



## Solomon Schechter Awards 2007 Outreach to Young Adults

### **GOLD**

Over 900

### **AHAVATH ACHIM SYNAGOGUE**

Atlanta, GA  
404-355-5222

“Today, the majority of individuals in their twenties and early thirties have no congregational affiliations; their affiliation rate is lower than that of any other age group.”[Synagogue 3000 Studies Institute report, *Synagogues That Get It: How Jewish Congregations Are Engaging Young Adults*, pg.2]. Atlanta is no exception, which is why, Ahavath Achim Synagogue (AA), located in Atlanta, Georgia, has made concerted efforts over the past two years to reach out to young professionals, those in their 20’s to 40’s, in our community. Through the creation of various programs and in participation with other community projects/programs AA has established itself within this demographic.

Our efforts began in October 2005 when AA co-sponsored a build with JDate for Habitat for Humanity. This was AA’s first program specifically targeting young professionals outreach. At that time we had about 30 names of young professionals that we contacted. Approximately 50 to 60 people who were in attendance at the event. This event formed the basis for our mailing list.

Our next program in January 2006 was a Friday night service led by singing troop, Shir Harmony, which was followed by a dessert reception of around 40 young professionals. During the course of the evening, the suggestion was made to hold a “parlor—type discussion group” in the rabbi’s home. This idea developed into what is now, the *Jewish View Café*.

The *Jewish View Café* began later that month with 10 people in attendance at AA’s Assistant Rabbi’s home and became AA’s first monthly program targeting young professionals. It has continued to be every fourth Sunday of the month and has since seen significant growth, now attracting approximately 30 participants each month. Those who attend explore current issues in a friendly and informal setting, debate and discuss if and how Jewish values can be applied to these situations and socialize with other young Jewish professionals from around Atlanta.

One of the congregation’s stated objectives over the last two years has been to provide a variety of worship experiences. It was with that goal in mind that we created a monthly alternative musical Shabbat service in June of 2006 called *AAbsolut Shabbat*. The idea behind this service was to attract young people who would not normally attend a Friday night service and would rather opt for dinner or drinks, but would respond to worship of a different character. “Young adults thrive when they are met where they are. They do not want to feel judged for their level of religious practice or knowledge.” [Synagogue 3000 Studies Institute report, *Synagogues That Get It: How Jewish Congregations are Engaging Young Adults*, pg.9] By creating a fun, spiritually connected service with a social dynamic we were able to make services attractive to that population.

The evening begins at 7:30 with a reception that includes light appetizers and both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drink options. As people arrive they are welcomed by the Membership Director and others from our community. This welcoming atmosphere creates an opportunity for people to socialize and feel part of the community. At 8:00, AA’s cantor, who is accompanied by other instrumental musicians, begins the service. *AAbsolut Shabbat* encourages various levels of participation through clapping, dancing, singing (both in English and Hebrew), and a *D’var Torah* in which our rabbis pose questions and ask for feedback from those in attendance. Following the service there is a dessert and coffee oneg. This gives people another chance to socialize reflect on the evenings service. Many attendees stay for an hour or more. Creating an engaging atmosphere is the goal of *AAbsolut Shabbat*.

The first service attracted about 200 people, about half of whom were young professionals. This compares with a regular Friday night service which attracts very few young professionals and is attended by 30 to 40 people. At the service we announced that there was a fishbowl that people could drop their business cards into if they wanted to win a free year’s membership to the synagogue. We used the card information to add names to our email database. The first service was received so well by those who attended that the next service was attended by over 300 people and was reported in several newspapers. The service has maintained its numbers over the last year and now draws 200 to 300 people on a regular basis. Of that number, roughly 75 to 100 are existing members of all ages; the rest are largely unaffiliated young professional singles and couples.

