

LOCAL

DIGEST | GREATER ST. LOUIS

UH to sponsor dance

United Hebrew Congregation will sponsor a "Martinis and Swing Big Band Dinner Dance" on Saturday, May 12, from 6-10 p.m. in the Messing Auditorium, 13788 Conway Road. Music will be provided by the Gateway City Big Band, an 18 piece band featuring the vocal stylings of Karen Sharp. A full course chicken and pasta dinner will be provided by Catering Your Way by Lisa. The cost to attend the dinner and dance is \$20 per person. To make reservations, send a check made payable to United Hebrew Brotherhood, 13788 Conway Road, St. Louis, MO 63141 by Wednesday, May 9. Groups of 8-10 individuals may reserve a table. For more information, call Marty Weil at 636-227-5456 or Ken Schwartz at 314-434-3404 ext. 103.

'Friday Night' set for May 11

There will be another "It's Friday Night!" dinner, May 11 at 7 p.m. for singles age 45 and up. The dinners are held every 2 or 3 months at a home in Clayton. They are facilitated by Rabbi Lynn Goldstein. Following a traditional catered Shabbat dinner, Stephanie Turner, the President of Brentwood Travel, will speak about "Where, When and How to Travel as a Single." Cost for the evening is \$15. Reservations can be held only with a check. Deadline is Tuesday, May 8. To make a reservation or for further information, call Harlie Frankel at 314-645-5297 or Phyllis Cantor at 314-469-1776.

Dulkin to attend assembly

Shaare Zedek Synagogue has announced that Hazzan Joanna Dulkin, will be attending the 60th Annual Convention of the Cantors Assembly (CA) held, this year, in Los Angeles from May 6 - 10. Before being awarded membership, Hazzan Dulkin, after attending the graduate program in Cantorial Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, had to pass a rigorous entrance examination, demonstrating her knowledge base in Judaism, as well as her artistic expertise in liturgical music. More than 250 cantors from throughout the United States, Israel and Canada are expected to attend the Convention, which will also include a concert, "On the Wings of Song," benefiting the Israel Air Force Memorial and Heritage Project and the Cantors Assembly Foundation. For additional information, please contact Hazzan Joanna Dulkin at 314-727-1747 or Hazzan@shaarezedek.org.

NHBZ to hold Pizza Night

On Saturday, May 5, Nusach Hari B'nai Zion will hold a Pizza Night for Teens in the Joe Rothman Auditorium, featuring pizza and live music. Call the office at 314-991-2100 for details.

Lights to host Grossman

The Lights of the Jewish Special Needs Society will host guest speaker Ellie S. Grossman at a luncheon buffet at 11:15 a.m. at Meadowbrook Country Club on May 9. Call 314-434-2566 for more information.

LOCAL | JEWISH STUDENT UNION



JSU Rabbi Michael Rovinsky, head of Jewish Student Union, works on a project with Daniel Iken of Clayton High School, Samantha Sabol of Parkway North, Joe Weil of Ladue High School and Andrew Israel of Parkway North High School. Photo: Kristi Foster

JSU provides Jewish life at schools

BY MIKE SHERWIN
STAFF WRITER

As a freshman at Ladue High School, Joe Weil is only in his first year with the Jewish Student Union, but already he has become a driving force in the student organization.

"I knew someone last year who was in JSU, so I knew I wanted to join. Once I went to my first meeting, I just got more and more involved, hanging up flyers, and now I'm organizing a lot of the programs," Weil said.

Students like Weil are the backbone of JSU, said Rabbi Michael Rovinsky, the founder and current director of JSU, a transdenominational Jewish student group for non-Jewish high schools in St. Louis. Rovinsky, known by students as "Rabbi Mike," has watched the program grow over the past five years from one student group at Ladue High School to four high schools (Ladue, Clayton, Parkway Central, Parkway North), serving over 300 students.

"It's 100 percent dependent on the kids," Rovinsky said. "My role is to deal with school administration, buy the food, and raise the funds."

