

APRIL 2010 IN UKRAINE

Jewish Life in Dnipropetrovsk, Dniprodzerzhinsk, Krivoi Rog, Zaporizhya, and Kyiv

The writer visited Ukraine in April 2010, arriving in Kyiv on April 15 and proceeding to Dnipropetrovsk the same day. From Dnipropetrovsk, she made three brief trips to other Jewish population centers in eastern Ukraine: Dniprodzerzhinsk, Kryvyy Rih (Krivoi Rog), and Zaporizhya. She then returned to Kyiv for several days, leaving the country on April 28.

Ukraine is a country somewhat smaller in territory than the American state of Texas. It shares a lengthy border with Russia to its north and east, and is bounded by Belarus to its north, and Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary to its west. Romania and Moldova are its southwest neighbors, and its southern boundaries are the Black Sea and the Sea of

Azov. Ukraine is composed of 24 provinces or *oblasts*, one autonomous republic (Crimea) and two cities with special status, the capital city of Kyiv and the Crimean port of Sevastopol, which hosts the Russian Black Sea naval fleet. These port arrangements were a subject of negotiations between Russia and a newly-elected government in Ukraine immediately prior to the writer's visit.¹



The estimated populations of Ukraine's largest cities in 2009 are: Kyiv, 2,765,531; Kharkiv, 1,245,964; Dnipropetrovsk, 1,017,514; and Odesa, 1,008,627. The estimated population of Zaporizhya is 781,643; Kryvyy Rih (Krivoi Rog), 675,565; and Dniprodzerzhinsk (north of Dnipropetrovsk), 245,082.²

¹ Map: http://www.intute.ac.uk/worldguide/maps2/1051_a.jpg. Retrieved May 17, 2010. Comments on Ukraine-Russia relations are below.

² <http://www.citypopulation.de/Ukraine-Cities.html>. Retrieved May 17, 2010.

The total population of Ukraine was estimated at 45,700,395 in mid-2009,³ a precipitous decline from its estimated 1991 population of approximately 53 million.⁴ The estimated mid-2009 birthrate was 9.6 per 1,000 population, and the estimated mid-2009 death rate was 15.81 per 1,000 population, that is, the number of deaths is substantially greater than the number of births. The life expectancy at birth in 2009 was 62.3 for men and 73.5 for women.⁵

The **mood in Ukraine** was generally disconsolate, reflecting a long and unusually harsh winter that had sapped the energy of many Ukrainians, continuing concern about a severe economic recession, and uncertainty about a newly-elected government. A modest recovery during the first quarter of 2010 had done little to lift the gloom that seemed to pervade many discussions on economic issues in the various cities visited by the writer. Several individuals observed that the gross domestic product had fallen by 15 percent in 2009, unemployment remained unacceptably high, and many working people were paid abysmally low salaries that did not cover the cost of everyday necessities. Corruption remained rampant and robbed people of their dignity as they were forced to pay bribes for basic services. Banks were unable to extend credit, thus hindering the development of new businesses or expansion of existing enterprises. However, inflation had stabilized at 15 to 20 percent, allowing individuals and organizations some confidence in their capacity to plan effectively. Philanthropic organizations had lost major donors, but some had acquired mid-level and smaller-scale contributors who previously had been intimidated by the munificence of former financial barons whose wealth had dissipated over the past 18 months.

A much-anticipated **national election** in February brought the ineffective tenure of Orange Revolution hero and pro-Western Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko to a welcome end. Having assumed office in 2004 with promises to implement massive reforms, sweep away corruption, and join Europe, Yushchenko became mired in infighting with Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, a one-time ally turned rival. Their very public contretemps became a bitter five-year standoff contributing to governmental paralysis. Yushchenko received a mere five percent of the vote in the first round of presidential elections in December 2009.



Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and Former President Viktor Yushchenko once were close allies.

Photo: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4035789.stm>, January 13, 2010. Retrieved May 20, 2010.

³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>. Retrieved May 17, 2010.

⁴ Demographic trends in Russia are similar. Population loss in both countries reflects poor health care, inadequate nutrition, substance abuse (tobacco, alcohol, narcotics), aging of the population, low fertility, high mortality, emigration of younger age cohorts, impoverishment, and environmental degradation.

⁵ *World Factbook*, *ibid*. Life expectancy in Russia is 59.3 for men and 73.1 for women.

As his standing eroded during his last months in office, Yushchenko splurged on a number of populist spending measures – including a 20 percent increase in pension payments – that further stoked inflation and delayed implementation of an International Monetary Fund assistance agreement. Stirring more controversy and consistent with his policy of encouraging a **strong Ukrainian national identity**, Yushchenko conferred the title of *Hero of Ukraine* posthumously on Stepan Bandera, a regional leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), a movement that aimed to free Ukraine of all foreign domination – Russian/Soviet in the east and Polish in the west – in the 1930's. When Nazi forces occupied Ukraine during World War II, some Ukrainian volunteers associated with the OUN collaborated with the invaders in organizing the murder of thousands of local Jews during the Holocaust.⁶ The award to Bandera, perhaps a logical component of Yushchenko's exaltation of Ukrainian nationalism, engendered a strong sense of **unease among Ukrainian Jews** that lingered even after the new Ukrainian government rendered the honor invalid on April 2.

Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian machine-politician perceived as supported by corrupt industrialists from the Russian-speaking eastern half of the country, defeated Ms. Tymoshenko in a run-off **election for Prime Minister** on February 7. Yanukovich's tenure to date has been controversial. In a comprehensive deal (Kharkiv Accords) with neighboring Russia reached on April 21, Ukraine agreed to extend the lease of Russia's Black Sea naval base in Sevastopol (Crimea) until 2043⁷ in exchange for less expensive natural gas from Russia, which controls almost all of Ukrainian energy resources. Critics were quick to note that the newly negotiated Russian discount merely reduced the price to the then current international market level and obligates Ukraine to purchase more gas in subsequent years, perhaps more than it needs. Ukraine, commented these observers, could have negotiated an even lower price or demanded tougher terms for the base extension because it owns the Ukrainian pipelines through which Russian gas flows to Europe.

Russian President Dimitry Medvedev, left, and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in Kyiv after reaching agreement on trade in May 2010.

Photo:

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/International/2010/05/18/Medvedev-Yanukovich-ink-accords/UPI-53941274187956/.

Retrieved May 20, 2010.



Following conclusion of the naval base/gas supply agreement, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin proposed a merger on April 30 between the Russian energy giant Gazprom and the grossly corrupt Ukrainian energy company Naftohaz, as well as a number of other deals in industry, nuclear energy, aviation, telecommunications, and

⁶ Bandera later went into exile and subsequently was murdered by the Soviet KGB in Munich in 1959.

⁷ The significance of the Russian Black Sea fleet is small in terms of actual military power. However, it is symbolically important and its presence is problematic for Ukraine, Georgia, and Turkey.

transport that would tie the Ukrainian economy more closely to that of Russia. Prime Minister Putin's proposals generated surprise among Ukrainian officials who clearly wanted a dependable supply of natural gas, but were unprepared for other elements of a Russian bear hug.

In early May, journalists at several Ukrainian media outlets alleged that Russia-style censorship was being imposed on commercial television, in particular. Some speculated that new editorial policies were enforced by private network owners as a means of preemptively protecting their businesses from harassment by the new government or by returning Russian business interests.⁸

The **changing Ukrainian-Russian relationship** was a topic of many discussions during the writer's visit. Only one individual, a foreign recipient of substantial charitable funds from Ukrainian oligarchs, expressed confidence in the new Ukrainian government, asserting that increased Russian influence will bring stability to Ukraine. Western Europe, he said, never did very much for Ukraine, and the pro-Western orientation of former President Viktor Yushchenko only increased tension with Russia. Other interlocutors expressed concern, noting that Russian economic assistance obviates the need for Ukraine to implement tough, but necessary economic reforms. Further, Ukrainian dependence on Russian gas permits Russia to gain leverage over Europe by altering the amount of gas that flows through Ukrainian pipelines to Europe. The Russian Black Sea fleet now is guaranteed a long-term presence in Ukraine and a base for exerting influence in Crimea and the nearby unstable North Caucasus area. Observers also expressed concern that freedom of the press in Ukraine would be sharply curbed under Russian influence. Russia, said one foreigner with long experience in the post-Soviet states, "has many tools" with which to "manipulate" Ukraine and would use these as it sees fit.

However, even among those most wary of expanding Russian influence over Ukraine, few anticipated any new problems for Ukrainian Jews as Jews. The Ukrainian nationalism of Viktor Yushchenko continues to haunt many Jews, they said, but it is unlikely to continue under the new government. Viktor Yanukovich, they continued, is pragmatic; he desires internal political stability and economic growth. For the latter, he requires the partnership of wealthy Jewish businessmen. **Antisemitism** always has existed in Ukraine and will continue to exist, but it will not become extreme. Unlike many countries in western Europe, both the Ukrainian government and people are well disposed toward Israel, in part because over 400,000 Jews of Ukrainian background now reside in Israel and many retain personal and/or business ties with Ukraine. Another factor, said observers, is that prejudice against Arabs is much stronger in Ukrainian society than bigotry toward Jews.

⁸ Soviet-style censorship was widespread in Ukrainian media before the 2004 Orange Revolution that brought Viktor Yushchenko to power. Freedom of speech and much more liberal media policies are considered among the main achievements of his five-year tenure as president. Several prominent Russia-based journalists fled Russia and established new media careers in Ukraine during this period.

Reasonable estimates of the number of Jews in Ukraine range from 180,000 to 250,000. Almost all respondents report declining enrollments in Jewish day schools, summer camps, and other institutions targeting younger-generation Jews. Although the low quality of some such institutions may account for some decrease in numbers, it is likely that reduced population simply presents a smaller pool of potential participants. The high proportion of intermarried families also yields a large number of people of partial Jewish ancestry who are not halachically Jewish and thus are ineligible for many programs operated under Orthodox Jewish auspices.⁹

The writer interviewed 55 people during her travels in Ukraine, including five diplomats attached to foreign representations. The diplomats are not quoted by name in this review.

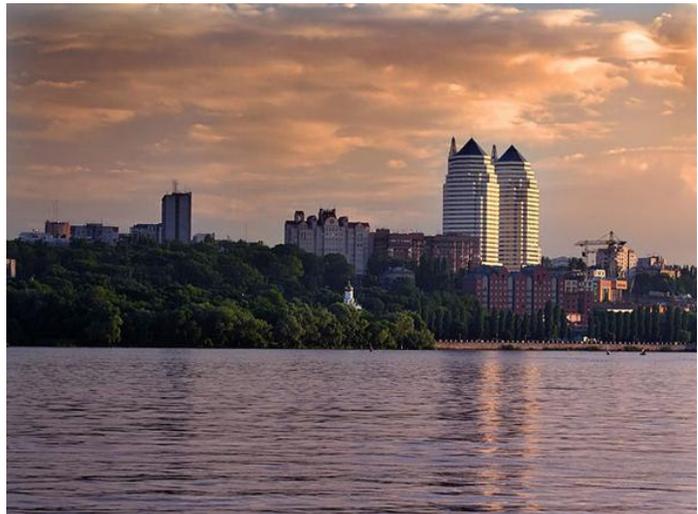
Dnipropetrovsk

Founded in 1778 on the banks of the Dnipro River, Dnipropetrovsk was known until 1926 as Ekaterinoslav in honor of Catherine II (Catherine the Great) whose troops conquered the territory. As the Soviet Union consolidated its power in the 1920's, place names associated with the tsarist period were changed to reflect Communist control.¹⁰ Currently the third largest city in Ukraine, following Kyiv and Kharkiv, the population of Dnipropetrovsk is slightly over one million. It was a closed city until mid-1990 due to its extensive military industry, particularly *Yuzhmash*, a producer of intercontinental ballistic missiles, booster rockets, and related products.

The two overly large apartment buildings overlooking the Dnipro River in Dnipropetrovsk in the photo at right are typical of grandiose new architecture in Ukraine.

Photo:

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8b/Dnipropetrovsk2006.jpg>. Retrieved May 21, 2010.



⁹ The writer encountered a growing number of Orthodox rabbis who are now quietly admitting non-halachic Jews to their programs. Without exception, they acknowledged that such individuals are critical to the sustenance of such programs.

The rate of intermarriage among Jews in Ukraine is widely believed to be 80 to 90 percent.

¹⁰ Grigoriy Ivanovich Petrovsky (1878-1958) was a prominent local pre-revolutionary political agitator, exile, and subsequent political figure in the city. His family name was combined with that of the Dnipro River to produce the current city name of Dnipropetrovsk.

Dnipropetrovsk continues to be a center of heavy industry, hosting factories producing cast iron, rolled metal, pipes, mining and agricultural machinery, large appliances, and transportation equipment. Other prominent industries in the city include food processing and apparel manufacture, the latter for European firms. Notwithstanding the current economic crisis that affects the local economy, just as it affects the remainder of the country, Dnipropetrovsk remains a relatively wealthy city in Ukraine.¹¹

Historically, the city has been an important source of leadership for the former Soviet Union and for post-Soviet Ukraine. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, former Ukrainian Prime Minister Valery Pustovoitenko, and former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma all spent significant portions of their careers in important leadership positions in the city. Yulia Tymoshenko, the immediate past Prime Minister of Ukraine, is a native of Dnipropetrovsk.

Jews have lived in the region of Ekaterinoslav, part of the old Pale of Settlement, since the late eighteenth century. By 1897, the Jewish population of Ekaterinoslav had reached 41,240, more than one-third of the population of the entire city at that time. Pogroms occurred in 1881, 1882, 1905, and 1918; the 1905 attacks were the most devastating, killing 97 and wounding more than 100 people. Prior to the consolidation of Soviet authority in the 1920's, the Jewish community was highly organized, maintaining a diverse network of Jewish religious, educational, and cultural institutions. It was an important center of both Zionism and the Chabad movement. A small Karaite community had its own prayer house.

Nineteen years after the demise of the Soviet Union, Dnipropetrovsk is once again an important center of both Zionism and the Chabad movement. The State of Israel enjoys a robust image in the city, reflecting substantial emigration from Dnipropetrovsk to Israel, continuing bonds between local Jews and their family members and friends in Israel, the presence of many Israelis as teachers and other community professionals, a stream of capable *shlichim* (emissaries) of Israeli organizations - the Jewish Agency, the Joint Distribution Committee, and Nativ (formerly Lishkat Hakesher) - and the pro-Israel views of Chief Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki. Regularly scheduled commercial air service connects Dnipropetrovsk and Ben Gurion airport in Israel. Estimates of the current **Jewish population** of Dnipropetrovsk range from 25,000 to 40,000; it is the second largest Jewish population center in Ukraine, surpassed only by Kyiv.

Dnipropetrovsk is the **center of the Chabad movement in Ukraine**. Honoring the historic presence of Chabad in the city that continued into the 1930's, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson appointed Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki to the post of Chief Rabbi of Dnipropetrovsk in 1990. Rabbi Kaminezki is widely

¹¹ Two caveats are important in considering the economic capacity of Dnipropetrovsk. First, the city lacks the high-quality academic and intellectual infrastructure that is found in other large Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Donetsk. Second, many of the Jewish oligarchs who powered the city's growth in the 1990's and earliest years of the 21st century have left Dnipropetrovsk and have resettled in Kyiv or in western Europe. It is too early to predict the impact of their departure, but many observers fear that some or all will turn their attention elsewhere.

recognized as the most effective large-city community rabbi in all of the post-Soviet successor states

1. As in 2009, the rising **Menorah Center**, an almost 44,000 square meter Chabad Jewish community center designed to resemble a seven-branch menorah, was a major topic of discussion both among Dnipropetrovsk Jews and about Dnipropetrovsk Jews during the time of the writer's visit. Scheduled to open in September/October 2011, construction is proceeding apace. The structure surrounds the Golden Rose Choral Synagogue on two sides and dwarfs it. Its tallest tower will be 22 stories in height; a section resembling three stepped towers is rising to the right of the synagogue (as seen from the street) and another section of three stepped towers is at a right angle to the first, is rising directly in back of the synagogue. Both construction and furnishing of the Center is being financed entirely by Hennadiy Boholubov and Ihor Kolomoisky, principals of **PrivatBank**.¹²

The Menorah Center is “a big responsibility,” said Vyechesav (Zelig, Slavik) Brez, Executive Director of the Chabad Philanthropic Fund of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community. The programs within the structure, he continued, must be vibrant and encourage Jewish life.

Both the rising Menorah Center and the Golden Rose Choral Synagogue can be seen in an artist's rendering at right. The grey pillared structure is the Golden Rose Choral Synagogue. To its left and rear (as seen from the street) is a small Jewish community center owned by Chabad; six windows of this center are visible in the depiction at right. The Joint Distribution Committee operates various community activities on one floor and the remaining space contains Chabad offices.



