans Home, said that with so much media attention on veterans' needs in returning from modern wars, and the consequences journalists face by putting themselves in danger to cover today's global conflicts, the timing of this perma-

to be the 348th veteran to be inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame.

"I hope the exposition of my photos will remind new generations about the battles in Sicily and North Africa during World War II," Stern said, his voice strong, though his body is confined to a wheelchair. "We were fighting the Nazis way before the European invasion. Although some elements of warfare have changed, the dangers

more meaningful to me than Hollywood images. When you consider all the historically important stuff he did during World War II, this constitutes one of the main reasons why I came today," she said.

Romi Dames, a co-star of the popular Disney TV series "Hannah Montana," said Stern's capturing of history also has the potential to reach and influence people in her younger generation.

"I grew up on an Army base, and my dad worked as a high school teacher for the kids of parents serving in the Army," she said. "For me, it's important that somebody went into the situation [Stern was in] to document major world events like D-Day."

As for making the transition from battle-grounds to movie sets, that was easy.

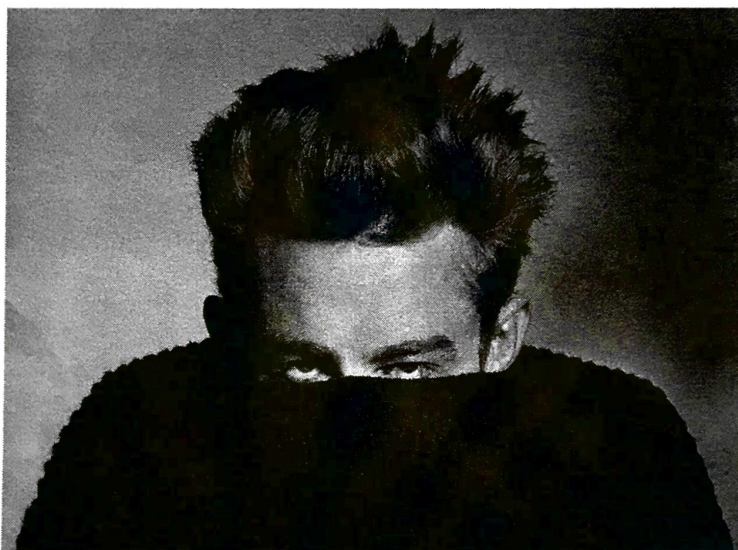
"Well, I can say that it was much easier to take a photo of pretty starlets on a movie set than dodging bullets," Stern said.

After the war, it was "lights, camera, action" for the photographer. He was recruited by Life, Look and Collier's magazines to capture the actors (Frank Sinatra, Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor), musicians (Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald), politicians (John F. Kennedy) and other public figures who would shape popular culture in the latter half of the 20th century. He also effectively froze time during cinema's golden age as a still cameraman on numerous feature films, including "West Side Story," "Judgment at Nuremberg" and "Guys and Dolls."

Although he put down his cameras for the most part in the early 1980s, Stern has a number of recent images capturing his friends at the Veterans Home, which he calls "Shooting From the Hip." Those photos, also on display at the recent event, show that he continues to have a thoughtful eye for humanity and personal details.

After all these years, many things have changed about the field — but not everything.

"I love digital technology and am still learning about it. It's great! No more dark fingernails from the developing solution," he said. "My advice to aspiring photographers, however, remains to not trip on the strobe light cord." ■



Phil Stern's 1955 portrait of James Dean is exemplary of his celebrity photographs.

Photo courtesy of the Phil Stern Archives

nent exhibit couldn't be more important.

"What he's still doing for the Department of Veterans Affairs and West Los Angeles adds to his impressive legacy," Manalo said. "Whether you survey what he captured in Sicily and in North Africa during the war or admire what he did in Hollywood work, you don't see this kind of nuance in photography today. Between our generation and Phil's, it bridges a gap by presenting history in a very accessible, tangible form."

At the recent event, Stern maintained a serene presence, even as he learned that he was going

journalists face today is the same old, same old. It's just a new enemy with different weapons."