Through the success of programming such as *Jewish View Café* and *AAbsolut Shabbat* we have been able to offer other opportunities for young professionals to attend synagogue events or interact with synagogue professional staff and members. In September 2006 we offered free High Holiday tickets to those who had been in attendance at one or more of



our programs. That month, we also bought a block of tickets to see Matisyahu, an Orthodox reggae performer, in concert. Prior to the concert the Assistant Rabbi and the Director of Membership Services scheduled a dinner. This gave the group a chance to make connections with each other as well as with synagogue staff. This opportunity was offered first to those who had been regular attendees of our programs and then open to our entire email list. In March 2007 we had a Purim Party called *Masks and Madness*. This was a completely social party aimed at this population and received praise by all who attended.

When *AAbsolut Shabbat* was introduced our email list consisted of about 80 email addresses. Through the use of Evite, we advertised this service, and by the day of the event we were up to 300 email addresses. Our email list now contains over 600 addresses of which about 100 are regular attendees of our programs. Our list continues to grow mostly through two means: one is by friends adding other friends to our list and the other is by people adding their own names through a website we created specifically geared to young professionals [www.AAbsolutshabbat.com]. Evites and the website have both been vital means of outreach to this demographic. Young professionals use the web extensively, and often exclusively, as a source of information. "They use email, email distribution lists and websites to coordinate their face-to-face connections. Rather than replace actual community, modern technology facilitates their in-person connections." [Synagogue 3000 Studies Institute report, *Synagogues That Get It. How Jewish Congregations are Engaging Young Adults*, pg.9]

Our success has been demonstrated by the sheer numbers of people who we have been able to attract and who return each month. *AAbsolut Shabbat* now acts as a vehicle of promotion for our congregation. At the beginning of each service we handout a special *AAbsolut Shabbat siddur* along with a sheet which includes highlights of all the month's relevant events. In fact both young singles and couples who are new in town and who are actively seeking a congregation to join have stated that they are interested in exploring a connection with AA -- specifically because they had heard that our synagogue is a good place to belong as a young professional person in town. We have also seen crossover from some of those attending young professionals events who are now attending other synagogue services, including Shabbat morning Torah study.

Few of these people have joined the synagogue and we understand that many will wait until they are married and/or have children before looking for a synagogue with which to affiliate. Our goal is to make sure that these young professionals feel connected to their heritage and community, so that when they make the decision to affiliate they will feel that AA is their spiritual home and will choose to join AA.

Ahavath Achim Synagogue is proud to nominate *Jewish View Café AAbsolut Shabbat* and our other outreach efforts for the 2007 Schechter Awards in the category of Outreach to and Integrating Young Adults/Singles.

#### **GOLD**

250-500

Submitted by Donald Kaye

#### **CONGREGATION B'NAI TORAH**

Atlanta, GA

404 287 0537

One of the weakest areas of engagement for Conservative synagogues has been the time between college graduation, where KOACH finishes, and when young Jews typically join a Conservative synagogue on their own, after getting married or having a child. B'nai Torah has created an active, vibrant young adults group (YAG) which reaches singles and couples ages 23-35 and integrates them into all aspects of congregational life.

The group, which is organized by its members with significant staff support and engagement, has an email list of over 250 contacts, of whom 100 are regular participants in group activities which include religious, social, social action and educational events, including Shabbat dinners, happy hours, classes and outdoor activities. In addition, a core group of YAG members have become regular participants in congregational activities, including Friday night services, classes and holiday activities.

Over 20 members of the group have already become dues-paying members of the synagogue, with many more planning to join in the coming year. They have also taken on volunteer roles in other parts of synagogue life. For example, two members of the group were table hosts for this year's Women's League donor dinner, and others have become active as youth advisors and Torah readers. The program has attracted citywide interest, as the group has been asked to be a cosponsor on community-wide Young Leadership programs, and its chair received an award for outreach cosponsored by the local Jewish newspaper.

#### **GOLD**

Over 900

Submitted by Micah Kleid

#### **BETH EL CONGREGATION OF BALTIMORE**

Baltimore, MD

410-484-0411

Since August 2006, Beth El Congregation in Baltimore has been the only congregation in Baltimore with a full-time, paid Outreach Coordinator. Since then, Jill Spielman has been dedicated to reaching out to all unaffiliated Jews in Baltimore and the surrounding communities in an effort to show them all that Beth El has to offer. As a result, in January 2007, BEYOM (Beth El Young Members) was formed.