The major entrance to the Menorah Center will be at the small tower immediately to the right of the synagogue (as seen from the street). A long and broad corridor extending from the entrance through the remaining towers will be a “**Jewish mall**,” Mr. Brez continued, its walls faced with replicas of facades of old synagogues in the region. Interspersed between the synagogue facades will be entrances into a kosher supermarket, a Jewish book and artifacts store, a subsidized pharmacy, a business center and bank branch, a notary, a travel agency, several kosher restaurants, a banquet/wedding hall, a 350-seat conference/concert hall, a lateral expansion of the synagogue prayer hall, and a children's synagogue.

¹² Mr. Boholubov also is lay President of the Chabad **Philanthropic Fund of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community** (Благотворительный фонд Днепрпетровского еврейского общины), which supports Chabad interests in the city, and Mr. Kolomoisky is lay President of **Всеукраинский Еврейский Конгресс** (lit. translation, **All-Ukraine Jewish Congress** or English acronym **VEK**, also known in English as **United Jewish Community of Ukraine**). Both former residents of Dnipropetrovsk, Mr. Boholubov now spends most of his time in London and Mr. Kolomoisky lives in Geneva.

The main corridor also will host the entrance to a **Museum of Jewish History and Culture in Ukraine**, the only institution of its kind in the country.¹³ In a subsequent discussion with Dr. Igor Schupak, Director of **Tkumah – the Ukrainian Holocaust Research, Education, and Memorial Center** in Dnipropetrovsk, the writer learned of plans for the Museum.¹⁴ The Museum, stressed Dr. Schupak, will cover much more than the Holocaust; the Holocaust, he said, must be seen in the context of regional Jewish history and culture, including Jewish life before and after the Shoah (Holocaust). Jewish life in Belarus and Moldova will be included in the Museum's purview, he continued, because international borders changed several times during the period covered by the Museum and were artificial constructs in the larger story.

The Museum itself will contain **seven exhibition halls**. Dr. Schupak outlined these as (1) Bible and Torah; (2) Judaism, Synagogue, and Jewish Education; (3) Jewish History in Eastern Europe [including Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus] in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries; (4) the Holocaust; (5) Jewish Art and Literature, including displays of Judaica donated by local private collectors; (6) modern Jewish life in Ukraine and the world; and (7) temporary/traveling exhibits. Advice on the development of all of these halls was being sought from internationally-recognized experts, including Dr. Leonid Finberg, a prominent sociologist and Director of the Judaica Institute in Kyiv. In addition to the permanent exhibits, said Dr. Schupak, the Museum will prepare **mobile exhibits** for use in schools, local museums, and other local institutions. It will develop **educational materials and hold seminars** for students and teachers. The Museum also will be the **base for Tkumah**, Dr. Schupak continued, providing office space for its research personnel and housing its extensive files.

The upper floors of the Menorah Center will include a **hotel** of about 90 rooms, an extended-stay **apartment hotel** for individuals coming to the city for a week or more, and a **hostel** with 130 beds in rooms for four to six people. The hostel will permit the holding of Shabbatons and the accommodation of visiting youth delegations at a reasonable cost.

Another section of the Menorah Center will host the **hesed** or welfare center operated by the **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee**. Rabbi Kaminezki is determined that Dnipropetrovsk Jewish elderly continue to feel comfortable in all of the facilities and programs operated in the city by Chabad. All areas of the Menorah Center will be handicapped-accessible, said Mr. Brez.

The Menorah Center also will include **program space** for various children's activities, meeting rooms of different sizes, and Chabad community offices. It will not, however, contain any physical fitness or sports premises.

¹³ The projected museum is the only comprehensive Jewish museum anywhere in the post-Soviet states or eastern Europe.

¹⁴ See pages 23-24 for information about Tkumah.

The Chabad community hopes to **generate Menorah operating funds** by renting office space in the Center to various businesses, a common strategy for managers of Jewish community facilities throughout the post-Soviet states. Some of the businesses, such as the ground floor kosher restaurants and various shops, will be geared toward visitors to the Center; however, management of the Center also is seeking unrelated commercial firms that find the Center convenient for their office needs. Hotel guests will be charged market rates for their accommodations, and use of all meeting and conference rooms will require fees. A small underground parking garage may provide another revenue stream.

Clearly, many Dnipropetrovsk Jews are pleased by the prominence of the Menorah Center, viewing it as a **symbol of Jewish consequence and continuity** in an environment that has too frequently deprecated or humiliated them. The Menorah Center represents to many an emergence, a new sense of self-respect. Its height and bulk are visible from multiple points in the city, a reality that many find assuring. Some local Jews, however, view the Menorah Center as ostentatious, a flamboyant and potentially dangerous monument in a culture that often has turned on its Jews. Outside the city, especially in Kyiv, the writer found opinion uniformly negative. Concern was expressed not because of envy that the Center is located in another city, but because the structure is pretentious, is likely to incur heavy operating costs that a shrinking Jewish population will be unable to support, and is expected to promote a philosophy of Jewish life that is uncomfortable for many Jews.

Jewish Education and Culture

2. **Beit Tsindlikht**, a Chabad-operated year-round **preschool**, is currently in its sixth year of operation in attractive, newly renovated premises – a two-story rectangular building - near the center of the city. Its rooms are spacious and well-equipped, and its grounds include a variety of play apparatus. Highly regarded in Dnipropetrovsk, the preschool currently enrolls 150 children between the ages of 2½ and six in space intended for 140.¹⁵

The summer program is somewhat less formal than the highly structured school-year curriculum and includes swimming lessons in a portable outdoor pool installed on the school grounds for the summer months. Another feature of the summer program is excursions to local parks and other attractions.

Beit Tsindlikht pupils are divided among six groups according to age. Two of these groups, with a total of 51 children, constitute a *heder* with an enhanced Hebrew-language program taught by Israeli teachers. Ninety-five percent of all pupils at Beit

¹⁵ The lead gift for renovation of the building housing the preschool was provided by wealthy industrialist Victor Pinchuk, who named the facility in memory of his maternal grandparents. A native of Dnipropetrovsk, Mr. Pinchuk is married to the daughter of Leonid Kuchma, a past president of Ukraine, and now spends most of his time in Kyiv. He is among the Ukrainian oligarchs who derived great economic benefit from government favor.

Tsindlikht are halachically Jewish; the remaining five percent are from intermarried families who have a strong relationship with the Chabad community.

According to Principal Yudit Baram, 90 percent of the youngsters go on to the Chabad day school/heder/machon following Beit Tsindlikht preschool. She receives reports from all elementary schools receiving Beit Tsindlikht youngsters that they are prepared well for first grade.

Tuition fees on a sliding scale are charged for all pupils. The full charge is approximately \$44 per month, said Ms. Baram. In response to a question, she said that only five to ten percent of families pay the full fee and five or six children are enrolled without any cost to their families.

Addressing the issue of overcrowding at Beit Tsindlikht, Ms. Baram showed the author plans for an extension to the building. The extension would include classrooms for two additional groups of pupils as well as an indoor recreation facility for use during inclement weather. At the time, Ms. Baram was unaware that the Pinchuk donor family had vetoed such an extension, expressing the view that a larger facility would reduce the outdoor play space that is such a vital component of the success of the school.



Yudit Baram, an Israeli who directs the Beit Tsindlikht Chabad preschool in Dnipropetrovsk, is considered a very capable administrator. However, her plans for expanding the school at its current site, have been vetoed by the family that provided the lead gift for renovating the current school building.

Photo: the writer.

Instead, current pupils whose families reside on the east bank of the Dnipro River will be directed to enroll in a new Chabad preschool that is due to open in fall of 2010 at the Beit Chana college facility. Ten children already are registered for the east bank program; Chabad anticipates a first-year enrollment of about 25 and an eventual capacity of about 50 preschoolers at Beit Chana.¹⁶

Additionally, another group of young children, some as young as 18 months old, participate in a smaller Chabad **early childhood program** in the center of the city. Located in renovated premises in an older building, the program is known as **Ilana** in memory of a former participant.

¹⁶ For more information about Beit Chana, see pages 21-23.

3. **School #144**, which bears the formal name of Levi Yitzhak Shneerson Ohr Avner Jewish Day School, occupies a three-building campus used as a boarding school during the Soviet period. The main building houses 260 to 270 youngsters in grades one through eleven in a general curriculum¹⁷ with a modest Jewish studies program. (See below.) Another 152 pupils are enrolled in more intensive Chabad religious programs, divided between a yeshiva katana for boys in a second building and a machon for girls in a third building. The machon facility also accommodates ORT computer classrooms for the entire school.

At its peak census in the late 1990's, the school enrolled close to 700 youngsters, most in the general program. At that time, it was the largest Jewish day school in all of the post-Soviet states and one of the largest in all of Europe. Although the total 2009-2010 **enrollment** of approximately 420 youngsters is comparable to that of 2008-2009, the raw number of pupils in the general program is decreasing while the raw number of children enrolled in the more religious yeshiva katana and machon is increasing. The growth of the Chabad religious programs reflects the increasing influence of Chabad in the city, whereas the decreasing enrollment in the general studies program reflects both Jewish demographic losses and a perception that the general studies program is inferior to that in many other city schools.

In terms of demography, Principal Leonid Ganopolsky and Director of Religious Studies Rabbi Meir Ostrovsky readily acknowledge that 20 to 30 percent of children in the lower grades of the general school are Jewish only according to the Israel Law of Return (which requires that only one grandparent be Jewish), not according to halacha (Jewish law, which defines Jewish ethnicity according to matrilineal descent). The admission of an increasingly large number of non-halachically Jewish youngsters is required to maintain the school census at a level necessary to assure quality in the general studies program, they said. The family situation of each non-halachically Jewish pupil is evaluated to be sure that each child's home situation is compatible with goals that the school seeks to advance; in most cases, the Jewish father attends synagogue with some regularity. The high intermarriage rate and low Jewish birth rate means that this problem will increase from year to year, said Rabbi Ostrovsky.

Principal Leonid Ganopolsky and Rabbi Meir Ostrovsky grapple with balancing a declining Jewish population with the need to maintain a high-quality general studies program.

Photo: the writer.



¹⁷ Ukraine currently is in transition to a new school curriculum from a Soviet-era 10-year public education system with no fourth grade; under the Soviet model, children entered school at age seven and graduated from high school after grade 11 at age 17. Reforms now in progress will lead to a 12-year system with school entry at age six and graduation at age 18. The first cohort of youngsters to have entered school under the new reforms is now in ninth grade.

Improving the quality of the general studies program in School #144 has been a priority of Dnipropetrovsk Chabad for several years. The day school competes with specialized public schools that offer enhanced programs in mathematics, science, computer technology, or foreign languages. Although technically free of charge, families with children at such schools often pay hefty monthly fees for teacher salary bonuses, advanced technology, extra class hours, security, maintenance, and other features. New private schools offer smaller classes and the expectation that tuition-based programs provide higher-quality education. Other schools also offer more attractive physical facilities and extra-curricular programs. Corruption in pursuit of good

grades is widespread; teachers expect bribes, sometimes in the guise of birthday presents and often more blatantly with cash extended in envelopes routinely at the beginning of each grading period.



The main building of the School #144 campus is seen in the photo at left.

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.

Rabbi Ostrovsky lamented that it is increasingly **difficult to find good teachers**. They have become corrupt in response to poor salaries and a government compensation system that does not reward experience or advanced degrees, he said. Nonetheless, he continued, School #144 has succeeded in hiring some excellent teachers by offering bonuses to state salaries¹⁸ and providing a good teaching environment.¹⁹ Further, assistance provided by the Boston Jewish community through a sister-city program has improved the teaching of English in the school.²⁰ These efforts have been fruitful, said the two school leaders, pointing proudly to a study showing that School #144 ranked seventh of all schools in the city based on standardized tests in 2009.²¹

In response to a question, Rabbi Ostrovsky said that 15 to 20 school families extend **assistance to the school**. Although a few wealthy families now send their children to School #144, most donors are mid-level business people. They contributed \$10,000 during the past year for repair of a staircase and additional funds to send an outstanding

¹⁸ As in many European countries, the government of Ukraine pays the basic salaries of teachers of secular subjects in faith-based public schools.

¹⁹ In common with most other Jewish day schools in the post-Soviet states, School #144 is drug-free and has few serious discipline problems.

²⁰ See pages 43-44 for information about the Dnipropetrovsk-Boston relationship.

²¹ See *Сегодня* [Dnipropetrovsk], April 13, 2010. Three of the schools that ranked higher than the Chabad school are selective enrollment high schools that admit youngsters on the basis of competitive exams.

computer technology pupil to an ORT summer seminar. Parents also established a “medical account” that supports speech therapy and similar programs. A wealthy family purchased new playground equipment for the school.

Answering another question, the two school leaders stated that three or four new **returning youngsters from Israel** transfer into School #144 every year. Most of these pupils, continued Rabbi Ostrovsky, come back to Dnipropetrovsk in the custody of a single parent after the parents divorce in Israel. He cited one example of a divorce among immigrants to Israel in which a non-Jewish parent married an Arab and the Jewish parent then returned to Dnipropetrovsk with his child so that the child would not be exposed to the new Arab family of the former spouse. Rabbi Ostrovsky commented that some émigré families never seem to find a place in which they feel comfortable and travel from country to country, disrupting their children’s lives every few years.

The **Jewish studies program** in School #144 includes six to seven class periods of instruction each week: three in Jewish tradition, three in Hebrew, and one in Jewish history or Jewish literature for middle grade pupils. Additionally, music classes and programs emphasize Jewish music, and all Jewish and Israeli holidays are observed. **Two student teachers** from a Chabad seminary in Israel conduct various programs in **informal Jewish education** for youngsters in the lower grades. The **Avi Chai Foundation** continues to support an annual three-day **Shabbaton** at a nearby resort for 35 pupils, their parents, and a number of Chabad families associated with the school. Separate and joint programs are held for youngsters and their parents at the Shabbaton.

Rabbi Ostrovsky addresses parents and children at an Avi Chai Shabbaton in 2010.

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.



The school lacks an indoor gymnasium, and outdoor space for **physical education activity** for older pupils is sparse. Rabbi Kaminezki and Zelig Brez indicated in separate discussions that development of such facilities may become a priority in future phases of school development. Under the auspices of a city program that teaches swimming skills, pupils are bused to a municipal pool for weekly swimming lessons at certain stages of their school experience.

Mr. Ganopolsky, who taught computer technology before becoming an administrator, said that **almost all families of middle school and older pupils have computers at home**; most of these families, he added, have access to the Internet now because increased competition generated by new Internet providers in the city has reduced the cost of Internet service. School #144 uses the Internet for some communication with school families, he responded to a question, but many parents purchased the

computers for their children and the parents themselves lack computer skills and remain uncomfortable with their use.

In answer to a question, Mr. Ganopolsky stated that School #144 had been forced to close for two different **government-imposed quarantines**, one of three weeks duration and the other for two weeks, during the current school year. After some hesitation, he endorsed a widely-held view that the national government overreacts to influenza or other illnesses, extending quarantines for lengthy periods of time in order to save money. Financial support of schools is adjusted when they are closed in response to epidemics.

4. The writer met with Yalta Barak, the new Israeli principal of the **girls' machon** that is housed in one of the buildings of the School #144 complex. Ms. Barak has brought new organizational skills and a new spirit to the machon, said several machon teachers. Ms. Barak stated that the machon currently enrolls 77 girls from grade 1 through grade 11. Of these, she continued, 29 are from Chabad families, mostly foreigners who work in local Chabad institutions. These families pay \$70 in monthly tuition for their daughters. Thirty-seven girls come from indigenous families of non-Chabad background who elect to enroll their daughters in the Chabad school. The remaining 11 girls, said Ms. Barak, live in the Chabad pension (residential facility) for girls from unstable families.²² The machon is free of charge for local girls, whether they reside with their families or in the pension.

The machon offers an extended day program with a full range of secular classes leading to the Israeli *bagrut* examinations plus an intensive schedule of Chabad religious classes. The facility has its own ORT computer room, a small exercise/dance studio, and its own lunchroom. It sponsors an afterschool gymnastics program, Sunday classes, and an additional month of academic classes in June. Machon girls rarely interact with other pupils on the School #144 campus.

A highlight of machon activities is a **Pesach vacation** at a hotel in the Crimean peninsula. Many of the local girls celebrate their first **seders** during this period and also participate in various local recreational activities.

5. Rabbi Yossi Glick, supervises several children's programs in the city, including **residential facilities for Jewish youngsters from troubled homes**. Few of the children are orphans in a legal sense; referred to as "social orphans", the overwhelming majority are from single-parent homes in which the custodial parent is unable to provide adequate childcare due to alcohol or drug addiction, impoverishment, or other problems.