Actress Erin Murphy, best known as Tabitha from the 1960s TV series "Bewitched," is another member of Hollywood, like Ratner, who is a devoted follower of Stern's work. Initially fascinated with his Hollywood images, she later developed a personal, deep-seated appreciation for his war images.

"As my father fought in World War II in the Army, and my grandfather was a fighter pilot in World War I, Phil Stern's war photography is even

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COLLEGE GUIDE

HELPING YOUNG ADULTS KEEP THE (JEWISH) FAITH

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

Heading off to college is usually seen as an exciting, colorful rite of passage. But, as rabbis at several local synagogues have observed, those steps toward adult independence often come with uncertainty and a need for an additional support system beyond Mom and Dad.

That, they believe, is where they can help by keeping Jewish young adults connected with their pre-college communities. Aside from the tried-and-true methods of doing this — holiday-themed care packages, regularly distributed *dvar* Torah messages and programs between semesters for college-age students — the ways clergy and staffers reach out to them has evolved with the advances of technology. Some rabbis also contend that the reasons young adults should stay connected are evolving.

"I would frame [this] less about how we are as a congregation reaching out to kids who have gone away to college, and instead ask ourselves how we are preparing them to develop their own Jewish way of life," said Rabbi Brian Schuldenfrei of the Conservative Congregation Ner Tamid of South Bay in Rancho Palos Verdes.

"While there is merit in keeping in touch with students, what we're really doing reflects that when kids go away to college, they are forging their own lives. We [need to] think about how we can help young adults gain the tools to forge meaningful Jewish lives during and after college."

Schuldenfrei fondly recalls how he received care packages for the High Holy Days from his home synagogue and thinking how wonderful it was to receive a piece of home and a reminder of childhood. (At Congregation Ner Tamid of South Bay, they don't even wait for students to leave home; they hold a special send-off program for graduating seniors, presenting each with a *mezuzah* to take with them.)

However, it is most important to him that a shul considers how it can guide young congregants into a fulfilling Jewish life no matter where they land after college, Schuldenfrei said.

"We as an individual institution and a part of the greater Jewish community have to look at how we are helping young adults create mature and vibrant Jewish lives," he explained. "We held a seminar this past spring for high school students and their parents led by one of the more prominent Hillel directors in the country. He spoke about Jewish life on campus and what to expect. One of the most meaningful moments, however, was not the program itself but after the program. There was a line of students who had questions and wanted to talk to this rabbi. The line showed that they cared about the future of Israel and about leading a Jewish life."

At Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, Senior Rabbi Laura Geller stresses that before college-age congregants go off to school, she and her fellow clergy collect their addresses so that they can send them holiday care packages. However,

the most important element of their outreach is keeping in touch with individual students, even via email.

"[Rather than] send out a mass email to all of them, I am in personal correspondence with many of our students, as are my colleagues Rabbi Jonathan Aaron and Cantor Yonah Kliger," she said. "The relationships that started prior to the students leaving for college continue to be developed through their connections with us. Out of these relationships come deepened relationships. This is something that matters to

who stay in touch because of that."

The new outreach program at Valley Beth Shalom (VBS) in Encino has been in the hands of Ami Monson, director of youth engagement, for a few months. However, he's applying a wealth of experience, including stints with Macabi USA/Sports for Israel and as an adviser with United Synagogue Youth (USY). He projects the new program at the Conservative shul will be in full swing in time for Chanukah.

"My plan is to take a list of [young adults] who recently entered college or university, or

of home and a knowledge that somebody cares about them, but shows they are part of a greater community and helps them maintain a connection to their home Jewish communities in particular.

Sinai Temple in Westwood has a program called College Connection that, like many other programs, starts when students or their parents submit their email and information on what university or college they are attending. From there, Rabbi Nicole Guzik explained, Rabbi Jason Fruithandler ("our young profes-



Leigh Schindler and Daniel Storrow enjoy a rooftop concert at Temple Beth Am's "House of Jews & Israeli Brews" program for young adults.

Photo courtesy of Temple Beth Am

us, especially if students end up moving back to L.A. after graduation."