Rovinsky said that one of the main goals of JSU is to reach unaffiliated Jews at a critical stage in their lives, which is vital for maintaining a strong Jewish community.

"Teens are a unique group," he said. "Little kids are dependent on their parents. Adults are pretty much set in their ways. But teens are challenging and questioning everything. They're thinking."

Rovinsky's sense of mission has led the rabbi, who has an MBA from Johns Hopkins University, to devote much of his time and energy to teaching young people. Reaching out to teens, he said, requires special attention to making

Judaism pertinent to their daily lives.

"What we're trying to do is show them that Judaism is relevant and meaningful and fun and reconnect them however they want to reconnect — whether it's through synagogue life, which is obviously the ideal, or through youth group activities," Rovinsky said. "Even if a student joins a Jewish book club, that's a success. Anything to get them engaged."

According to Weil, teens are responding, and getting involved in Jewish life.

Weil came to JSU already engaged in Jewish life, participating in Congregation B'nai Amoona USY and BBYO. But he has found that many of his peers move on to become more involved in Jewish life once they get involved with JSU.

"We want JSU to be a starting point for your Jewish experience and from there, you can find other places to continue your teenage Jewish life," Weil said.

One student at the Ladue JSU group came from a household with one Christian and one Jewish parent, who raised one child Christian and the other child Jewish, Weil said.

The Christian child started attending JSU out of curiosity. "He had this intense yearning to learn about his other parent's religion," Weil said. "And he's really started to identify with Judaism."

Rovinsky said that the JSU are not religious clubs, but rather a "cultural experience," that encourages discussion and debate about topics that matter to teens.

"We focus on common values, ethics and moral dilemmas," said Rovinsky. "We don't preach answers. We let the kids discuss and debate and at the end, we discuss the Jewish approach, or how different denominations of Judaism approach the subject."

JSU started with funding from the

Simon Foundation and the Lubin Green Foundation, and it is wholly supported by private funding from parents and supporters. However, with an annual budget of only \$50,000 to \$60,000 for all four high school groups (including any joint programs held among the groups), Rovinsky said the program is in a constant struggle for funds. Rovinsky said several other schools have expressed interest in the program, but JSU simply cannot afford to expand without more funding. However, Rovinsky notes that all of the JSU clubs are open to anyone, even if they do not attend the club's host school.

But if there are financial constraints, the students involved in the existing clubs do not seem to notice.

Sam Sabol, a junior at Parkway North, and active member in her school's JSU, said it was refreshing to be able to connect with other Jewish students at her school.

"Students at public high schools kind of get lost in the mix of everyday school life. But taking part in something Jewish can really add to your life and develop a stronger connection to your sense of self," Sabol said.

Rovinsky said he has seen numerous teens walk into a JSU meeting, some simply for the free pizza, and end up coming back again and again.

"I get phone calls from parents who were either totally unconnected Jewishly or who were connected but their children weren't, and they'll say, 'Rabbi, thank you so much. I don't know what you're doing, but my kid loves the JSU programs and is interested and questioning and challenging and exploring,'" Rovinsky said.

For more information or to help support JSU, contact Rabbi Michael Rovinsky at rabbimike@jsu.org or call 314-498-6279.

Jewish Student Union schedules fundraiser

There will be a kosher wine-tasting fundraiser for JSU on Sunday, May 6 at the home of Marshall and Bonnie Friedman, 10123 Winding Ridge from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The event will feature kosher wines and *hors d'oeuvres* from around the

world. Wines will be available for purchase by the bottle or the case at special prices. All proceeds will benefit JSU. Tickets are \$75 per person, and valet parking will be provided. For more information or to make a reservation, contact

event co-chairpersons Cyndee Levy at 314-514-0038 or Bonnie Goldmeier at 314-434-9900. For information about joining or supporting JSU, contact Rabbi Mike Rovinsky at 314-498-6279, or email RabbiMike@jsu.org.