²² See below for further information about the Chabad boys' and girls' pensions in Dnipropetrovsk. In general, all halachically Jewish girls in the pension are enrolled in the machon, and non-halachically Jewish girls are enrolled in the general program of School #144. However, older halachically Jewish girls in the pension are permitted to opt out of the machon and transfer to the general curriculum of School #144 if they so wish. Eleven girls from a total of 16 in the pension were enrolled in the machon in 2009-2010.

Some parents are imprisoned. A few youngsters had been cared for by grandparents unable to cope with the needs of active, growing children.

The **current census** includes 22 boys and 16 girls; in the past, the boys' home has accommodated almost 40 youngsters, and as many as 28 girls resided in the girls' home. Rabbi Glick attributed the decline in both facilities to overall Jewish population decline and "competition" from newer housing programs established by Chabad rabbis in Zaporizhya and Krivyy Rig. Whereas Dnipropetrovsk previously drew youngsters from a broad region, the newer programs now enroll youngsters from the same area. The ages of youngsters in the homes ranges from 4½ to 17.

The smaller number of boys in the boys' home has permitted the conversion of one large bedroom into an exercise room; additional space will become available for recreational activity when offices currently in the boys' home are moved to the new Menorah Center. Rabbi Glick observed that the boys had spent a very good Pesach week on Khortytza Island in the Dnipro River near Zaporizhya, ironically the former base of local Cossacks. In addition to participating in seders, the youngsters made good use of various recreational facilities there. As noted, girls from the girls' home were in a Crimean hotel during Pesach.

A native of Australia, Rabbi Yossi Glick manages several Chabad children's programs in Dnipropetrovsk.

Photo: the writer.



In response to a question, Rabbi Glick said that the program is slowly restoring its **financial capacity** and that the "panic" of last year has been eased. However, he continued, the residential program still is heavily dependent on outside, i.e., foreign, financial support and that he remains uncertain about its future.

Asked about **further education of youngsters** after they graduate from high school and leave the residential facilities, Rabbi Glick said that most of the boys now go to a yeshiva in New York that is directed by a rabbi with close ties to the Kaminezki family. Previous placements of youngsters in Israeli institutions had not worked out well, he said, implicitly acknowledging that the Dnipropetrovsk program lacked the capacity to place boys in appropriate Israeli programs. Fewer girls, continued Rabbi Glick, are going to Beit Chana than previously; the standard of education offered at Beit Chana is too low for graduates of the machon/day school as it is geared to the needs of girls from small towns.²³ Instead, he noted, many girls go to Israel upon completing high school, some of them joining grandmothers or other relatives who had already settled there.

²³ For information about Beit Chana, see pages 21-23.

6. A **Jewish big brother/big sister program** was started in Dnipropetrovsk about ten years ago with the active encouragement and assistance of the Jewish Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Greater Boston, a constituent agency of the **Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston**, the Boston Jewish federation. According to its executive director, Tatiana Kaplunskaya, the Dnipropetrovsk program now includes 55 pairs of older/younger siblings. Another 30 children are on a waiting list for older brothers/sisters.

In response to a question about **attracting big brothers/sisters**, Ms. Kaplunskaya said that candidates hear about the program in any of several ways; some learn about it through Hillel, some were former little brothers/sisters themselves, some remember



hearing about it when they were pupils at School #144, and others are recruited by friends who are active in the organization. Most of the **little brothers/sisters**, said Ms. Kaplunskaya, enroll through School #144 or through a special needs program operated by the JDC hesed.

Tatiana Kaplunskaya, left, manages the Jewish big brother/big sister program in Dnipropetrovsk. Her family roots in the local Jewish community are strong as her parents have played significant roles in Dnipropetrovsk Jewish education since the early 1990's.

Photo: the writer.

Because most of the big brothers/big sisters are students or young working adults, they have little discretionary income, stated Ms. Kaplunskaya. Therefore, they are paid **stipends** of \$10 to \$15 per month for their participation in the program and to cover expenses associated with transportation, purchase of snacks or light meals, and entrance fees into parks or other venues. Additionally, continued Ms. Kaplunskaya, the program hosts several events each month – such as Jewish/Israeli holiday parties, ice skating, bowling, pizza parties, etc. – for big brother/big sister pairs. Officially, all food is kosher, but she cannot supervise each pair and she knows that kashrut obligations are not always fulfilled.

Asked about **problems** of child abuse or other issues arising from the close relationships formed between big brothers/big sisters and their younger charges, Ms. Kaplunskaya said that none have emerged to date. She is a psychologist by education and training, she noted, and she checks out the backgrounds of all older siblings very carefully before they are matched with a younger brother or sister.

Some of the relationships formed 10 years ago are still active, observed Ms. Kaplunskaya. The single parents and custodial grandparents who form the major population whose children are enrolled in the program are very happy with it.

7. The **STARS (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers)** program was initiated in 2006, funded jointly by oligarch and Chabad supporter Lev Leviev and Brazil-based Eli Horin. The curriculum recruits halachically Jewish young people between the ages of 18 and 25 to attend classes in Orthodox Judaism; in return for achieving good results on examinations based on coursework, students are rewarded with **stipends** that are pegged to the cost of living in specific cities in which the program is offered. In Dnipropetrovsk, the initial monthly stipend was \$90 monthly for twice weekly classes of 2½ hours each; remuneration was higher in Kyiv and higher still in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Reflecting the dominant position of Chabad throughout the post-Soviet states, Chabad was the principal organizer of STARS programs, but other Orthodox groups also offered STARS classes.

In response to losses suffered in the economic crisis that began in 2008-2009, STARS funders reduced support by about 50% and the **program has been cut back** significantly. In some cities, rabbis have been able to raise replacement funds, but in many locales, classes now are taught only once weekly and the monthly stipends have been reduced accordingly.

In Dnipropetrovsk, under the determined management of Iosif Masakovsky and with the financial support of local businessmen Natan Zolotarevsky and Alexander Yudashkin, the **STARS program has been supplanted** by a related program under the auspices of the local **National Business School**, an unaccredited informal business seminar associated with the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad community.²⁴ Between the truncated STARS program that targets university students and the NBS program that has a broader outreach, about 550 Dnipropetrovsk young people now are enrolled in STARS-type programming. According to Mr. Masakovsky, participants receive 18 hryvna (about \$2.70) for every class that they attend if they also do well on examinations and participate in Jewish community activities.



Iosif Masakovsky is a local individual, largely self-taught in Judaism, and a relentless organizer.

Photo: the writer.

Mr. Masakovsky is largely self-taught in Judaism and regarded by others as an excellent teacher.²⁵ He readily acknowledges that many halachically Jewish young people remain outside the STARS/NBS program and says that he is actively looking for them and trying to enlist them in classes. All classes are taught separately for men and

²⁴ See two previous reports of the writer, [A Brief Visit to Ukraine in February 2008](#), pp. 13-14, and [A Spring Visit to Ukraine March-April 2009](#), pp. 38-39. Both are available on the writer's website www.betsygidwitzreports.com.

²⁵ Mr. Masakovsky was incorrectly identified as a rabbi by the writer in several of her previous reports. He has had no rabbinic training. Prior to teaching Judaism, Mr. Masakovsky taught computer technology at several local post-secondary institutions.

women, but male and female students are brought together for various social activities and, organizers hope, matchmaking. About 30 teachers are involved, offering classes at various hours that are convenient to participants and at various knowledge levels.

With the endorsement of local rabbis and the financial support of local residents, the **STARS/NBS model is being exported to other cities**, such as Kyiv and Zaporizhya. It is anticipated that similar programs will be opened in Krivoi Rog and Poltava as well.

A variation of the STARS/NBS **program for young women** in was initiated in 2009-2010. Promoted in secular post-secondary institutions in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhya, and Novomoskovsk, the program currently enrolls 10 girls who meet twice weekly at Beit Chana (see below) for a total of 20 hours of intensive instruction plus one Shabbat each month. Rabbi Kaminezki concedes that the draw for most girls is an annual stipend of \$700. He expects enrollment to increase in 2010-2011.

The STARS program and its NBS variant are not without criticism. First, many object to the cash incentives, perceiving them as little more than bribes. Second, the requirement that all participants be halachically Jewish excludes the majority of young people in the post-Soviet states who consider themselves Jewish. Third, the Judaism that is taught often is narrow and dogmatic.²⁶ Fourth, other organizations, such as Hillel (see below) have found that, based on their STARS/NBS stipends, STARS/NBS participants and alumni expect to be paid for community service that others consider voluntary; concern has been expressed about the impact of such attitudes on long-range hopes to make the post-Soviet Jewish community self-supporting.

8. After many years of mediocre leadership and programming, Dnipropetrovsk **Hillel** seemed to come alive in 2008-2009, infused with energy by a new director, Olga Tovkach. In the year since the writer first met with her, Ms. Tovkach has added new staff and new programs, further enhancing the Hillel representation in the city.



The writer met with (from left) David Dakhteryn, coordinator of Dnipropetrovsk Hillel educational programs; Yana Vilen-skaya, coordinator of Hillel volunteer programs; Olga Tovkach, Director of Dnipropetrovsk Hillel; and Leah Kudrin, Dnipropetrovsk Hillel office manager. Lilya Makeyevskaya, Hillel Taglit coordinator, also attended the meeting, but left before the photo was taken. Photo: the writer.

²⁶ The quality of teaching varies from city to city and even among teachers in a specific city. However, all classes are taught from an Orthodox perspective.

Using statistics provided by the Joint Distribution Committee, Ms. Tovkach estimated that the Dnipropetrovsk **university-age population** includes 5,000 individuals who are halachically Jewish and another 10,000 who may be Jewish according to the Israel Law of Return.²⁷ About 500 different students participate in some Hillel activities during the year, said Ms. Tovkach; more than 100 of these participate at least once monthly and 12 form a core leadership group. About 300 will attend large events, she said. Hillel maintains the names and contact information of all participants in a data base and communicates with people through Russian-language networking sites, such as *Vkontakte* (In Contact), and the “Jewish radio” (word of mouth).

In response to a question, Ms. Tovkach said the **most popular Hillel activity** was a post-Taglit (birthright Israel) Shabbaton that included Taglit participants from other cities in the area as well as Dnipropetrovsk. She stated that Dnipropetrovsk Hillel feels a special responsibility to include students from Donetsk in their events whenever possible because Donetsk has no local Hillel.²⁸ Hillel students also enjoy participating in various volunteer projects, such as cleaning and maintaining old Jewish cemeteries.²⁹ Dnipropetrovsk Hillel, she continued, has accepted responsibility for maintaining a Holocaust monument in nearby Novomoskovsk, a city in which the Jewish population is rapidly declining.

Mr. Dachternyn outlined a broad range of **educational activities** offered by Hillel. An English-language discussion group is popular, he said, as is study of basic Jewish texts and Jewish trivia competitions. Hillel trains leaders for Hillel itself and for working with disabled children and young adults and with elderly Jews at the hesed and at Beit Baruch. Ms. Tovkach said that she would like Hillel to develop a basic Judaism course that would reach out to both halachic and non-halachic Jews.

Joint holiday celebrations are held with youth and student groups sponsored by Sochnut and Nativ.³⁰ Such collaborative efforts have intensified during the past year, said Ms. Tovkach, noting that some young Jews are active in several of these groups.

²⁷ Some other well-qualified observers consider the JDC population estimates very high.

²⁸ Donetsk is a large industrial city in eastern Ukraine (see map on first page) with a Jewish population that is much smaller than that of Dnipropetrovsk. However, Donetsk is home to a number of prominent universities and other educational institutions that attract outstanding students.

²⁹ Through a grant from the Genesis Philanthropic Group of Moscow, Dnipropetrovsk Hillel students have been able to participate in the ***Lo Tishkach* (לא תשכח; Do Not Forget) European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative**, a joint project of the Conference of European Rabbis and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany. *Lo Tishkach* is establishing a comprehensive data base of all European Jewish burial grounds, as well as current local laws and practices affecting their protection and preservation. Assembling this information will facilitate advocacy for the maintenance of these sites. A major aim of the project is engagement of young European Jews in collecting applicable information not only about cemeteries, but also about pre-Holocaust Jewish life and culture in surrounding communities. *Lo Tishkach* participants also are expected to undertake practical work in the preservation and protection of these sites.

³⁰ Nativ, formerly known as the Liaison Office (*Lishkat Hakesher*), is sponsored by the Government of Israel. It operates Israel Cultural Centers attached to Israeli consulates in several post-Soviet cities.

When the writer asked if Hillel also worked closely with participants in the STARS/NBS program, the immediate response was nervous laughter. After an awkward silence following the laughter, Ms. Tovkach explained that **STARS/NBS is perceived as restrictive** because participation is limited to halachic Jews and its approach to Judaism is too narrow for many people. Further, she continued, because STARS/NBS students receive stipends for attending STARS/NBS classes, they expect to be paid for all Jewish activity, including such volunteer endeavors as visiting elderly Jews in Beit Baruch. Yet, some STARS/NBS participants go to Israel on **Taglit** (birthright Israel) tours and then attend Taglit follow-up and other programs at Hillel, so Hillel has to deal with these issues. The money question is divisive, she said; Hillel absolutely will not provide the stipends that STARS/NBS students demand. Resentment is created on both sides.

Hillel does not require **documentation about Jewish heritage** when young people first come to Hillel programs, said Ms. Tovkach. However, as participants become more active and wish to enter leadership development programs, she continued, Hillel requires proof that they qualify as Jews under the Israel Law of Return.

In response to a question about **possible exchanges** with Hillel of Greater Boston, the sister-city of Dnipropetrovsk, the local Hillel leaders said that no such visits have taken place. However, they continued, groups of approximately 20 students from Hillel at Cornell University in New York have come to Dnipropetrovsk on alternative spring break programs for several years. Most recently, the Cornell students worked with Hillel of Dnipropetrovsk and with Donetsk students in cleaning the hesed yard in Donetsk.

Hillel of Ukraine is very active in **Taglit** (birthright Israel), said the Hillel activists, sponsoring one summer bus (40 participants) each from Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa, and joint buses during the winter. In contrast, they said the Jewish Agency and Nativ each sponsor one summer bus only and these summer buses cover all of Ukraine. Post-Taglit follow-up is very important, they said, and is a major program element of Dnipropetrovsk Hillel. Ms. Tovkach joked that Taglit may be *too* effective because some participants then enroll in longer MASA programs³¹ and subsequently make aliyah, thus depriving Dnipropetrovsk Hillel of local leadership.

Without prompting, Ms. Tovkach said that Dnipropetrovsk Hillel is strongly supported by Rabbi Kaminezki, who knows that some young Jews do not feel comfortable in the synagogue and/or in STARS/NBS classes. Rabbi Kaminezki perceives Hillel as a gateway to Jewish life for some Jewish young people, she said, and encouraged Ihor Kolomoisky, a principal benefactor of Rabbi Kaminezki and also president of the All-

³¹ MASA offers a broad variety of study opportunities in Israel, each of which is five months or longer in duration. The program is heavily subsidized by the government of Israel and the Jewish Agency, but some curricula require co-payments by participants. Some MASA courses target Russian-speakers specifically, but some students from Russian-speaking families enroll in English-language MASA curricula.

Ukraine Jewish Congress, to support Hillel through contributions for Hillel events of various types.³²

9. Beit Chana Jewish Women’s Pedagogical College was established in 1995 to prepare teachers and childcare workers for Chabad-sponsored preschools and elementary schools throughout the post-Soviet states. The college currently offers programs leading to certification as teachers in preschool and primary grades and childcare workers in preschools. In cooperation with Crimean State University, it also offers bachelor’s degrees that provide more comprehensive certification in education. Its diplomas and degrees are recognized in the post-Soviet states and in Israel. About half of the first-year students enroll after ninth grade and are eligible to receive teaching certification after completing a four-year curriculum. The other half enter Beit Chana after graduation from high school (currently at the end of grade 11) and are eligible for teaching certificates after completing a three-year curriculum or bachelor’s degrees after a four-year course of studies. Tuition and housing are free of charge. According to Rabbi Moshe Weber, Rabbi of the College and its Deputy President for Jewish Studies and Jewish Education, Beit Chana graduates are in demand for teaching positions in Chabad schools throughout the post-Soviet states.

However, said Rabbi Weber, Beit Chana has never reached its capacity enrollment of between 200 and 250 young women. It achieved its peak of 165 students several years ago, and its **2008-2009 enrollment** plummeted to 70. Acknowledging that the institution was unlikely to survive without a “new vision”, Beit Chana has made several **changes in its operational procedures** during the last year and intends to evolve further in the future. Acknowledging that single-gender religious dormitory life was unattractive to many potential students and that the Jewish population in the small towns from which Beit Chana drew the majority of its students had declined radically, the institution opened its doors to day students from Dnipropetrovsk itself during the 2009-2010 academic year. The result was very favorable; enrollment almost doubled, reaching 133 girls; 60 girls, mainly from out of town, have elected to live in the dormitory, and 73 commute on a daily basis from their homes in other areas of Dnipropetrovsk. Some commuters stay at the dormitory on occasional weekends in order to participate in Shabbat activities, but many others do little more than arrive at the classroom building for classes at the beginning of the day and then return home at the end of the day.