The goal of BEYOM was to create a social outlet for all Jewish young adults, singles, couples and families, ages 21-39, with new and innovative programming that would appeal to those generations. With the help of Communications Coordinator Micah Kleid, Ms. Spielman has done just that.

In September a database of young members was created. It included both those people who had already joined the synagogue, but also the children and grandchildren of synagogue members who had not yet joined themselves. To date, that list is comprised of over 1,000 names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

The programming officially began in October with tailgating parties for the Baltimore Ravens. Although the event was heavily advertised to our new mailing list, members and non-members of every generation were invited to attend and over 150 people came to watch the Ravens play the Denver Broncos on our 25-foot projection screen. The event was repeated with equal success in November when the Ravens played the Cincinnati Bengals.

Our largest event to date was on Christmas Eve when we held Rock of Ages at Have A Nice Day Café in downtown Baltimore. With the idea that there are very few social opportunities for Jewish young adults on Christmas Eve, we rented out the entire club, hired a DJ and a live band and watched as over 250 people came out that night.

Other young adult events since then have included our monthly *Parsha* & Pizza classes; a visit from Arthur the Aardvark for those young adults with young children; a wine and beer reception after the *Megillah* reading on *Purim*; a poker night in conjunction with Beth El Brotherhood; "Got *Shabbat*?" Friday night dinners; a live satellite interview with Gene Wilder; a lecture with Rabbi Sid Schwarz, the founder of PANIM; and a *Yom Ha 'Atzmaut* celebration at a hookah lounge in Towson. All of this was made possible by both the \$10,000 budget allotted to the outreach department and the annual salary for the outreach coordinator that was endowed by a handful of synagogue members.

In an effort to make the transition from our young adults attending social events to joining the synagogue, Ms. Spielman worked with the Budget & Finance Committee to create a new dues structure for young adults. Now, the price to join the synagogue, and the option to purchase no seats for the High Holidays if they wish to join their families at other synagogues, has made it both enticing and affordable for this generation to join.

#### **SILVER**

500-900

Submitted by Margie Gutnik

#### **BETH EL SYNAGOGUE**

Omaha, NE

402-492-8550

Over the past 18 months, we held 3 events specifically designed to attract 20-and 30-somethings (both singles and couples), the purpose being to connect congregants and unaffiliated Jewish young adults and singles in our community as well as get them more actively involved in the synagogue.

The numbers attending have varied from 40 at a Sushi & Schmoozing social to 56 at a Mexican and Margaritas Shabbat dinner (41 adults + 15 children) to 30 (+ 8 children) at a Vodka & Latke cooking night for Hanukkah. The attendance was a mix of congregants and unaffiliated, single and married. The charge for each event was \$10 per person with free babysitting included in the 2nd and 3rd events. Less than \$300 was allocated from the synagogue budget to cover all three events.

"Sushi and Schmoozing" in April 2006 was held at a restaurant as a purely social evening to see if there was interest in any programming for this age group. This event was the most expensive and was partially underwritten (\$250) by 2 families (parents of this age group) to keep the attendees' costs down.

Both the second and third events were held at the synagogue and required and received much more volunteer involvement. The chairmen did everything from menu planning to shopping, cooking, setting tables, making decorations and name tags, serving and cleaning up after the event.

In July 2006, we held a Mexican and Margaritas Shabbat dinner only for 20-and 30-somethings only, following our congregational Kabbalat Shabbat services. After services, the parents had the option of the children eating dinner with them or going into the babysitting room where they would have dinner. The remainder of the evening was a relaxing Shabbat dinner and socializing with a non-traditional menu.

The third event, in December 2006 in conjunction with Hanukkah was "Vodka and Latkes." Held on a Saturday night at the synagogue, the attendees were divided into "teams" that were each given a grocery sack of ingredients, a non-traditional latke recipe and space in the kitchen to work. Munchies and wine (donated) were available while the teams cooked. The finished product was sampled along with flavored vodkas. Costs were kept in check by purchasing decorations on sale and getting door prizes and most of the alcohol donated by congregants.