Geller added that the Reform temple recently hired Assistant Rabbi Sarah Bassin, who is reaching out to young professionals in their 20s and 30s. The synagogue also has several Facebook pages, as well as personalized efforts to reach out to students returning home for major Jewish holidays and inviting them to participate in the services. Although the choir is only open to local students, Geller said many members are students from USC and UCLA.

"We hope people will recognize that a synagogue community is a community, whether it is a face-to-face community or a virtual community, and what makes it special is that it is inter-generational," she said. "As supportive as Mom and Dad may be, it is sometimes important to talk to somebody outside of family. You would be surprised at the number of young people

went back to school, and send them notes keeping them up to date on what's happening at VBS and [our local chapter of] USY," Monson said. "Thanks to social media, including Facebook, we have instant gratification with our students, whether we're wishing them a happy birthday or happy holy days. However, there's something pure and old school about sending a note in the mail, or sending alumni of our shul or school a gift to let them know they are remembered."

"Once I build relationships, I plan to work with some of the college students and college graduates in the area who are now in the workplace, and have them come back to talk about their college experience to our USY board in a mentoring manner or in our Teen Tuesday program."

Monson said person-to-person contact for students attending traditional sleep-away schools not only offers them a welcome taste

sional outreach rabbi") prepares *dvar* Torahs as well as special token gifts on holidays and special occasions to get the moral lessons of those messages across. For example, on Purim, he'll send a mask with a *dvar* Torah that refers to the courage needed for one to unmask a new side of one's character or personality.

Guzik also said Rabbi David Wolpe puts a message out on his Facebook page every day, whether it relates to Shabbat, a major Jewish holiday or a current event, so young adults who grew up in the Conservative congregation will still feel connected to him. Guzik, too, sends out a weekly *dvar* Torah via email and Facebook and finds she gets 50 to 100 replies on Facebook — 10 to 20 times more than she gets via standard email.

"If it weren't for social media, we would have almost no connection with our younger mem-

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CELEBRATIONS

GRAZING IN GREENER PASTURES

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

The prospect of finding satisfying wedding or b'nai mitzvah reception food has long been daunting to most vegetarians and vegans, no matter how expertly the dishes are executed. Sides and substitutions can only fill up a person so much.

Those who've done their family celebration circuit will often recall RSVPing "vegetarian" only to get a plate of steamed vegetables, overdone pasta or a pile of starchy sides for their trouble.

Thankfully, today's caterers and event planners are increasingly attuned to the growing number of vegetarians and vegans and the more sophisticated tastes of those maintaining a glatt kosher diet. They've been aided by the farm-to-table culinary movement, too.

"There's a definite trend in kosher weddings and b'nai mitzvahs with chefs upping their game in terms of the kinds of foods and options that you would not necessarily see a couple of years ago," said Michele Grant, who founded The Kosher Palate catering two years ago.

"There is no reason why families shouldn't serve their guests [who have] specific dietary needs the most amazing food. This is a particularly amazing time to be doing things kosher and vegetarian in Los Angeles, as what's happening with artisanal food purveyors is revolutionary."

Event planner Alexandra Rembac of Sterling Engagements agreed that these are exciting times.

"We're in the midst of the 'foodie generation,' where people are not only seeking out delicious food but also are vested in the quality of the ingredients and preparation and nutritional value," she said. "They're exploring everything from general organic to vegan and vegetarian at their favorite restaurants, which is informing how families are planning weddings and [b'nai] mitzvahs. ... It is important that as much care is put into meatless dishes as with beef, chicken and fish dishes."

Teri Kane recently helped coordinate her daughter's all-vegetarian Malibu wedding with Ruth Hurwitz of Tarte Catering in Thousand Oaks and event planner Michael Habicht. She explained that while her daughter and son-in-law mapped out the menu they wanted for their big day, she made her daughter's bat mitzvah and other family events vegetarian long before it became trendy or common.

"Between our kosher friends and family, and those who are vegetarians, we've long felt a beautifully prepared vegetarian menu was the perfect option," Kane said. "One thing we did at my daughter's wedding was a series of multiple food stations with separate menus

and food themes that were open all evening so that the party never stopped for a 'sit down' moment."

Habicht said chefs are executing all sorts of new and fun ideas that tap into the vegetarian and kosher worlds, and the Kane wedding was a great example.