Rabbi Moshe Weber, right, is Rabbi of Beit Chana and its Deputy President for Jewish Studies and Jewish Education. He is committed to making the necessary changes in the College to assure its survival. Photo: the writer.



³²The initial approach to Mr. Kolomoisky on behalf of Hillel was made by Iosif Akselrud, who is executive director of both the regional Hillel and the All-Ukraine Jewish Congress. See pp. 66-68 and 74-75 for more information about regional Hillel, AUJC, and Mr. Akselrud.

Beit Chana also is exploring **additional courses of study**, such as bachelor's degree programs in sociology, psychology, and other subjects in cooperation with Crimean State University. Business-related curricula may be added in collaboration with a local business college.

Plans have been developed to improve the physical facilities of Beit Chana, but the global economic crisis has forced a delay in their implementation, said Rabbi Weber. He and colleague Rabbi Meir Stambler (who was in Israel at the time of the writer's visit) envision a **campus-type expansion** of the site on which the current Beit Chana dormitory building stands. Funding already is in place, stated Rabbi Weber, for the development of the first of three new dormitory buildings, and he expects construction to start soon. The dormitories will include accommodations for several different groups of residents: Beit Chana students, seminary girls from religious families who are pursuing a year of post-high school intensive religious studies, girls from religious families who are attending a Chabad high school machon, and teachers employed in other cities who return to the campus for in-service seminars and degree programs. The dormitories also will include apartments for Chabad families who are working in the city.

The current dormitory building, continued Rabbi Weber, will be reconstructed as a large classroom building. A newly-built structure will include extensive computer facilities, a swimming pool, and offices.

The post-secondary school **seminary** will open in fall of 2010 in existing premises with an anticipated first-year enrollment of at least ten young women from Chabad religious families. Girls will be 18 or 19 years of age and will pursue an intensive course of rigorous religious studies according to Chabad tradition. It is expected that the seminary will grow substantially over time because of its high quality of education, superior accommodations (after a new dormitory opens), and its location in Dnipropetrovsk, a city with great significance in Chabad history. Rabbi Weber believes that the presence of religious girls will increase the prestige of Beit Chana. Discussions already have been held with the Ministry of Education in Israel about accreditation of the program. The cost of tuition, room, and board will be about \$5,000 for each student.

A **residential high school machon** for girls from Chabad families remains a project for the future. However, Rabbi Weber and others believe that a strong market exists for such a program among the growing number of Chabad families in Ukraine. Notwithstanding the overall growth of the Chabad population in the country, the number of religious girls in specific cities remains too small for high-quality secondary schools in each city. Dnipropetrovsk has good transportation links with other cities, he noted, thus permitting the girls to visit their families regularly.

Beit Chana continues to house a **Special Needs Educational Resource Center**, which currently enrolls 53 children and young people up to the age of 22. Cerebral palsy and autism are among the most common needs addressed at the ERC, said Rabbi Weber, but educational and therapeutic services are offered to young people with a variety of

disabilities. Educational services and socializing experiences are available to parents and family groups as well.³³

The ERC occupies a suite of rooms on the ground floor of the Beit Chana academic building and also uses both a courtyard and a specially-developed adjacent exterior playground. The ERC was initiated by Dr. Judith Wolf and her daughter Susan Wolf Fordham from Boston and continues to be supported by them, other individuals from Boston, and the Boston Jewish federation, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston. Professionals in pediatrics and child development from Tufts University in Medford MA and from Gordon College in Haifa visit the ERC on a regular basis and advise the ERC program; Tufts University and Gordon College also consult with Beit Chana in development of required course work in special education for Beit Chana students.

The Special Needs Educational Resource Center at Beit Chana is well supplied by friends from Boston with educational and therapeutic materials.

Photo: the writer.



10. Awaiting completion of new quarters at the Menorah Center, **Tkumah**, the Dnipropetrovsk-based **Ukrainian Holocaust Research, Education, and Memorial Center**, is currently housed in temporary space at Hesed Menachem in the center of the city. Most of its archival collection of documents and artifacts remains in storage. Its Director, Dr. Igor Schupak, spoke eagerly of plans for the **new Museum of Jewish History and Culture in Ukraine** that is to be developed at the Menorah Center.³⁴

Overall, the objectives of Tkumah are to: (1) conduct scholarly research about the Holocaust through interviews of survivors, examination of pertinent documents, and expeditions to relevant sites; (2) educate contemporary and future Ukrainians about the Holocaust through publications, development of school curricula, teacher training, and seminars and conferences; (3) encourage dialogue between Jews and other Ukrainian ethnic groups through seminars and conferences for youth, adults, and historians; and (4) arrange museum displays and related programming about the Holocaust.

³³ The Joint Distribution Committee also operates a special needs program at its Hesed Menachem in the city. The Beit Chana program is regarded by many observers as more sophisticated and encompassing.

³⁴ See page 8 of this report.

Dr. Schupak related that Tkumah is now participating in **10 to 15 seminars or conferences every month**, a load that is too much for it to handle. Obviously, such interest in the Holocaust and respect for Tkumah is very gratifying, but the Center does not have the resources to be the principal convener of such events and now will participate only in more-or-less equal partnership with other organizations. Seminars or conferences are held for school teachers, university students, high school pupils, and various groups, such as Hillel.

The Tkumah **publishing program** also is very active, having released eight different titles between January and May 2010. These include a volume of personal testimonies about the Holocaust, World War II, and evacuations to the Ural mountain area, Siberia, or Central Asia; the human interest content of such memoirs is very rich, said Dr.



Schupak, and makes these collections very popular. Other recently published books include a high school textbook,³⁵ a volume about righteous Gentiles in Ukraine, and the third volume of a four-book series of translated German documents about the Holocaust.

Dr. Igor Schupak at a presentation of Tkumah publications.

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.

Tkumah participates in **excavations** of Holocaust and other historic sites. It also engages in **multi-ethnic dialogues**, finding Protestant groups more open to such events than Ukrainian or Russian Orthodox Christians.

In response to a question, Dr. Schupak said that the current **budget** of Tkumah is between \$150,000 and \$200,000 annually. Their major sponsor is the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, but they also receive funds from the Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund,³⁶ the Joint Distribution Committee, the Philanthropic Fund of the Chabad Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community, the United States Fund for Democracy, and various foundations/organizations in Germany and Poland.

In addition to his paid responsibilities as Director of Tkumah, Dr. Schupak also is the volunteer director of the Program Committee for Limmud. His lectures on Jewish

³⁵ Dr. Schupak noted that many Ukrainians believe that Jews are not “true” Ukrainians and thus should not write accounts of Ukrainian history. Therefore, some of the work of Tkumah is dismissed without any serious deliberation.

³⁶ The Joods Humanitair Fonds / Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund allocates funds from Jewish property confiscated by the Dutch government during the Holocaust to renewal of Jewish life in former communist countries, Jewish education, promotion of interethnic harmony, and disaster relief.

history are popular among Limmud participants, he stated. He also has helped Limmud find additional sponsors.

Welfare

11. **Hesed Menachem**, the JDC-sponsored welfare center, is centrally located in a large building constructed originally as a preschool.³⁷ Hesed Director Anatoliy Pleskachevsky stated that the hesed currently serves 8,500 clients, 7,000 of whom live in Dnipropetrovsk. The remainder, he continued, reside in such nearby cities as Dniprodzerzhinsk (see below) and Pavlograd. The total number of those served is stable, said Mr. Pleskachevsky, but the number of Nazi victims is diminishing each year and thus the supplemental funding from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany also is diminishing.

At the time of the writer's visit, the hesed was preparing commemorative ceremonies for the then forthcoming **60th anniversary of the end of World War II**. About 220 Jewish World War II veterans remain alive in the area, said Mr. Pleskachevsky, including both combat veterans and those who worked behind the lines in military factories. As it has done every year, the hesed would sponsor a major ceremony in the hesed yard. Each veteran, continued Mr. Pleskachevsky, will receive a large food parcel containing treasured food items, such as chocolates, contributed by local merchants; Rabbi Kaminezki, he noted, is providing kosher sausages for these food parcels. Many community people, said Mr. Pleskachevsky, have donated funds for a gala concert to be held in the veterans' honor.

Hesed director Anatoliy Pleskachvsky, right, is a 34-year veteran of the Soviet armed forces, having retired as a colonel after serving in the artillery corps in Afghanistan.

Photo: the writer.



On a more mundane level, stated Mr. Pleskachevsky, about 5,500 hesed clients receive **smart cards** that can be used at a chain of supermarkets for discounted purchase of groceries.³⁸ A similar arrangement exists for discounted purchase of pharmaceutical goods. About 700 homebound seniors receive **patronage services**, i.e., cooking and cleaning, at home, Mr. Plesakachevsky said, provided by about 100 patronage workers. Only about 100 elderly receive **food parcels** on a regular basis, almost all of whom

³⁷ See pages 41-43 for an interview with Amir Ben Tzvi, JDC director for the region.

³⁸ Recipients must pay for the cards according to hesed evaluation of their needs. Thus, a particular client might pay the equivalent of \$5 for a card worth \$15, and another client might pay \$8 for the same \$15 card. The cards are programmed to prohibit use for tobacco, alcohol, and pork products.

reside in rural areas with little access to supermarkets that accept smart cards. Economic pressure has forced the **closure of dining room programs** in which prepared food is served. Similarly, the hesed also has curtailed its very popular **warm home program** in which affinity groups of elderly gather in private apartments for a hot meal and socializing. The program still exists, said Mr. Pleskachevsky, but only tea and cookies are served. However, the hesed continues to distribute **medical equipment** (walkers, wheelchairs, orthopedic mattresses, and other items) to those need it.

The hesed maintains **agreements with several providers of medical services**, such as a particular hospital that provides free medical imaging to clients in return for their participation in medical surveys. Additionally, clients with fractured hips are entitled to receive hip replacement surgery and related therapy through the Boston program. (See below.) Many physicians see hesed clients at discounted fees.

The **day center program** remains a keystone of hesed activity. Groups of about 30 seniors participate in a full day of activities twice each month, transported between the hesed and their homes in private vans. They discuss medical issues with physicians who refer them to specialists, receive hairdressing services, participate in various cultural activities, socialize with others, and eat breakfast and a warm noon meal. On



Fridays, the day care group is joined by about 20 other seniors for a Yiddish club and another 70 to 80 individuals who participate in a kabbalat Shabbat program. (The Yiddish club members and kabbalat Shabbat group do not receive free transportation.)

Seniors in the Dnipropetrovsk Hesed Menachem day center program enjoy a hot meal.

Photo: the writer.

12. The **Beit Baruch Assisted Living Facility** for elderly Jews opened in 2002, the first of only two dedicated housing facilities for Jewish seniors in all of the post-Soviet states.³⁹ Beit Baruch provides accommodations, meals, medical care, and various social activities to its residents. Some reside in single rooms, others in doubles with a roommate. Each room has its own private bathroom. The facility is located in a relatively quiet outlying district of Dnipropetrovsk on the site of a former preschool. The original building was completely razed and then replaced by a clean modern structure.

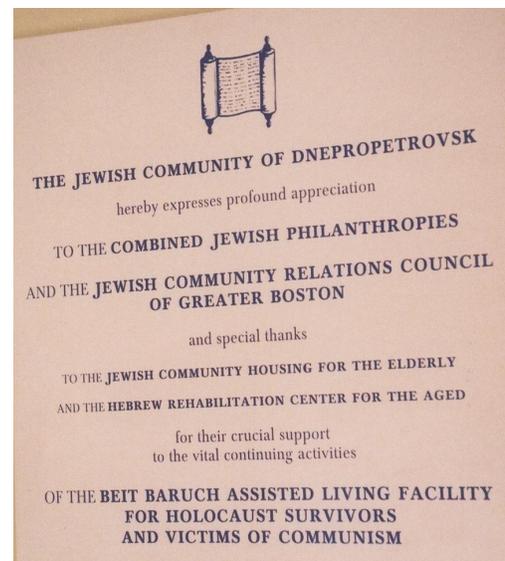
³⁹ The second such facility is located in Kyiv. See pages 72-74.

Although the official capacity of Beit Baruch is 94, geriatric specialists from Boston recommend that the total number of residents not exceed 75 to 80. The **census** at the time of the writer's visit was only 56, although four newcomers were expected to move into the facility within a few weeks. The then census of 56 included four individuals recovering from hip fracture surgery, who were expected to stay between two and six weeks before returning to their homes. The current relatively low number of residents reflected both economic pressure deriving from the need for extensive subsidy of the home and from the increasing number of patients with dementia, each of whom requires an individual room without a roommate.⁴⁰

Residents pay 40 to 60 percent of their pensions for accommodation at Beit Baruch, an amount that may cover as little as 10 percent or as much as 40 percent of the real cost (\$5,000 annually) of their care at the facility.⁴¹ **Subsidies to fill the funding gap** are provided by the Chabad Philanthropic Fund of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community and by Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, the Jewish federation in Boston. The Adopt-a-Bubbe program (see below) and foreign visitors provide many basic medicines required by residents. (The Joint Distribution Committee provides no support to Beit Baruch.)

Assistance from Boston is acknowledged in a large plaque inside the entrance to Beit Baruch. In addition to a substantial operating subsidizing, Combined Jewish Philanthropies and related organizations provide significant geriatric expertise, including extended stays by a leading physician in the field, as well as visits by therapists, social workers, and other specialists.

Photo: the writer.



According to Alexandra Kizhner, the highly respected manager of Beit Baruch, more than 50 percent of the residents are suffering from **dementia** of different degrees. Fourteen residents died in 2009, most from cancer, but others from heart attacks and strokes. In response to a question, Ms. Kizhner acknowledged that a waiting list exists for admission into the facility; however, she continued, some applicants are too frail to leave their current homes and complete a transition into Beit Baruch.

Beit Baruch employs a fitness instructor, who works in a **basement fitness facility**, as well as art and recreation therapists. A **choir** has always been popular among some

⁴⁰ The largest number of individuals ever to have resided in Beit Baruch concurrently was 72.

⁴¹ The wealthiest people at Beit Baruch are World War II combat veterans who receive generous monthly pension bonuses for their wartime service. With the passage of time, the number of such individuals is diminishing.

residents. Its repertoire includes Yiddish songs that some residents remember from their childhoods.



At left, Ida Tsyapkina, a longtime resident of Beit Baruch, insisted that the writer visit her room. She is well-known in Beit Baruch and the larger Dnipropetrovsk Jewish community for her affecting renditions of Yiddish songs, including My Yiddishe Mama. A book of large-print lyrics to Beit Baruch choir songs lies on her bed at right. Her husband died during the early years of their marriage and a son died at age 50.

Below, three more recently-arrived residents relax on a bench outside the Beit Baruch building.



Alexandra Kizhner, the manager of Beit Baruch, is respected by Beit Baruch residents and other members of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish community as well. She had emigrated to Israel and worked in a senior housing facility there before returning to Dnipropetrovsk.

Photos on this page: the writer.

13. With substantial assistance from the **Boston Jewish community**, the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad community offers **hip fracture surgery and therapy** free of charge to 18 local Jews annually. Dr Lewis Lipsitz, senior scientist at the Institute for Aging Research at Hebrew Senior Life in Boston, identified Dr. Alexander Loskutov, the leading local orthopedic surgeon in the Dnipropetrovsk region, as an individual who could address local needs in this field. Dr. Loskutov was brought to Boston for specialized training in appropriate surgery and has subsequently returned to

Dnipropetrovsk where he initiated a hip fracture surgery program at the Mechnikov State Hospital, considered the city's most advanced medical institution.

According to Bella Zak, who manages the program providing hip surgery to Jewish patients, the average cost of such surgery on the open market is about \$800 plus another \$200 to \$300 for required medications and other related expenses. Such charges are well beyond the means of most pensioners. Following an accident in which a hip fracture is incurred, said Ms. Zak, families of patients in other hospitals often are referred to the Mechnikov hospital or, if they are Jewish, to the synagogue, which helps to arrange a transfer to Mechnikov and enrollment in the program.

Dr. Alexander Loskutov, right, leads the hip surgery team at Mechnikov State Hospital in Dnipropetrovsk.

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.



At the urging of Dr. Lewis Lipsitz, Combined Jewish Philanthropies agreed to support 18 individuals annually in this program. Following surgery, patients go either to Beit Baruch or enroll in a private fee-paying clinic for rehabilitative therapy. Notwithstanding the unusually icy winter of 2009-2010, most hip fractures occur at home, rather than on the street, said Ms. Zak.

Bella Zak, right, who manages the Jewish community hip fracture program in Dnipropetrovsk, is a graduate of the Chabad machon in the city. She later graduated from a Chabad women's college in Zhytomyr.

Photo: the writer.