By offering these informal social programs, Beth El Synagogue is establishing a welcoming environment that connects young Jews with each other and creates positive experiences within the context of synagogue life.



**SILVER**

500-900

Submitted by Jonathan Langman

**HERZL-NER TAMID**

Mercer Island, WA

206 232 8555

Formed in 2005, HNT Next Generation is a community of young Jewish adults that is part of Herzl-Ner Tamid Conservative Congregation. Our mission is to provide a spiritual and social community for young Jewish adults within the framework of HNT. All of our events are open to all; in this way we are able to welcome all those who are interested in being part of Seattle's young adult community. Our programming encompasses spiritual, social, and social action events throughout the year. In total, we have had between 900 and 1,000 attendees at our events over the past two years.

Our main goals are to create a vibrant community for the current HNT young adults, to attract other young adults to HNT, while at the same time to provide programming to all those interested in connecting to their Jewish roots. We partner with other local Jewish organizations in order to reach as broad a spectrum of people as possible.

HNT Next Generation has led the way for synagogue supported young adult programs in the Seattle area. Following on our success, several other synagogues have begun similar programs, thereby increasing the amount of programming available to Seattle's young adults.

**SILVER**

Over 900

Submitted by Elie Greenberg

**ADAS ISRAEL CONGREGATION**

Washington, DC

202-362-4433

The young professionals program here at Adas Israel has been in existence for several years but its pace has recently picked up dramatically. In the past, the program and all of the events therein had been organized by volunteers. There were no identifiable objectives and the events were scarce. There is now a full time staff person who coordinates all of the young professionals events and works with the email distribution list on a regular basis to keep Adas Israel's young professionals updated. We have branded a new logo and have given the entire program a fresh new look and feel.

YP@AJ has grown significantly in the last year. Our e-mail distribution list has increased by over two hundred names, putting us at over 700 young professionals in the Greater Washington area to whom we can reach out. Our goal is to meet at least every other month and to provide meaningful social and holiday-related programs for 22-to 40-year-olds. We have achieved that goal this year and continue to get the highest attendance at our young professionals events out of any other synagogue in the region.

Our Purim wine and cheese reception this March brought in our best turnout yet -- over 250 young professionals crammed into one of our large ballrooms to drink an unlimited supply of wine, snack on crackers, hummus, and triangular shaped cheeses, compare costumes, and exchange words with friends. All this for a mere 55\$ cover charge. It was an incredible evening, "The best Jewish get-together ever in DC" according to an active young professional in the Jewish community. With regard to budget, the synagogue underwrites the YP activities in the amount of several thousand dollars per year and some of the activities like the one described above are self supporting.

YP@AI also hosts a series of events to encourage holiday involvement to unaffiliated young professionals. Project Reconnect" is a special program that offers free High Holiday tickets to anyone who was once active in USY. Another program called "Kol Dichfin" ensures that any young adult who wishes to participate in a' Pesach, Seder has a place to go.

With constant exposure in and outside the local Jewish community, YP@AI and its great successes has not gone unseen. We frequently receive requests to co-sponsor community events and oftentimes comply, which reflects positively on the program, showing that we are community players. When teaming up with the local Jewish Community Center, Theater J, or the Sixth & I Historic Synagogue.(Adas Israel's 2nd building), YP@AI only gets more exposure and our list continues to grow as it reaches out to wider and more varied audiences. We have been featured in various publications such as The Washington Jewish Week, The Chronicle, Geshet City newsletter, etc.

I invite you to browse through this scrapbook where you will get an idea of the progress this program has made in the last year.

**HONORABLE MENTION**

Over 900

Submitted by Rabbi Bradley Greenstein

**NEVEH SHALOM**

Portland, OR

503-246-8831

**VISION**

Hinenu will grow to great numbers, be a force to be reckoned with in the synagogue and Portland Jewish community. Our events and intimate gatherings will connect the unaffiliated to the pulse of Jewish life at Neveh Shalom. We will go on retreats and camping together, we will travel to Israel together.