"We did a count of guests who were glatt kosher in the Old World sense, and how many dishes we had to prepare for those guests as opposed to general vegetarian that was kosher style. We had fun with the challenge, including bringing in a pizza oven to the site and making vegetarian kosher pizzas," he said.

Rembac pointed to the emergence of menus and food stations that are interactive, compelling guests to get engaged in the preparation process in ways that make non-meat eaters feel included. These include the return of pasta and salad bars as well as soup bars that incorporate organic herbs, seasonal vegetables and family-style platters with an



Veggie sliders offered by Sterling Engagements. Photo by Isabel Lawrence

assortment of sides such as braised kale and brussels sprouts, which are both in vogue right now.

Grant, meanwhile, noted that while portobello mushrooms are now a commonplace substitute for beef, many savvy vegetarians and vegans are hungry for the next creative thing.

"I grill a mushroom cap and use it as a bun, and then do one of our favorite veggie burger patties, such as a black bean and quinoa cake," she said. "I top it with garlic and jalapeno on the cap."

"My goal, first and foremost, is to make really interesting and wonderful-tasting food in whatever category you want to place it in. Tempeh is another versatile meat alternative, with a nuttiness and nice texture that can be adapted in different dishes."

The downside of planning a memorable vegetarian feast is that it may involve more of an investment.

"It takes more time and thought to prepare these vegetarian and vegan dishes, and [the use of] seasonal produce may also add to the cost per meal," Habicht explained. "In some cases, when meals are specially created for a vegan or vegetarian attendee, ingredients cannot be purchased in bulk. If your family

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Greener Pastures

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is glatt kosher, I would do my research and find a caterer who not only has the facilities and supplies necessary, but also experience in elevating their dishes beyond what people consider standard fare.”

Or, you could just go shopping at a place like Whole Foods.

“When we did our vegan bar mitzvah, we had Chinese food, lots of vegan baked goods and salads from Whole Foods,” said Charles Stahler of The Vegetarian Resource Group, based in Baltimore and focused on educating the public on vegetarianism and the interrelated issues of health, nutrition and the envi-

ronment. “To please non-vegetarians, we included popular ethnic foods from [the store’s] Italian and Chinese section.”

Rachel Safran, chef and healthy eating coordinator for Whole Foods’ Southern Pacific region, stresses that vegan and vegetarian trends are having an impact on formal and informal catering, especially as the percentage of the population identifying themselves as “vegetarian” or “vegan” has doubled in the last 10 years. However, families planning a milestone event need to do their homework and be very upfront with a caterer or food purveyor about their expectations, she said.

“It is the responsibility of any consumer to clearly articulate concerns and review ingredients before purchasing or consuming,” she said. ■

FOOD

HAVA'S KITCHEN COOKS LOCAL, THINKS GLOBAL — AND HEALTHY

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, *Contributing Writer*

There's nothing more comforting than a home-cooked meal — even if it's not cooked in *your* home.

While the hectic pace of everyday life and two-income homes have made the fresh-prepped meal an endangered species, healthy food delivery services like Hava's Kitchen are doing their best to reawaken consumer appreciation for it.

Launched in 2011 by Santa Monica resident Hava Volterra, 52, the company cooks up dishes to order in its Culver City kitchen on Sundays, then delivers them to customers via door-to-door cooler service early Monday morning.

"Our changing menu includes soups, sides, salads and main dishes, and covers a lot of geography, recipe-wise, around the Mediterranean," Volterra said. "I grew up in Israel, a child of an Italian father and a French mother, among friends who kept kosher to different degrees, and traveled to my parents' home countries at 16. Experiences like these have enabled me to serve clients keeping kosher to various degrees as well as vegetarians, vegans and people with food sensitivities."

Menu items — which change weekly online — have run the gamut, from Kousa bi Gebna (summer squash and cheese gratin) to fresh, broiled Atlantic salmon.

"Our most popular items include Turkish beef and leek meatballs, pan-seared top sirloin steak, a tomato-basil frittata, Greek mous-saka and Spanish fish paella," Volterra said. "One of my personal favorites during the summer and fall months is a Moroccan vegetable tagine with chickpeas and dried apricots."