14. Adopt-A-Bubbe/Adopt-A-Zayde is an independent assistance program created by Dr. Judith Patkin, the Executive Director of Action for Post-Soviet Jewry in Waltham, MA. The Dnipropetrovsk organization **supports elderly Jews** in Dnipropetrovsk itself and in 18 additional cities or large towns and numerous smaller towns in eastern, central, and southern Ukraine.⁴² However, the total number of towns served has declined as Jewish populations in these villages have diminished to the point where service calls are economically prohibitive. At any given time, said Yan and Tanya

⁴² The program also operates in several other cities. However, this report deals only with the actions that are directed from its Dnipropetrovsk office. In addition to assisting Jews, Adopt-A-Bubbe also reaches out to elderly Righteous Gentiles, i.e., those from families who helped Jews during the Holocaust.

Sidelkovsky,⁴³ who direct AAB operations in the Dnipropetrovsk region, approximately 1,500 Jewish seniors are in their service census. Elderly people who die are replaced by younger pensioners; the younger pensioners, said Mrs. Sidelkovsky, may have greater needs because they do not receive the government pension bonuses given to veterans of World War II. The program also supports some younger Jews who are chronically ill or handicapped, as well as some Jewish families with young children in which the parents are unemployed.

The Sidelkovskys are assisted by **local coordinators** in most of the larger Jewish population centers in which AAB is active; the coordinators receive modest stipends for their work, but these stipends are less than full salaries. In some cities, volunteer physicians also are enlisted in AAB efforts. The program attempts to address **individual needs**, providing food, clothing, and medicine according to the requirements of each client. It works with local physicians and with physicians and pharmaceutical



outlets in the United States to fill prescriptions. Adopt-a-Bubbe also provides some medicines to Beit Baruch in Dnipropetrovsk and to several **hospitals**, thus assuring admission and competent treatment for AAB clients requiring hospitalization.

Yan and Tanya Sidelkovsky have been active in the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish community since the early 1990's.

Photo: the writer.

Long recognizing the importance of socializing activities for isolated elderly, Adopt-a-Bubbe has expanded its operation of **warm homes** as JDC has curtailed operation of such programs. Under pressure from JDC, Adopt-a-Bubbe has changed the official name of its comparable activity to **Еврейский дом шалом (Yevreiskiy dom shalom; Jewish Home Shalom)**, but popular use of *warm home* persists. The organization currently manages two warm homes in Dnipropetrovsk, one on each bank of the river, and single warm homes in each of 12 other cities and towns. Typically, said Mrs. Sidelkovsky, the warm home will begin with 10 to 12 participants invited by Adopt-a-Bubbe coordinators and then will expand to as many as 20 people as original clients invite their friends. Usually, continued Mrs. Sidelkovsky, 15 to 17 people attend warm home events, which are held monthly in a participant's apartment. These events often are organized around a holiday theme or in celebration of clients' birthdays. Adopt-a-Bubbe provides about \$50 to purchase food for a full meal, which is prepared by the hostess and by participants who bring specific components of the meal. Sometimes, Mrs. Sidelkovsky said, individual participants will purchase wine, cakes, or other special items as gifts to the group; such donors, observed Mrs. Sidelkovsky, take great pride in

⁴³ Yan Sidelkovsky also represents the Boston Jewish community in Dnipropetrovsk. See pages 43-44.

their contributions. Following the meal, participants often linger to socialize, watch videos on Jewish themes, sing, and/or dance.

The writer attended one Adopt-a-Bubbe warm home event in a Dnipropetrovsk apartment. Convening in the early afternoon, participants consumed a hearty, multi-course midday dinner, most of which was prepared by the hostess. One male guest in this group brings wine and vodka to every meal, gifts that are much appreciated by other attendees. The youngest participant is 69, the oldest 84.



Following the meal, many members of the group sang and danced, the latter in space that had been cleared of furniture. Tanya Sidelkovsky, center in black jumper and floral-pattern blouse, joined in the festivities.



Photos: the writer.

In response to a question, the Sidelkovskys said that **inflation** was increasing somewhat less rapidly than last year. However, prior to the election, the government then in power had increased the prices of certain foods to appease farmers, thus causing major problems for Adopt-a-Bubbe nutrition programs. The price of gasoline also had risen sharply, thus making their visits to outlying communities much more costly.

Synagogue-Related Programs

15. Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki is the Chief Rabbi of Dnipropetrovsk and is regarded by most observers as the most effective community rabbi in all of the post-Soviet successor states. He has built an unparalleled community infrastructure, deftly raising and managing funds from wealthy local Jews, international Jewish organizations, and the Boston Jewish community with which Dnipropetrovsk Jewry enjoys a twinning or sister-city relationship.

In response to a question, Rabbi Kaminezki said that the **financial crisis** that was so acute last year at this time has eased substantially; however, he continued, the (Chabad) Jewish community is living “month to month” without the assurances of continuing economic stability that it had experienced prior to late 2008. They have lost some previous donors, he said, but they also have gained some new contributors.

At least publicly, Rabbi Kaminezki seemed unperturbed by the fact that almost all of his **major benefactors have left the city**, electing to live in Kyiv and/or abroad.⁴⁴ They still return to Dnipropetrovsk periodically, some of them specifically to attend meetings of the Chabad **Philanthropic Fund of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community** (**Благотворительный фонд Днепрпетровского еврейского общины**) and all locally-born entrepreneurs continue to regard him as their rabbi. Some even are adopting certain religious practices.

Rabbi Kaminezki estimates the **Jewish population** of Dnipropetrovsk at between 35,000 and 40,000. About half of the Jewish population, he said, is active in Jewish community institutions, although many such individuals are pensioners whose activism is dependence on Jewish institutions for welfare services, he acknowledged. About **85**



Chabad families now reside in the city, he continued. Perhaps 30 are foreigners, who have come to the city to work as Chabad Jewish educators, in other community institutions, or operate businesses. The majority are local people who have adopted the Chabad lifestyle, including dress code and religious practice.

Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki of Dnipropetrovsk is considered by many to be the most successful community rabbi in the post-Soviet states.

Photo: the writer.

The Philanthropic Fund, Rabbi Kaminezki noted, is developing a **photo identification card** for community members that will enable bearers to forego security procedures at certain community events and obtain discounts for specific services. Such a card will be especially useful in the new Menorah Center.

Rabbi Kaminezki proudly noted the expansion of the **Shiurei Torah (Lessons of Torah)** program, a Dnipropetrovsk initiative that sponsors the development of Torah study circles in the synagogue, local offices, and private homes. With the enthusiastic cooperation of local rabbis, the program is being replicated in Krivoi Rog, Zaporizhya, Poltava, and Kyiv. Instructors often are indigenous individuals, trained in Ukrainian yeshiva programs and Israeli yeshivot.

⁴⁴ Hennady Boholubov, Ihor Kolomoisky, and Viktor Pinchuk, live in London, Geneva, and Kyiv respectively. See footnotes on pages eight and nine. Also, two American Chabad-affiliated businessmen who became wealthy in Dnipropetrovsk-based business ventures have returned to the United States.

In addition to his position as Chief Rabbi of Dnipropetrovsk, Rabbi Kaminezki actively **supports rabbis in nearby smaller Jewish population centers**, sometimes assisting them in finding donors for their various projects. For example, he identified Dnipropetrovsk Jewish businessmen with roots in Dniprodzerzhinsk and Krivoy Rog who have provided generous assistance to the smaller Jewish populations remaining in those areas.

Responding to a question about local **antisemitism**, Rabbi Kaminezki said that expression of anti-Jewish bigotry generally is not a problem. The **SBU** (Служба безпеки України (СБУ); *Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrayiny*; principal Ukrainian government security agency, successor to KGB in Ukraine) does a good job of tracking rightwing groups, he said, and the western phenomenon of leftwing intellectual antisemitism does not exist in Ukraine.

16. Vyecheslav “Slavik” or “Zelig” Brez is the Executive Director (Исполнительный директор) of the **Philanthropic Fund of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community** (Благотворительный фонд Днепрпетровского еврейского общины), which supports Chabad interests in the city. The 2009-2010 budget for the community is \$4.5 million; the planned 2008-2009 budget had been \$5.5 million, but was slashed by 20 percent as soon as the worldwide economic crisis became apparent in fall of 2008. Of the budgeted \$4.5 million for 2009-2010, Mr. Brez continued, the Chabad community probably will raise \$4.3 million in its general campaign and then will appeal to particular individuals for the remaining \$200,000 in designated gifts that fill specific needs, such as food for the children’s residential programs. In response to a question, Mr. Brez said that approximately 75 percent of the budget is raised locally and 25 percent is contributed by donors in the United States and Israel.

Slavik or Zelig Brez is considered a highly competent executive director of the strong Dnipropetrovsk Chabad community. From a non-observant local family, Mr. Brez has become more observant as his tenure with Chabad grows.



Photo: the writer.

The **Board of the Philanthropic Fund**, said Mr. Brez, consists of 89 individuals, each of whom is expected to contribute a minimum of \$500 monthly. However, due to the current economic situation, 30 members no longer give consistently. As policy, he continued, such delinquent members are not dismissed from the Board; humiliation is to be avoided and it is hoped that individuals will fulfill their charitable commitments as soon as circumstances permit them to do so. For its part, the (Chabad) community is striving to reduce costs and is charging more substantial fees for the various services that it provides. Although few programs are fully self-supporting, Chabad is pricing such

programs as community seders (which attract 3,000 individuals) and summer camps for children at levels closer to real costs. Of course, individuals in dire financial condition continue to be accommodated at little or no personal charge, he said.

The **financial contribution of the Boston Jewish community** is substantial, said Mr. Brez, most of it coming directly from **Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston**, the Boston Jewish federation. CJP contributes to the day school, the resource center at Beit Chana, Beit Baruch, the hip fracture program, humanitarian aid for Jewish elderly, and the micro-enterprise program (see below). Other Boston groups and individuals support Adopt-a-Bubbe, designated services at the resource center, and programs that serve the broader population at hospitals serving women and pediatric patients.

Mr. Brez anticipates some **stabilization of the economy** as a result of better relations with Russia following the election of Victor Yanukovych as President of Ukraine. Gas prices should drop, thus improving productivity for the chemical and metal industries, both of which are prominent in the economy of eastern Ukraine. Trade between Ukraine and Russia will increase, predicted Mr. Brez, and the currently high rate of unemployment should decline over three to four years. Unemployment in the region now probably is about 15 percent, estimated Mr. Brez; it is impossible to find a job, he continued, no one is hiring. Those seeking employment are thinking in terms of short-term work, not careers.

Mr. Brez estimated the **local Jewish population** at 40,000 to 50,000, a figure that is based on the demand for food parcels and on attendance figures at community events, such as Jewish-focus concerts. He noted that the community website attracts more than 20,000 hits each month.⁴⁵

The Chabad community, continued Mr. Brez, would like to start **two new affinity groups** within the Jewish population. One would be an *Association of Jewish Professionals* that would focus on attracting Jewish lawyers, accountants, and other educated middle-class people. Chabad would organize Jewish educational opportunities for such individuals, Mr. Brez said, and would try to engage them in volunteer activities. Also, stated Mr. Brez, the time is ripe to help middle class Jews advocate for exempt absences from work on Jewish holidays. The second affinity group, Mr. Brez explained, will be a *Rambam or Maimonides Medical Society* that will attract Jewish physicians; it will focus on providing access to the latest medical information and instilling a strong sense of medical ethics in local medical practice. Additionally, such a society will have a section for medical students that will provide badly needed medical texts and other medical materials to Jewish students of medicine.

Speaking of another medical issue, Mr. Brez said that the Chabad community plans to open a **modern medical clinic in a six-room suite** to be developed at the Beit Baruch Assisted Living Center. The clinic, he continued, will have a separate entrance and will

⁴⁵ The website can be accessed at <http://dj.com.ua>. It includes material about prominent community personalities, including birthday observances. An abbreviated English-language option is available.

offer examinations and care by specialists who will work at the facility one day each week according to an established schedule so that they can maintain their current private or hospital/clinic practice as well. They will be selected and trained by Boston physicians and will be paid well so as to avoid the bribery that is commonplace in contemporary Ukraine medical care. A first-rate medical laboratory, of which very few exist in Ukraine, will service physicians and patients. It is planned, continued Mr. Brez, to provide shuttle bus routes between the synagogue and Beit Baruch at least twice daily so that people can access the clinic without difficulty. Patients will be charged for all medical services on a sliding scale according to means.

In an earlier comment, Mr. Brez spoke with opprobrium of the Ukrainian **legal profession**, asserting that it is a “profitable family business”, passed on from one generation to the next. Lawyers are in an excellent position, he said, to extract bribes from clients, adversaries, and regulatory bodies in influencing the outcome of cases; the entire legal system is corrupt, he continued. Far from a western, liberal approach to government encouraged by Westerners, Mr. Brez asserted, Ukraine at this stage in its development needs a system of “force” and “dictatorship” that would stamp out corruption at its source.⁴⁶

Although he personally has been a victim of **antisemitic attacks**, antisemitism is much less of a problem in Ukraine than it is in western Europe, Mr. Brez said in response to a question. Few Jews are hesitant to dress as observant Jews, he continued. The new [Yanukovych] government is anti-Nazi, he commented, and does not support skinheads or Ukrainian nationalists. Its security forces watch all radical movements and deter them from assaulting Jews and others. The situation is calm now, much better than it was under previous President Victor Yushchenko who was attempting to gain the electoral support of Ukrainian nationalists.

17. Igor Romanov is Director of the **regional office** of the **Union of Jewish Religious Communities (Объединение юдейских религиозных общин)**, the Chabad religious organization in Ukraine. The Dnipropetrovsk region includes 16 communities in Dnipropetrovsk and Kirovohrad oblasts. The role of the regional office is to reach out to Jews in population centers that are too small to have resident rabbis.

Igor Romanov represents Chabad in small Jewish population centers. He manages several Chabad outreach programs and also maintains contact with police and judicial systems throughout the area, including Dnipropetrovsk itself, on behalf of Chabad.

Photo: the writer.



⁴⁶ The views expressed by Mr. Brez are widely held in Ukraine. Although he did not mention the role of judges in the Ukrainian legal system, these individuals also are commonly believed to be corrupt. Many refer to the Ukrainian judicial system as “telephone justice”, that is, judges wait for a telephone call from a superior to inform them of a decision desired for a specific case.

A special project of banker Hennadiy Bogolubov is the distribution of **large food parcels** to elderly and invalid Jews just before Rosh Hashanah and Purim/Pesach; a **smaller food parcel** (which includes a menorah and candles) is distributed for Chanukah. Approximately 5,700 parcels are distributed on each occasion, said Mr. Romanov, including 4,800 in the city of Dnipropetrovsk itself and the remaining 900 elsewhere in the area. Additionally, about 2,200 individuals are accommodated at Chabad Pesach seders in the region.

Unfortunately, he observed, Chabad no longer is able to provide **hot Shabbat meals** to Jewish elderly in the area. A donor who had previously supported this program withdrew funding when the economic crisis started and has not yet restored it. Chabad also has been unable to resume **Sunday school-type Jewish education programs** for children who remain in the region.

A total of about 100 individuals, said Mr. Romanov, participate in local versions of the **National Business School/STARS religious education program** that have been developed for Pavlograd, Novomoskovsk, and Nikopol. These classes, which meet weekly, are taught by local individuals and yeshiva instructors.

In response to a question, Mr. Romanov estimated **local inflation at 10 to 15 percent**. The **economic situation has stabilized**, he said; the global economic crisis was exacerbated in Ukraine, he continued, by uncertainty stemming from the protracted election process. Further, he noted, the very lengthy winter just made things worse. Now that winter is over and Ukraine has a new government, perhaps conditions will improve.

18. Oleg Rostovtsev is a **media specialist** whose primary client is the Chabad Jewish community structure in Dnipropetrovsk. He is responsible for the community website (<http://djic.com.ua>, which has 33,000 unique visitors every month),⁴⁷ a community newspaper (*Shabbat Shalom*), and a weekly television show, *Alef*. *Alef* is shown twice weekly on a regional network and draws several hundred thousand viewers to its program of interviews with local Jews and visiting Jewish guests, information about Jewish holidays and Jewish current events, and news from Israel. Because of its large audience, it attracts significant advertising. Mr. Rostovtsev also produces various compact disks for the community, arranges and manages press conferences, and serves as a guide/contact person for visiting reporters and other media specialists.



Oleg Rostovtsev is a media specialist employed by the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad community.

Photo: the writer (in 2009).

⁴⁷ Zelig Brez, Executive Director of the Chabad philanthropic fund in Dnipropetrovsk stated that the site has 20,000 unique visitors every month. See page 34.

The **major concern of Ukrainians**, said Mr. Rostovtsev, is economic stability. Their election choices were based on this factor, almost to the exclusion of any other consideration. Few people, including Jews, have any vision of the future, he continued. People just live from day to day and seem unmoved by larger issues.