## **TODAY**

We have committed and productive co-chairs. We have a dedicated committee and a new updated website (www.hinenu.org.) We have made a name for ourselves in the Portland Jewish community as the only flourishing group for young adults attached to a synagogue. We are a growing group of 60+ young Jewish couples and singles. We have tremendous support from the synagogue and eagerly hope for recognition from United Synagogue.

## **TOMMORROW**

The prominent sociologist of American Jewry, Steven M. Cohen just recently released a new study with recommendations for the future survival of the Jewish people. He gives three recommendations: (Cohen 2007)

- Greater linkage among Jewish educational opportunities for children such as camps, schools and Israel trips
- **Greater communal funding for cultural, social and religious initiatives that attract young adults**
- Community-funded rabbis who will focus on conversion.

The newest member of Neveh Shalom (joined with his wife 2/16/07) writes:

“I have also gone from having no Jewish friends, to now having two very good Jewish friends that need mentioning here. I met Anna and Michael at a Hinenu event during Sukkot. Having a couple our age that we can share our stories with, engage in dialogue with and celebrate the holidays with has been extremely beneficial in fostering our Jewish environment, not to mention a lot of good times. Being able to experience their Judaism and hear their experiences has only enhanced my journey. They have been extremely supportive of my conversion; Michael has become something of a mentor to me. I am most grateful for their friendship and insight. It will be exciting to continue to share with them and grow our friendship.”

We have all heard voices from Jewish community, both local and beyond, that ask: “Why don’t young adults affiliate?” “What is there for people between *b’nei mitzvah* and bris?” “Where is young adult energy in congregational life?” “Where is the next generation of Jewish leaders?” Congregation Neveh Shalom is proud to have an answer **HINENU... HERE WE ARE!**

## **HONORABLE MENTION**

250-500

Submitted by Roland Roth

## **CONGREGATION BETH SHALOM**

Wilmington, DE

302-654-4462

One of our most successful new initiatives in the last two years has been our **3<sup>rd</sup> Fridays @ CBS** program, specifically targeting Jewish people in their twenties and thirties, regardless of Conservative backgrounds (although most are). Our congregation had no formal programs for people in this demographic before our new Director of Education and Programming arrived in August, 2005, and his being thirty years old probably was a catalyst in making this happen! The 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of the month seemed to be a uniquely well placed Friday in each month that did not conflict with major holiday weekends and seemed like a good fit for the first few people that were approached about this program.

Publicity started with emails and phone calls and the program kicked off in November, 2005. The set-up was painfully simple: 7:30pm Kabbalat Shabbat service, led by one of the people in their twenties or thirties, a *d’var Torah* by another youngish adult, and dessert that another 3<sup>rd</sup> Fridays person brought. The idea was that people could eat beforehand, come for a late service (helped those who worked late), and then stay afterwards and schmooze.

The first time we had a Fridays program (the name, of course, designed to be kept as simple as possible to keep those with crazy schedules from having to think too much about it) it drew over twenty young adults from all walks of life! It was a smash hit. People stayed and schmoozed until after 11pm. The following month, again, over twenty people in attendance. Each month since then, with the exception of one month, has had at least fifteen people in attendance, always with a few new faces. This program was not specifically designated for singles, or young couples, or married couples, or those with or without children. It is designed simply for anyone in their 20’s or 30’s who is Jewish or considering conversion. We do not discriminate in any way and in fact have received “new blood” from non-Conservative synagogues who know we have this program and they send their twenties and thirties over to our program as well.

Now with a core committee of three or four, including the Director of Education and Programming, calls are made to over forty individuals about a week before the **3<sup>rd</sup>** Friday of each month letting them know that the program is coming up and that they are invited.

The keys are these: It’s free. There’s no RSVP required. All are welcome. Beyond that, it’s casual, low-key, and designed for those with busy schedules. Has it resulted in people “hanging out,” going to dinner, dating, and relationships forming? Absolutely. It has even resulted in a weekly “Gray’s Anatomy” viewing party at one member’s house.

Some have asked if we’ll start a 1<sup>st</sup> Fridays for people in their 40’s and 50’s and that’s a potential option that we’re putting on the programming table for 5768/2007-2008! Having a successful 3<sup>rd</sup> Fridays CBS program 17 out of 18 months is a great start!