Hava's Kitchen took root with clients based on the Westside and in Santa Monica, Studio City, Sherman Oaks and Encino. During the course of 2014, she's added Pacific Palisades, La Brea/Fairfax, Playa Vista, Westchester and El Segundo to her delivery area.

As part of the subscription service, customers purchase a certain number of points to cover meals. If a customer needs more

food, more points can be purchased. If a pre-paid allotment is not used up, points roll over to subsequent weeks. A four-week subscription of 36 points — the equivalent of two to three dinners and one lunch per week for one person — costs a minimum of \$320. An introductory two-week subscription starts at \$160.

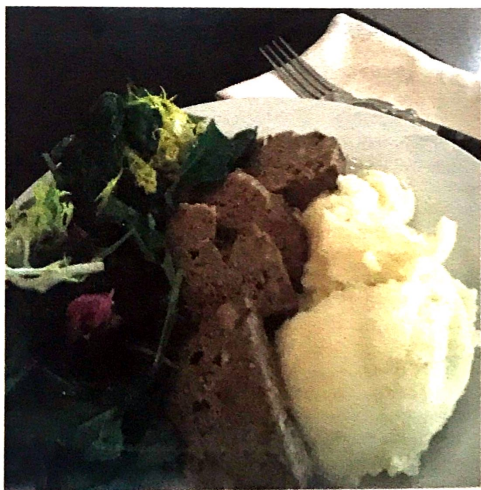
"Our biggest clientele group is families with young children, but we do have a mix of customers of all ages — singles, families, older couples and college kids."

For Volterra, who left a successful career as an electronics engineer and tech startup executive, the business is, in a way, a dream realized.

"As a teenager, I wanted to be a chef," she said. "When I looked closely at the diverse cuisines of Jewish people around the Mediterranean, as well as the general populations of those countries, I realized that many dishes not only comply with Jewish dietary laws, but also meet vegetarian and/or vegan requirements. Once I decided to pursue my dream years later, I researched



Chef Hava Volterra



Lemon meatloaf with celery root mashed potatoes from Hava's Kitchen.

Photos courtesy of Hava Volterra

and experimented with different Jewish cuisines from Syria, Greece, France, Italy and other places. The recipes coming from the research are now regularly rotated in our offerings based on customer demand."

The mother of two, who is an avid yogi and surfer, said she also represents the key demographic for the vanguard of food delivery companies: a busy professional mom

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Hava's Kitchen

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wanting the most nutritious, delicious food for her household. Like many of her clients, she is university educated (an alumna of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), and an established professional with a full schedule. Topping that off, she's also a documentary filmmaker, having made "The Tree of Life," which covers the history of Italian Jewry and explores her Italian-Jewish roots. Her late physicist father, who

survived World War II by being hidden in the house of non-Jews, emigrated to Israel in the early 1950s.

Although her own children are grown, Volterra relishes her current role as a personal chef — this time for hundreds of customers with divergent religious and health-based dietary requirements.

"Hava's Kitchen offers a variety of plant-based meals, as well as meat, fish and dairy items that can be mixed and matched," she said.

The company is based on the premise that

the right mix of food should be everyone's primary source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Volterra underscores that the Mediterranean diet she was raised on in Israel — rich in vegetables, beans, whole grains and natural oils such as olive oil; low in animal fats; and moderate in meat, fish and dairy — is also one that lends itself to great taste and a variety of different flavor profiles that naturally motivates people of all ages to maintain good eating habits.

Given that the expanding customer base includes a large contingent of Jewish families, Volterra developed her online menu to incor-

porate thorough descriptions of each dish, with user-friendly indicators that denote whether the dish is vegetarian, vegan, dairy-based or gluten-free and so on. One thing she finds her Jewish and non-Jewish clients have in common is a shared belief that the dining experience itself should not be restrictive or boring.