Similarly, little vision exists about the **future of the Jewish community**. Jewish communal life, he said, is controlled by rabbis and by outside Jewish organizations, such as the Joint Distribution Committee, Jewish Agency, and the Israel Cultural Center. Wealthy Jewish businessmen, said Mr. Rostovtsev, may support specific projects, but have no interest in the broader Jewish collective.

In Dnipropetrovsk, continued Mr. Rostovstev, **everything revolves around Rabbi Kaminezki**. The outside agencies essentially work for him and he is the only Jewish authority figure with whom the mayor will speak. **Dnipropetrovsk is tolerant toward its Jewish population**, Mr. Rostovtsev said; antisemitic attacks occur from time to time, but antisemitism is not a major problem.

19. **Matseva** (*Heb.*, מצבה), which means *tombstone* in Hebrew, is the name applied to a small memorial on a portion of **an old Dnipropetrovsk Jewish cemetery** that had been partially destroyed during military operations in World War II and then subsequently razed by Soviet authorities in the 1950's and 1960's. Prior to its devastation, it may have included as many as 90,000 Jewish graves, including those of 1905 and 1918 pogrom victims. Following its destruction as a Jewish cemetery, it became a public park.

Notwithstanding its status as public property, powerful business forces proposed the development of a large supermarket on the site in 2008. Rabbi Kaminezki quickly mobilized the Jewish community in opposition to commercial exploitation of the setting and, in a dramatic confrontation with the would-be developers and municipal officials in 2009, blocked its use for mercantile purposes. The Chabad community subsequently allocated its own funds for creation of a memorial on a small segment of the park.

The four vertical slabs at far right in the photo constitute one of two sets of facing pillars with text in Ukrainian and Hebrew at the entrance that briefly explain the history of the memorial site. To the side of the entrance, in the grass, are recovered original headstones from the earlier cemetery. Most of the tombstone-appearing structures elsewhere on the site are modern creations intended to depict the earlier function of the property.

Photo: the writer.



20. A highly successful Jewish **women's microenterprise loan fund** continues to launch new businesses in Dnipropetrovsk. Initiated with funds from Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, the Boston Jewish federation, the fund is managed by local women and PrivatBank, a large Ukrainian bank controlled by two Dnipropetrovsk Jewish leaders, Hennady Boholubov and Ihor Kolomoisky. All loan applicants must submit business plans to a committee of local Jewish leaders and PrivatBank representatives.

More than 200 women have applied for loans, said Natalia Rier, director of the microenterprise program. Forty-six such loans have been granted, and 31 of these have been paid back in full to date. Ms. Rier anticipates that almost all will be repaid eventually. The range of loans granted is between \$1,000 and \$3,200, she stated. The most common reasons for rejecting a loan request, stated Ms. Rier in response to a question, are poor business plans, excessively large sums required for equipment, and excessive anticipated rent required by building owners.

Over the years, continued Ms. Rier, the amount of annual Boston funding has declined in response both to **recycling of loan money** as loans have been paid back and to some **local fundraising** (approximately \$5,000 collected to date) in support of the project. PrivatBank, she said, charges very low interest on the loans, another factor in ensuring the continuity of the loan program.⁴⁸

Two current clients were introduced to the writer. One woman operates a **small kosher dairy café** inside the entrance to the community center adjacent to the synagogue. In existence for two years, the café sells non-alcoholic beverages, cakes and pastries, and salads. It seats four people at a small table in the entrance and another six at small tables in the elevator lobby; its major market derives from the extensive foot traffic in and out of the community center, but it also does some catering for outside events. The second business is located in a popular bazaar. It sells **goods for infants and toddlers**, such as baby buggies, strollers, and similar items.



Natalia Rier, in blue skirt, poses with the proprietor of a bazaar stall financed with a Jewish women's microenterprise loan. The stall is located in an aisle of the bazaar that features goods for children. Most of the merchandise in the stall appears to be imported from Poland. A pull-down metal door protects the stall and its inventory during the renter's absence.

Photo: the writer.

⁴⁸ Another microenterprise loan program was started in the city by the Joint Distribution Committee. Its conditions were much more complex and much more expensive to the borrower. It failed to attract clients and subsequently was terminated by JDC.

National and International Organizations

21. The **Jewish Agency for Israel (Sochnut, JAFI)** operates a suite of offices and program rooms in a modern building in Dnipropetrovsk. The Dnipropetrovsk center also supervises JAFI coordinators in Krivoi Rog, Zaporizhya, and Melitopol, as well as volunteer representatives in Alexandria and Kirovograd.⁴⁹ Its major mission centers on Jewish identity-building through formal and informal Jewish education and it encourages emigration of local Jews to Israel. Lena Zbarzhevsky, a native of Dnipropetrovsk, is the new JAFI director in the city. She left the city as an adolescent when she emigrated to Israel with her family.

Ms. Zbarzhevsky observed that **budget cuts** inflicted upon JAFI have affected local programming severely. JAFI has had to curtail the number of ulpan (Hebrew-language courses) that it offers and the type of Jewish/Israeli programs that draw local Jews into substantive JAFI activities. In an effort to save money, JAFI now has far fewer Israelis on staff; it is much more reliant on local employees who, no matter how competent, are unable to convey the sense of Zionism that Israelis themselves promote and that she believes is essential to fulfillment of the JAFI mission.



Lena Zbarzhevsky emigrated to Israel as an adolescent with her family from Dnipropetrovsk. Twenty years later, she has returned to direct JAFI operations in the region.

Photo: the writer.

Ms. Zbarzhevsky said that she was surprised by the **lack of knowledge** in the Jewish population about Judaism, the Jewish people, and Israel. She had anticipated that Rabbi Kaminezki's efforts, as well as the fact that so many local Jews have relatives in Israel, would have had greater impact. It may be that this lack of knowledge about Jewish peoplehood and the Jewish state is responsible for **lower interest in aliyah** (immigration to Israel) than she had expected, especially given the dire state of the Dnipropetrovsk economy. She finds it strange that parents whose young adult children have settled in Israel after participation in various JAFI programs (such as Na'aleh and Selah) are not seriously considering aliyah for themselves. In an ongoing endeavor to meet people, she continued, she attends synagogue every Shabbat, introducing herself to various people and striking up conversations with them. Ms. Zbarzhevsky noted wryly that the majority of individuals attending Shabbat services seem less interested in praying than in socializing with others; the **synagogue**, she said, serves an important function as a **social venue**.

⁴⁹ The Kharkiv office of JAFI supervises its programs in Donetsk and the surrounding area.

JAFI currently operates **two ulpan**s in the city, each with a strong Jewish identity component. Together, these classes enroll about 50 adult students, Ms. Zbarzhevsky, said. JAFI is forced to charge fees for the ulpan, whereas the Hebrew-language classes offered by the Israel Cultural Center are free of charge. However, she noted, it is broadly recognized that the quality of instruction offered in the JAFI ulpan is higher than that available in the ICC courses. Some individuals who are planning aliyah never consider studying Hebrew at all while they remain in Dnipropetrovsk, she stated; they are aware that ulpan is provided as components of the absorption process in Israel and they wait until they actually are in Israel before beginning to study the language.

JAFI also operates a **club for students and young adults**, enrolling about 60 people up to the age of 33. Not all members are active, she acknowledged; about 20 or 30 attend any single activity of the club. **Taglit** (birthright Israel) and **MASA** generate great interest, Ms. Zbarzhevsky responded to a question, but she was not certain of the precise numbers of interested individuals because these programs are the responsibility of the JAFI education specialist, a local woman who was not present at the time that the writer met with Ms. Zbarzhevsky. Ms. Zbarzhevsky also was unfamiliar with local participation in Russian-language distance-learning courses offered by the **Open University of Israel**.

JAFI summer camps remain a popular vehicle for instilling Jewish identity; Ms. Zbarzhevsky had not yet (April 23) been informed by JAFI in Jerusalem of the precise number of local children and teens who would be accommodated in JAFI summer camps during the then-forthcoming summer, but she anticipated that three sessions would be offered, each for a different age group.

Na'aleh, the high school program in Israel, and **Selah**, a program offering an ulpan and a university course of studies in Israel, remain very popular among young people. The overwhelming majority of participants in these programs remain in Israel upon completion of their academic degrees.

In all, Ms. Zbarzhevsky anticipates about 450 **olim** (immigrants to Israel) from the Dnipropetrovsk region in 2010, in contrast to 330 in 2009. The majority of olim, she said, are likely to be young adults, many of whom immigrate as young families with small children, and adults in their 50's and 60's. Some of the latter, she continued, are joining adolescent/young adult children who have already resettled in Israel; others include individuals who are seeking treatment for medical conditions.

Among the **younger adults**, she continued, some are interested in absorption programs that combine Hebrew-language ulpan with professional courses in computer programming or in culinary arts. Some insist on going to work right away, even if their qualifications do not match Israeli standards and their Hebrew is shaky. A shortage of physicians in Israel has prompted interest in aliyah from some local doctors. Many potential olim, Ms. Zbarzhevsky continued, are well-informed about the aliyah and absorption process, having obtained information from relatives and friends. Local Jews

request specific employment opportunities, apartments in good areas, and high-quality absorption programs.

Ms. Zbarzhevsky hopes that **the previously cool attitude of the Boston Jewish federation toward JAFI** in general and JAFI in Dnipropetrovsk in particular will improve. She reported that, for the first time in many years, a recent delegation from Boston agreed to meet with the JAFI representation in the city. Sensing an opportunity, she invited them to her home for dinner; however, because no one in the group spoke Russian or Hebrew and she herself does not speak English, communication was very limited and their major interaction was eating the dinner that she had prepared.

22. Amir Ben-Zvi, an Israeli, heads a large **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee** representation in the area. About 40,000 Jews reside in Dnipropetrovsk itself, he said, including approximately 7,000 who receive welfare services through the hesed.⁵⁰ The Dnipropetrovsk JDC office also is responsible for JDC programming in a number of smaller Jewish population centers in the region.

After absorbing the impact of the worldwide economic crisis in late 2008 and in 2009, **the local JDC budget** has remained stable in terms of its total amount between 2009 and 2010, said Mr. Ben Zvi, although allocations to specific programs have changed. In all, he continued, JDC is spending about \$6,400,000 in the region on welfare⁵¹ and another \$600,000 on Jewish renewal programs. Those seniors eligible for funding through the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, i.e., Holocaust survivors and other Jews who lived in areas occupied by Nazi forces, receive five to six times more support than those who lived elsewhere during World War II or who were born after the end of the War. The number of World War II survivors is decreasing every year due to simple mortality, said Mr. Ben Zvi, even as the Claims Conference recently increased the amount that each such individual receives by 15 percent. The needs of non-victims of Nazis continue to strain the JDC budget as available funds do not come close to fulfilling their welfare requirements. JDC was forced to reduce its budget by 10 percent for this particular demographic segment, he stated, notwithstanding the fact that a “stream” of new non-victim clients has requested services.

Amir Ben-Zvi is well-respected in the area as lead representative of the American Jewish Joint Jewish Distribution Committee. As is the case in JDC offices throughout the post-Soviet states, he is grappling with a severe difference in services available to victims of the Holocaust and those who escaped the Holocaust.



Photo: the writer.

⁵⁰ See pages 25-26 for information about Hesed Menachem in Dnipropetrovsk.

⁵¹ Much of the welfare budget comes from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany and other Holocaust restitution funds.

Jewish children-at-risk constitute another segment of the population receiving JDC welfare services. The needs of this demographic group are “never-ending”, said Mr. Ben-Zvi, and he stated that JDC may be reaching only 30 percent of Jewish children with various issues. However, due to budgetary constraints, funds available to such youngsters have been cut by five percent from 2009 to 2010. He noted that many families with children in the **Beit Chana Special Needs Educational Resource Center** also participate in the Hesed Menachem **Tikvah** program that serves the same population group.⁵² JDC, he said, provides some professional support to Beit Chana staff and welfare assistance to families with children in ERC programs.

Because it is much more cost-effective to operate in larger Jewish population concentrations, JDC is now focusing its **Jewish renewal programs** in this part of Ukraine on Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhyya, and Krivoy Rog – and is no longer attempting Jewish renewal in smaller Jewish population centers. Specifically, resources are being directed to family camps, Shabbatonim, and young adult leadership development, said Mr. Ben-Zvi. However, notwithstanding the proven worth of these ventures, budgetary pressures forced a 12 percent reduction between 2009 and 2010 in funding available for such programs. Earlier in the discussion, Mr. Ben-Zvi stated that the lack of lay leadership constituted a “crisis” in indigenous Jewish community organization and expressed the view that development of responsible indigenous lay leadership would require the passage of at least three generations. In response to a question about JDC measurement of real outcomes of its renewal programs, Mr. Ben-Zvi said that no formal evaluations had been conducted, but he believes that young Jews will come forward as lay leaders in the future. He added that professional leadership also is improving.⁵³

In response to a question about **World Jewish Relief**, a British organization with a mandate similar to that of JDC, Mr. Ben-Zvi said that WJR has allocated significant funds to Jewish special needs children and to Jewish elderly who are ineligible for Holocaust-survivor benefits. It maintains several programs in Zaporizhyya, including the provision of support to a Jewish community center. WJR also provides some assistance to non-Jewish orphanages, noted Mr. Ben-Zvi.⁵⁴

⁵² See pages 22-23. The Beit Chana ERC program places greater emphasis on education and specific therapies, whereas the JDC Tikvah program is less structured and more recreational.

⁵³ Mr. Ben-Zvi seemed unaware of his contradictory statements about Jewish lay leadership, i.e., the lack of Jewish lay leadership constitutes a crisis, JDC leadership development programs have proved themselves, no evaluations of JDC Jewish renewal programs (including leadership development) have been completed, and Jewish young people will come forward in the future (which can be interpreted as meaning that they have not yet come forward). In general, indigenous Jews with lay leadership capacity/ambitions have avoided association with JDC, perceiving it as a foreign bureaucracy unwilling to grant meaningful authority to local people.

However, Mr. Ben-Zvi’s statement that the quality of local professional leadership is improving is supported by many observers.

⁵⁴ For information about Zaporizhyya, see pages 50-55.

World Jewish Relief maintains no infrastructure in the post-Soviet states. Instead, it works with and through JDC.

Asked about earlier plans to renovate Hesed Menachem, the centrally located JDC hesed in Dnipropetrovsk, into a **multi-purpose Jewish community center**, Mr. Ben-Zvi said that such a project now would be very problematic economically. The main local commercial firm backing such an endeavor is in financial difficulty, and JDC may have “lost the moment” in going forward with additions that would include a large sports hall and various cultural facilities. Such a JCC had been perceived by JDC as a secular counterpart to the Chabad Menorah Center.⁵⁵

23. The **sister-city relationship between the Boston and Dnipropetrovsk Jewish communities**, various details of which are noted elsewhere in this section, was initiated in 1992⁵⁶ and today is the most comprehensive of any “kehilla” project connecting North American and post-Soviet Jewish population centers. It involves both Jewish and non-sectarian entities in each city, although most of the latter appear to have been promoted by Boston-area Jews. Almost all projects involve assistance from Boston to Dnipropetrovsk. The relationship also includes some projects involving Haifa, Boston’s Partnership 2000 city in Israel.

Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston (the Boston Jewish federation) provides essential subsidies to Beit Baruch, the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish day school, and certain other programs. Education components of the relationship include consultations in special education to the special needs program housed at Beit Chana and methodology for teaching English as a second language at School #144. Exchanges of teachers take place annually, and Boston-area Jewish teens travel to Dnipropetrovsk for a winter camp with local Jewish adolescents. Occasionally, the teen exchange also involves youngsters from Haifa as well. A medical care program provides critical expertise in geriatric care, as well as advice, training, and advanced technology in pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology to Dnipropetrovsk clinics and hospitals. Boston Action for Post-Soviet Jewry, although an independent entity, initiated its Adopt-a-Bubbe program in association with the sister-city effort.

Although some refer to the relationship as a “partnership,” almost all initiatives and funding originate in Boston. Unlike other relationships between North American Jewish federations and post-Soviet Jewish population centers, the Boston-Dnipropetrovsk

⁵⁵ The dedicated hesed programs currently housed at Hesed Menachem will move into the Menorah Center at the request of Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki, who has stated that the Menorah Center should be a venue in which all Jews, including the elderly and impoverished, feel comfortable. However, it is anticipated by many that the overtly Chabad sponsorship of the Menorah Center may deter some younger Jews from associating with it.

As is the case with many new Jewish community buildings in the post-Soviet states, including the Menorah Center and Jewish centers developed by JDC, planners count on full or partial operating support from commercial concerns that are expected to rent space in such facilities.

⁵⁶ The writer, who was living and working in Cambridge at the time, was one of two individuals who initiated the project under the auspices of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston. The other founder, Dr. Judith Wolf, remains active in the partnership; her family has provided leadership and resources for the special needs program at Beit Chana.

relationship does not include collaborative projects with the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Israel, or the Hillel student organization.

24. The writer did not visit the **Israel Cultural Center**, which is operated by Nativ, a Israeli government entity formerly known as Lishkat Hakesher. A representative of **Project Keshet**, a Jewish women's organization, failed to appear for an arranged meeting, which could not be re-scheduled.

Dniprodzerzhinsk

Dniprodzerzhinsk is located on the banks of the Dnipro River, approximately 22 miles northwest of Dnipropetrovsk. Founded in 1779 as **Kamenskoye**, its name was changed in 1936 in honor of Feliks "Iron Feliks" Dzerzhinsky (1877-1926), notorious head of the Cheka (renamed OGPU in 1922, NKVD in 1934, and KGB in 1953) from 1917 until his death in 1926. A massive hydroelectric station completed in 1964 provides power for a "black industrial base" focused on iron and steel, industrial chemicals, cement, machine-building, and construction of railroad cars.



Uranium dumps remain from the production of 'dirty' nuclear bombs in the postwar period. Dniprodzerzhinsk is rated one of the ten most heavily polluted cities in all of the post-Soviet successor states.

An urban scene in Dniprodzerzhinsk depicts the pollution that characterizes the city.

Photo: <http://ukrainetrek.com/dneprodzerzhinsk-ukraine-city.shtml>. Retrieved July 11, 2010.

The general population of the city is approximately 250,000. About 2,000 Jews live in Dniprodzerzhinsk, following heavy emigration (perhaps 2,000 or more) in recent years.

25. Rabbi Levi Stambler, a Chabad Hasid from Israel, remains the chief rabbi of the city, although he and his family reside in Dnipropetrovsk to be close to the yeshiva katana and machon that the Stambler children attend and to avoid the exposure of their family to the heavily polluted Dniprodzerzhinsk environment. Rabbi Stambler commutes to Dniprodzerzhinsk daily and often remains in the city for Shabbat. An assistant rabbi raised in Dnipropetrovsk has lived in Dniprodzerzhinsk for three years and fulfills many routine rabbinic tasks. Technically, the assistant rabbi is the rabbi of the synagogue; he

also teaches in the local day school (see below), visits local Jews in their homes, and fulfills other responsibilities on a daily basis.

The **Chabad Jewish center** is a substantial four-story brick structure built on the site of an earlier synagogue. The new edifice, designed to resemble the Chabad headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, includes an attractive prayer hall, community rooms, day school, and Chabad offices. (See photo next page.) Close to the center of the city, it stands out as a modern building in a neighborhood of small homes and poorly maintained narrow streets. Development of the building was financed by Dnipropetrovsk oligarch Hennady Boholubov, whose family originates in Dniprodzerzhinsk; Mr. Boholubov continues to subsidize the community.



Notwithstanding their residence in Dnipropetrovsk, Rabbi Levi Stambler and his wife Dina are regarded as doing excellent work in Dniprodzerzhinsk. With the contraction of services by JDC, the Stamblers now operate the only substantive Jewish programs in the city.

Photo: the writer (in 2009).

In response to a question, Rabbi Stambler said that the **economic situation** in Dniprodzerzhinsk is somewhat more stable than had been the case one year previously. The passage of time has accustomed residents to reduced circumstances; they are less desperate and more accepting, he said. They have become used to an unemployment rate of 50 percent. Many of those who are nominally employed, he continued, work only two or three days each week. Small businesses are failing, stated Rabbi Stambler, because banks do not give loans. Inflation has increased because teacher salaries were raised just before the last elections and then import taxes also rose so that the state would have sufficient revenues to pay for increased teacher remuneration.

People devise their own **coping mechanisms**, said Dina Stambler. About half of the population refuses to pay local water and gas bills; in response, the city disconnects these services for several days at a time, driving people to draw their own water from local water sources, including contaminated springs.

Chabad has managed to continue and even increase some services in the city during this period, responded Rabbi Stambler to questions by the writer about the **Chabad response to local economic distress**. The Chabad **Federation of Jewish Communities (Федерация Еврейских Общин)** in Ukraine extends some assistance to Dniprodzerzhinsk, he stated, replacing funds that were contributed by local donors before the economic crisis affected indigenous Jewish philanthropic capacity. Further, the **regional office of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities (Объединение юдейских религиозных общин)**, the Chabad religious organization in Ukraine,

distributes food parcels to needy elderly Jews just before Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah, and Purim/Pesach.⁵⁷ Additionally, the synagogue sponsors a small soup kitchen, providing meals to about 10 people every day; not all of these individuals are elderly, said Rabbi Stambler.

The **hesed** operated by the Joint Distribution Committee has suspended many of its programs, Rabbi Stambler noted. It now has no local director,⁵⁸ and it relies on the Chabad day school van to bring seniors to the hesed for a reduced schedule of activities. After the hesed terminated patronage services (home health care, such as cleaning, bathing, cooking) to needy clients, the synagogue took this responsibility upon itself as well. Rabbi Stambler commented that the JDC smart card program for discounted groceries in cooperating supermarkets has been a failure in the city; JDC refuses to acknowledge, he said, that elderly people in smaller population centers simply cannot adjust to such strange methods of shopping. They do not like the supermarkets at which the cards are accepted and they just refuse to go to stores that they find unpleasant or inconvenient.

Chabad is taking a further step toward **unofficial assumption of JDC welfare responsibilities** as it develops a caravan (trailer) to be used as a **medical clinic for local Jewish elderly**. Chabad recently obtained a plot of land immediately adjacent to the synagogue/day school that can be used to accommodate both the caravan and a play yard for preschool children. Local donors contributed \$40,000 for purchase of the caravan, said Rabbi Stambler, and funds are being raised to equip it. A physician who is a synagogue member will supervise all medical programs. The government medical system is “dehumanizing,” observed Rabbi Stambler; the clinic will treat its patients with dignity and respect.

26. The **Chabad day school**, which opened in 2001 and enrolled 140 youngsters at its peak, now enrolls only 77 pupils, said Rabbi Stambler. Sixty-five are registered in grades 1-11, and 12 are in the pre-school. Enrollment continues to decline from year to year, he acknowledged. As soon as the new Chabad community building was completed in 2008, the school was moved from its former oversized premises to the upper floors of the community building.



The Dniprodzerzhinsk Jewish day school occupies the upper floors of the Chabad center in the city. The structure was designed to resemble Chabad world headquarters in Brooklyn.

Photo: <http://lubavitch.com/news/article/2024056>. Retrieved May 16, 2010.

⁵⁷ See pages 35-36.

⁵⁸ The Dniprodzerzhinsk hesed is now managed from Dnipropetrovsk.

Families are asked to make a modest contribution – 200 hryvna (approximately U.S. \$25) – per child per year to the school, said Rabbi Stambler, but many are reluctant to do so. Some contribute physical labor, he acknowledged, but others persist in believing that the government of Israel is paying all of the expenses of the school.⁵⁹

The Soviet system, Rabbi Stambler asserted, “educated” people to take, to steal, rather than to be responsible for their own lives and for the well-being of others around them. These attitudes, he continued, persist in the post-Soviet era and create difficulties for the operation of community-based programs.

27. However, Rabbi Stambler acknowledged that local Jews pay to attend **community seders** that are held in the basement hall of the Chabad center. Participants are very orderly and responsible, he said. About 200 people attend on the first night and 100 on the second night.

Amongst other programs operated by Chabad in the city are **day camps** during Pesach and Sukkot vacations and a **STARS** class. The latter, which offers a stipend to students, currently enrolls 23 young adults.

28. In response to a question about local **antisemitism**, Rabbi Stambler observed that the situation is mixed. Local police, he said, offer good protection to the synagogue. However, the editor of a city newspaper has written antisemitic articles about local Jewish businessmen. The businessmen sued her and won their case in court, but the court has not enforced penalties imposed by judicial authorities. The case is complex, said Rabbi Stambler, because the editor’s father is Jewish. Rabbi Stambler continued that popular antisemitism appears to be increasing, probably reflecting efforts by some to find scapegoats during current economic distress.

Krivoi Rog (Krivyy Rih, Krivyy Rig)

Although the previous Ukrainian government strongly encouraged the Ukrainianization of all Ukrainian place names, the Russian name of Krivoi Rog has continued to be more commonly used than is Krivyy Rih, the Ukrainian equivalent. The city was founded in the 17th century as a Cossack village, but expanded rapidly in the late 19th century following discovery and exploitation of high-grade iron ore deposits in the area. Krivoi Rog stretches some 130 kilometers (81 miles) in length, connecting numerous mining sites, some of them now inactive. Production of iron and steel, chemicals, and engineering equipment dominate its economic base. Krivoi Rog is located approximately 136 kilometers southwest of Dnipropetrovsk. Its general population is about 675,000.

⁵⁹ The government of Israel provides no support to the school. The school was established after the Hephzibah day school subsidy program was closed to new institutions.

The **Jewish population** of the city is estimated by local Jews to be between 10,000 and 12,000, a range that may be too high. The extreme linear nature of Krivoi Rog has impeded development of a **sense of community** among local Jews.

29. Rabbi Liron Edri, a Chabad rabbi from Israel, arrived in the city in late summer of 2001 and has proved to be a strong leader for a Jewish population with little effective indigenous leadership. Among his initial accomplishments was an informal demographic survey that indicated three defined areas of the city in which the local



Jewish population is concentrated. Rabbi Edri has used this information to determine the location of community services, including a new **day school** and a **synagogue**. He proved to be adept in working with local officials in obtaining suitable land for both projects. Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki assisted him in making contact with several individuals with Krivoi Rog roots who have provided financial support for these undertakings.

Rabbi Liron Edri.

Photo: Chabad.

30. The **Ohr Avner** Chabad day school now enrolls 87 pupils in grades 1-11, an increase from the 76 who attended the school at the time of the writer's last visit in 2008. (In 2005, enrollment was 100.) Another 20 youngsters are in a related pre-school program housed elsewhere. The current school structure is a renovated older school that once consisted of three parallel buildings. The two larger original buildings now are connected by a sizeable atrium and the third building, to the left of the other two, is connected to the center building by a smaller enclosure.



A five-sided modern glass and steel structure encloses a large new atrium connecting two of the three buildings of the Krivoi Rog Chabad school.

Photo: the writer (in 2008).

Currently under development to the right of the existing structure are additional buildings accommodating a new sports hall,⁶⁰ assembly hall, and a preschool. The

⁶⁰ The large center atrium stands empty and probably could have been used as a sports hall if it had been designed for that purpose.

school grounds already include extensive play grounds and sports fields, perhaps the most substantial developed outdoor area that the writer has seen at any Jewish day school in the post-Soviet states.

The **school is private**, charging 350 hryvna (approximately U.S. \$44) monthly to all families who are able to pay such fees, said Rabbi Edri. If families are unable to pay the full fee, they give whatever they can afford; all families pay something, he stated. Rabbi Edri acknowledged that not all pupils are halachically Jewish; some, he said, have Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers.

In addition to day students, the school hosts nine **boarding pupils** up to the age of 13 in purpose-built premises. Youngsters reside in two- or three-bed rooms, each with its own bathroom.

31. Construction is proceeding on a **new synagogue**, funded by a former Krivoy Rog resident. Such a synagogue is an “essential symbol” for a developing Jewish community, said Rabbi Edri. The main prayer hall will accommodate 180 people; a portable mechitsa will be used for daily services. On Shabbat, women are expected to use an upstairs gallery seating 70 people. Unlike many other new or renovated synagogues in the post-Soviet states, the Krivoy Rog structure contains an elevator; it will be programmed to operate automatically on Shabbat, noted Rabbi Edri.



Krivoy Rog synagogue

Photo:

<http://djv.com.ua/?page=news&type=news&mnu=9&artid=3721>. Retrieved June 27, 2010.

In addition to a prayer hall, the synagogue building will include several community rooms, a casual kosher restaurant/café, community offices, and a Jewish museum. The latter will focus on local Jewish history, including World War II and the Holocaust.

Rabbi Edri anticipates that the synagogue will host adult education classes in both Jewish subjects and in English, as well as the STARS (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers) program, which currently enrolls 46 young people who are paid for attendance at twice-weekly classes. The community mikveh is located in his home, he said.

32. Following the lead of Rabbi Kaminezki in nearby Dnipropetrovsk, Rabbi Edri has formed a **philanthropic council of wealthy Jews** in the city. Thirty-three individuals

contribute regularly to the Chabad enterprise in Krivoy Rog, said Rabbi Edri, but most are simply donors, not leaders. The majority, he continued, do not understand the concept of lay leadership and are unwilling to assume any leadership responsibility.⁶¹

33. The **Joint Distribution Committee** operates Hesed Chana and a Jewish community center program in Krivoy Rog that the writer was unable to visit. **World Jewish Relief**, the British organization, supports several programs in the city, said Rabbi Edri.

Zaporizhya

The city of Zaporizhya (known until 1921 as Aleksandrovsk) is the administrative center of Zaporizhya oblast (region), which lies immediately south of Dnipropetrovsk oblast.⁶² The cities of Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhya, both on the Dnipro River, are about 50 miles apart. Zaporizhya was established in the late sixteenth century by roving bands of local Cossacks known as Zaporizhyan Cossacks. Their descendants remain in the area today, although they are less numerous and less well known than the Don Cossacks to the east and Kuban Cossacks to the southeast.

A major hydroelectric power plant on the Dnipro River powers a strong industrial base, including metallurgy, transportation equipment, and chemicals. Zaporizhya also sustains a food processing industry based on agricultural production in the area.

The current population of Zaporizhya is about 780,000, the sixth largest city in Ukraine. According to Chabad Rabbi Nochum Ehrentroi, the **Jewish population** probably is around 12,000, of whom perhaps 7,000 are Jewish according to Jewish law (halacha, by matrilineal descent).

34. Rabbi Nochum Ehrentroi, a Chabad hasid from Israel, arrived in Zaporizhya in 1996 in the dual capacity of community rabbi and JDC representative in the city. JDC had renovated a large synagogue building that includes a spacious prayer hall, several smaller community rooms and classrooms, offices, a kitchen, and a dining room accommodating 100 people. Initially, the JDC hesed was based in the synagogue. In 1998, JDC abruptly terminated payment of Rabbi Ehrentroi's salary in response to budgetary pressures. However, Rabbi Ehrentroi remained in Zaporizhya and continued to work on behalf of the Jewish community; he was dependent on the salary of his wife, Dina, a teacher at Gymnasia Alef, then the only Jewish day school in the city. (See

⁶¹ See www.krjew.com, a Russian-language website describing Chabad activities in Krivoy Rog under the direction of Rabbi Edri.

⁶² Aleksandrovsk was named in honor of Russian Prince Aleksander Golitsyn. Zaporizhya means "after the rapids," in reference to the Dnipro River rapids near the island of Khortytsa.

below.) After several months, Chabad assumed responsibility for Rabbi Ehrentroi's salary, as JDC doubtless had assumed that it would.

In response to a question, Rabbi Ehrentroi said that the **economic situation** in the city is somewhat less dire than it was last year, but life is still very difficult for most people. Inflation has been tempered to some extent, and unemployment appears to have stabilized. Nonetheless, it is still very difficult to find a new job, he said.

Unlike many other rabbis, Rabbi Ehrentroi has made no effort to establish a Board/Council of Donors or Guardians (Попечительский совет) committed to financial support of the Chabad agenda in the city. Only two or three wealthy Jews in Zaporizhyya have come forward in support of the Jewish community, he said; it simply is not worth the effort to organize a board of contributors, he stated. Rabbi Ehrentroi has been joined in his work by two additional rabbis from Israel who teach in the Chabad day school (see below), lead the Zaporizhyya STARS program, and do other community work.

Rabbi Nochum Ehrentroi, a Chabad rabbi from Israel, began his work in Zaporizhyya as a representative of JDC.

Photo: the writer.



35. The **Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish day school** was started by Dina Ehrentroi in response to the secular focus of Gymnasia Alef, the first Jewish day school in the city. (See below.) An experienced educator, Mrs. Ehrentroi also is artistically inclined; the building, a former public school, has been attractively renovated and includes appealing color schemes and school furnishings. The school now enrolls approximately 150 pupils in grades 1-11, said Principal Olga Rogozyanova. Almost all are Jewish according to halacha, she continued, but the total number of youngsters is decreasing from year to year due to emigration and overall Jewish population decline. The Jewish curriculum of the school includes three to four class periods weekly of Hebrew language instruction, two hours of Jewish tradition, and one or two class periods of Jewish history, depending on the specific grade level. Jewish themes are common in both music and art classes, Ms. Rogozyanova stated. Additionally, the school holds kabbalat Shabbat (greeting the Sabbath) programs every Friday afternoon and sponsors a Jewish-theme choir for boys and a Jewish/ Israel-focus dance program for girls.