"Every week, the team scouts our local farmers markets and food purveyors to find the freshest seasonal, organic and local ingredients," Volterra said. "The chicken is free-range, the beef is grass-fed whenever possible, and fish is wild-caught." ■

CELEBRATIONS

A SECOND HELPING: BRINGING YOUR PARTY TO THE PEOPLE

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, *Contributing Writer*

Anybody who has grown up in a Jewish home and attended key family functions, from bar mitzvahs to weddings, knows that the food served during celebration is the life of the party.

It's comforting to know, though, that meals created to celebrate life also can help sustain it for others in need. When the leftovers pile up afterward, there are numerous area organizations serving women, children, veterans and others that might benefit from the extra delectables.

Finding the right destination for your nourishing gift may sound daunting, but it doesn't have to be. Some organizations make it their job to rescue leftover food and efficiently get it to people and other agencies. Food Finders (foodfinders.org) and the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank (lafoodbank.org) are among several outfits serving greater Los Angeles.

"Almost every large event has food left over, and if hosts or party planners let us know ahead of time, we or a representative from one of the agencies we serve can pick it up," said Diana Lara, vice president of operations for Food Finders.

"Since our establishment 25 years ago,



we have 'rescued' over 108 million pounds of food. This is roughly enough for about 40,000 meals per day. We are non-denominational and give to any of our 270 partner agencies (i.e. missions, shelters, charities, churches or synagogues) with a valid 501(c)3 nonprofit status."

The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank has

been involved in collecting packaged food since its inception in 1973, but public interest in donating sealed, untouched leftover food led to the launch of the Extra Helpings program in 1998, according to Susan Acker, a communications associate for the food bank. Now, when a party host, planner or caterer contacts a coordi-

nator at Extra Helpings (323-234-3030), the coordinator tries to locate the closest agency open to receiving the leftover food.

"Donors should bear in mind that we serve all of Los Angeles County, which includes 670 partner agencies," Acker explained. "One million people are served every year, and 400,000 of those people are children. Another staggering statistic is that one in every six L.A. residents is hungry.

"Donors, meanwhile, should also be mindful that many who benefit are working people with families who have jobs but still can't make ends meet. In 2013 alone, Extra Helpings distributed nearly 5.3 million pounds of prepared and perishable food from caterers, restaurants, groceries and private parties with extra food."

Making preparations in advance is important. Acker said there is not an Extra Helpings coordinator on hand 24 hours a day, and it is not always possible for them to respond to prospective donors immediately after an event. Instead, reach out once you've made the decision on where your event will be held and what foods will most likely be leftovers.

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A Second Helping

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Check on the policies of your venue as well to see if the hotel, caterer, restaurant banquet hall or other entity allows the donation of leftover food. Some prefer to give remainders to their staff.

Other practical tips: Package the leftovers thoroughly (or be sure the restaurants or caterers can do it), keep the packages properly refrigerated until someone arrives to pick them up, and let coordinators know the time and place of your event so they can time the pickup to take place immediately after it ends.

Kosher food and other specialty items are welcome, Acker said, as long as the prospective recipient tells the coordinator and donor the food will be accepted.

"One of our main focuses here is that the food we distribute is nutritious. What foods individual agencies are willing to accept is at their discretion, as they can opt out if they feel a specific item on the event menu is not appropriate for their clients," she said.

"There is a law, the [Bill Emerson] Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (1996), that protects the donors from civil and criminal liability should the product donated in good faith later cause harm to the recipient," she added.

Leaving Los Angeles for your big event and headed to Israel instead? Leket Israel, the country's food bank, organizes food rescues to help to the nation's needy. For more information, call American Friends of Leket Israel at (201) 331-0070.

For some people, this one act following a *simcha* becomes a gateway to a more long-term commitment. Lara can remember several bar and bat mitzvah teens who committed to a post-event donation and then decided to make the cause of fighting hunger the foundation of a mitzvah project. Others continue to contribute as regular volunteers with the organization into their high school and college years.

"When [one volunteer's] daughter got bat mitzvahed, she went beyond donating her leftovers, volunteering regularly and earning service hours at her high school. She's been very committed to our organization," Lara said.

"Another young lady last year organized a large food drive as her mitzvah project covering several communities, in addition to donating leftovers. It was such a success that her younger brother is now volunteering and working with us for his mitzvah project." ■