Thirteen girls between the ages of six and 15 live in a dormitory section of the school, said Ms. Rogozyanova, and six boys between the ages of seven and 14 live in an apartment with counselors. All of these youngsters come from smaller towns or from at-risk families.

In response to a question, Ms. Rogozyanova estimated that 90 to 95 percent of school families have **computers at home**, but that only 30 to 40 percent are connected to the Internet. For some, Internet service is too costly, but many parents also believe that

programs available on the Internet are “dangerous” and they are reluctant to permit their children to have access to any Internet content. The parents themselves are uneasy with computers; the impetus for purchasing them often is generated by older siblings of current pupils or other young people in the family.

Answering another question, Ms. Rogozyanova said that some families provide **assistance to the school**, but that such support usually is insubstantial.

36. Chabad also operates a year-round **preschool**. Located in another part of the city on a large plot of land, the pre-school enrolls 37 children and anticipates a larger census during the 2010-2011 school year. The preschool includes a small **heder** of



eight children, boys and girls, from religious families. According to Rabbi Ehrentroi, the special section for children from observant families will be maintained in the regular day school as the children grow older.

Chabad preschool in Zaporizhyya.

Photo: the writer.

37. **Gymnasia Alef** was opened in 1992 by the Lishkat Hakesher (Liaison Office of the Israeli government, now known as Nativ) as a secular Zionist school. It was one of a number of Lishka schools intended to “compete” with religious day schools that were being developed by Orthodox rabbis in the larger cities of the post-Soviet states; the Lishka viewed such rabbis and their schools as inherently anti-Zionist. The Lishka schools were to be secular and aliyah-oriented, encouraging pupils and their families to emigrate to Israel.⁶³ In 1995, the Lishka reached agreement with ORT about bringing ORT computer technology into Lishka schools. The official title of the institution (in English translation) now is Zaporizhyya Jewish Gymnasia “ORT-Alef”.

Alef has been controversial among many Jews since its inception, largely because its principal, Dolina Mikhailovna Shalmina was widely perceived to enjoy strong ties with Ukrainian government officials and to be indifferent, at best, to Israel and Zionism. In its early years, the school seemed to devote more time and energy to teaching Yiddish than Hebrew.⁶⁴

⁶³ The Lishka opened such schools in several other cities, including Kyiv and Odesa, as well. At the time, there was no rabbinic presence at all in Zaporizhyya, although it is possible that the Lishka perceived Chabad Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki in nearby Dnipropetrovsk as competition.

⁶⁴ Disclosure: The writer visited the school previously, in 1998 and 2003. In 2005, Ms. Shalmina personally declined the writer’s request for a third visit. In 2010, the writer was asked by the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA, formerly United Jewish Communities) to chair a JFNA task force

The **school occupies two older buildings** – the lower grades in a small detached structure, and middle and higher grades in a portion of an adjacent (but not connected) larger edifice. The other section of the larger building is a neighborhood community center.

The **current enrollment**, said Ms. Shalmina, is 315; its peak enrollment was 350, she noted. About 85 percent of pupils are Jewish according to the Israeli Law of Return; most of the remaining 15 percent, she stated, are children of non-Jewish teachers and other non-Jewish school employees. All pupils, whether Jewish or not, study all Jewish subjects.⁶⁵

The **loss of Jewish enrollment**, she explained, is due to a declining Jewish birth rate and a loss of amenities, such as free bus transportation and free meals, due to budgetary constraints. Bus transportation is still available, Ms. Shalmina said, but pupils must pay for it. The school has no dining room or kitchen – these are in the community center segment of the building and are not available to the school; previously, the school provided catered non-kosher lunches at a cost of approximately one dollar per meal, but the school no longer is able to afford this service. The city offers a small breakfast to each pupil, she said. She observed that several specialized schools in the same district, that is, the center of the city, offer free bus service and free or heavily discounted meals.⁶⁶ She also noted that the city pays salaries of classroom teachers only if their classes enroll at least 18 pupils, so a declining enrollment carries the risk of classes so small that the city withholds teacher compensation and ORT is responsible for appropriate funding.



Dolina Shalmina and her school have been accused of anti-Zionism and hostility toward Judaism. Her office contains many souvenirs of trips to Israel and she insisted on posing in front of a map of Israel posted on a wall in her office.

Photo: the writer.

considering continuation of North American Jewish Federation financial support of ORT; therefore, her 2010 request to visit the school was made through ORT and the appointment was represented in part as a component of the JFNA ORT Task Force study.

⁶⁵ ORT schools in the post-Soviet states commonly enroll a minority of non-Jewish pupils, most of whom reside in the school neighborhood or have some other relationship with the school.

⁶⁶ Specialized public schools – those that offer double class periods daily in mathematics, science, a foreign language or another subject – are nominally free of formal tuition charges, but usually impose fees on families for teacher bonuses, laboratory or computer costs, security, etc.

The economic crisis has imposed **other constraints** upon the school as well, continued Ms. Shalmina. They are unable to afford security for their two buildings or for pupils as they enter and leave school. Several youngsters have been attacked physically, she said, but it is likely that these assaults were general bullying, not specifically antisemitic. The cost of utilities has increased, she stated, and most institutional supporters – municipal education authorities, the Jewish Agency, ORT, and the Israeli government – have either decreased their allocations or have not increased them to keep pace with inflation. The school has had to drop its shorashim (Jewish roots) trips to western Ukraine and Belarus, Shabbatonim, and Jewish family clubs.

She stated that **81 percent of the teachers have graduate-level certificates or degrees**, but the school has been unable to pay them appropriate bonuses for more than a year. None has quit yet, she added, even though they work extra hours for supervising extra-curricular activities and holiday celebrations.

Asked **if parents assist the school** in any way, Ms. Shalmina said that she is constantly “begging” (просить) them for contributions to defray the costs of necessary new furniture, janitor service, Jewish/Israeli holiday celebrations, and “even books.” However, she observed, 52 percent of pupils live in single-parent homes, which means fewer resources for family support.

In response to a question, Ms. Shalmina said that the **school curriculum** includes three class hours of Hebrew each week, two of Jewish history, and one of Jewish tradition. Additionally, grades 5-8 study the geography of Israel and grades 9-11 study Jewish literature. The school also sponsors three choirs and three dance ensembles, each for a different age group. All of these groups emphasize Jewish/Israeli programs.

The **ORT technology program** includes two class hours of instruction each week for grades 1-4, three for grades 5-8, and five for grades 9-11, said Ms. Shalmina.



Additionally, the school sponsors several technology clubs that meet after school hours.

The ORT computer technology labs in the middle and upper schools seemed modern and well-equipped. However, computers in the lower school building (not pictured here) appeared obsolescent.

Photo: the writer.

Answering a question about **computer use at home**, Ms. Shalmina estimated that only about 50 percent of all pupils have computers at home and that not all families with computers have access to the Internet.

Throughout Ms. Shalmina's appointment with the writer, she emphasized her Jewish roots, including lengthy accounts of her family's experiences and sacrifices during World War II and the Holocaust. Several of her ancestors fought in the Red Army against the German invaders. Ms. Shalmina also expressed her desire to improve conditions at the school; they need both Russian- and Hebrew-language books and maps about Israel, she said. No funds exist to replace items that have been lost or damaged during the 18 years of the school's existence.

38. Time constraints prevented an appointment at the **Max Grant Jewish Center**, a **JDC** building that the writer had visited on a previous trip to Zaporizhyya. Opened in 2004 with a major gift from Max Grant through **World Jewish Relief**, a British organization with strong ties to JDC, the Center is a two and one-half story structure located on a major thoroughfare. The ground floor accommodates the Zaporizhyya hesed, and the second and partially-built third floors house Jewish community center activities, including arts and crafts, a library and computer facility, a small theater, and a small fitness room.

Unlike the JDC Jewish centers in St. Petersburg and Odesa, the Max Grant center is unpretentious and appears to be accepted by local Jews as a community structure. According to Zaporizhyya Jews with whom the writer spoke, the JDC funding crisis has generated a number of program cutbacks and the imposition of fees for certain services at the Max Grant facility. **Nativ** (Lishkat Hakesher) maintains an office at the Center.

39. The writer also was unable to visit the Zaporizhyya office of the **Jewish Agency for Israel (Sochnut)**. JAFI operates an ulpan and various teen/young adult programs in Zaporizhyya.

Kyiv

Situated on both banks of the Dnipro River in the northern part of the country, the origins of Kyiv are lost in antiquity. It is, however, known as the "mother of all Russian cities," long pre-dating cities in Russia itself. Kyivan Rus – the city and territories around it - is considered the forerunner of the modern Russian state. In 988, Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv designated Orthodox (Byzantine rite) Christianity as the state religion of Russia and established its seat in Kyiv. Kyivan Rus attained its greatest powers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when it was a trading center between the Baltic and Mediterranean seas. Sacked by Mongols in 1240, the lands of Kyivan Rus were successively under Tatar, Lithuanian, and Polish control from the fourteenth century and then annexed by Russia in 1686. The third largest city in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Kyiv was occupied and almost completely destroyed by German forces between September 1941 and November 1943.

Now the capital of independent Ukraine, **Kyiv** is the political hub of the country and an important center of Ukrainian commerce, industry, culture, and education. Increasingly,

prominent businessmen from other parts of the country are relocating to Kyiv in order to be close to government, national financial institutions, and other critical national organizations. It is as well a magnet for younger people wishing to build careers in post-Soviet Ukraine. The 2010 population of the city is estimated at 2.4 million.



The statue of St. Volodymyr in Kyiv overlooking the Dnipro River. The location of the monument is reputed to be in the area where the saint forcibly baptized the populace of the city in 988.

Photo:https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-worldfactbook/photo_gallery/up/photo_gallery_B1_up_26.html. Retrieved August 22, 2010.

Notwithstanding the relatively large size (40,000 to 70,000 people) of the Kyiv Jewish population, **Jewish life** in the capital remains weak and seemingly without spirit. Kyiv, said one observer, is a city of Jewish offices, but almost devoid of Jewish life, as such. Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine, appears to be absent from the country on more days than he is present, and no other individual has emerged as a leader of Kyiv Jewry. The majority of Kyiv Jews remain aloof from all organized Jewish activity. Not only is there little noticeable dynamic Jewish life in Kyiv itself, but the capital seems to provide little stimulus or direction for Jewish life in the rest of the country.

Because of time constraints and the unavailability of several prominent local Jews, the writer visited fewer individuals and institutions than she had in 2009.

Jewish Education

40. The **Orach Chaim day school** (School #299), operating under the auspices of Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, is the oldest of six Jewish day schools in Kyiv.⁶⁷ It currently enrolls a total of 170 pupils in grades one through 11,⁶⁸ a significant decline from its peak enrollment of approximately 470 and a drop of 30 from the 2008-2009 enrollment of 200. Boys' and girls' classes meet in separate buildings, each a former preschool located some distance from the center of the city. The general Jewish demographic decline is but one factor in the loss of pupils; the remote locations of the buildings, their

⁶⁷ Moscow, a city whose Jewish population probably is three to five times larger than that of Kyiv, has five Jewish day schools.

⁶⁸ An additional 30 boys are enrolled in a related heder and 70 more children attend an associated preschool. The heder is located in a building adjacent to the synagogue and the preschool classes are held in an Orach Chaim dormitory building.

lack of modernity, a secular curriculum that lags behind that of elite public and new private schools, the intensity of the Orthodox Jewish curriculum, the requirement that all pupils be halachically Jewish, and the single-gender education model are additional significant deterrents to greater enrollment. The need to maintain four separate buildings (schools for boys and for girls, dormitories for boys and for girls) imposes a major financial burden on the Orach Chaim system.⁶⁹ The **dormitories** now accommodate approximately 30 youngsters, whereas they previously housed twice that number.

Khariton Gilgur, the longtime and respected principal of the school, is pessimistic about its future. Although the number of class periods designated for Jewish studies has been reduced lately, the **Jewish curriculum remains too intense** for youngsters from families in which there is little Jewish awareness and even less Jewish practice, said Mr. Gilgur. The current Jewish studies program, which consists of daily classes in both Hebrew language and Jewish tradition, should be reduced to daily Hebrew and three weekly formal classes in Jewish tradition, he stated. In place of the two eliminated Jewish tradition classes, he continued, the school should include some informal Jewish education activity, such as kabbalat Shabbat (welcoming the Sabbath) gatherings on Friday afternoons. Periodic Shabbatonim could be used to transmit elements of Jewish tradition not covered in classroom study, he added. Clubs emphasizing Jewish music, dance, or art might attract some pupils as well, suggested Mr. Gilgur. He noted that compulsory davening (prayer) already had been eliminated from the curriculum.

Khariton Gilgur has been the principal of Orach Chaim school in Kyiv since it was established in 1990.

Photo: the writer.



Mr. Gilgur observed that Orach Chaim **teachers** of secular subjects receive very low base salaries, but the more skilled instructors receive bonuses and all are paid on time. Several have been recognized by city education authorities for excellence in teaching.

Food in the school, continued Mr. Gilgur, has improved, and a fleet of ten rented **minibuses** transport pupils between the school and their homes. As a public school, the city pays its basic **operating expenses**, but the school itself has paid for new doors and windows and is preparing to make major repairs to corridors in several of its buildings.

⁶⁹ Most of the four buildings were constructed in the 1960's of material that is "more sand than cement," said Principal Khariton Gilgur in 2009. The girls' school, in particular, has an unattractive façade, covered in graffiti and with several broken outer windows. Orach Chaim must replace 100 broken windows in its four buildings every year, acknowledged Mr. Gilgur. (The damage appears to be perpetrated by common vandals – "bandits," as they are called in Ukraine - rather than by antisemites, Mr. Gilgur stated.)

Mr. Gilgur noted with satisfaction that a number of **Orach Chaim graduates** are successful in various business endeavors and are beginning to take an interest in contributing to the future of the school, perhaps, he speculated, for their own children. So far, he said, they organized and paid for a program for older pupils at the school in which 13 speakers challenged the students and encouraged debate on various cutting-edge topics. Alumni also have provided support for dance lessons for girls. Mr. Gilgur hopes that their support will become more substantive and generous in the future.

Support from large organizations is minor, said Mr. Gilgur. The **Israeli government** pays the salaries of two Jewish studies teachers, **JDC** provides matzot and wine for various occasions, and the **Avi Chai Foundation** funds several special projects at the school. Financial assistance from the **Canadian Foundation for the Education and Welfare of Jews in the C.I.S.** is no longer a significant factor in support of the school, Mr. Gilgur stated.⁷⁰ Several **local donors** help the school, he continued, observing that one sends funds directly to food purveyors on behalf of the school and another pays a transportation company for the van service.

Toward the end of the meeting with Mr. Gilgur, he reiterated the **need for School #299 to modify the orientation of its Jewish studies program and its Jewish practice.** He believes that the **Simcha school** and the **ORT school** are the Kyiv Jewish schools most likely to survive in twenty-first century. (See descriptions of both schools below.)⁷¹

41. The **Simcha-Chabad Jewish Academy** was established in 1992 by Berel Karasik, then a Chabad-associated local leader in Kyiv. Simcha is affiliated with **Tsirei Chabad** (Young Chabad), an Israel-based faction of the Chabad movement. The school receives no financial assistance from Ohr Avner, the educational arm of the Chabad-controlled Federation of Jewish Communities. The writer spoke with Rabbi Mordechai Levenhartz, director of Tsirei Chabad programs in Ukraine, and his wife Devorah, who is a teacher at Simcha.

⁷⁰ The Canadian Foundation, also referred to as the Sh'ma Yisroel network, was established in 1989 to foster the growth of emerging Orthodox Jewish communities in the then-Soviet Union and eastern Europe. It focuses on programs operated by non-Chabad rabbis; among its better known grantees are Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich of Kyiv, Rabbi Shlomo Baksht of Odesa, and Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt of Moscow. However, its capacity to raise and distribute funds has sharply diminished in recent years.

⁷¹ Rabbi Bleich has acknowledged the need for change in Orach Chaim, but has focused on physical changes, rather than modifications of its Jewish orientation. He has proposed a united Kyiv Jewish secondary school that would be open to all halachically-Jewish pupils in grades 5 through 12. He envisions a common educational institution that would boast modern science laboratories, a gymnasium and swimming pool, and other outstanding education amenities. New dormitories would house youngsters from smaller towns and unstable families. Although boys and girls would study in the same building, they would attend separate classes. Most observers believe that Rabbi Bleich's intended requirement that all students be halachically Jewish is unrealistic in a city and country in which the intermarriage rate exceeds 80 percent. No site has been secured for such a school, no serious planning has been done about its development, and no significant funding sources have been identified.

Rabbi and Mrs. Levenhartz were preoccupied by a **severe daubing of their school** with antisemitic slogans and drawings that had occurred during the night about one week previously, on April 19. The date, they and others believe, was not coincidental as it coincided with Israel Independence Day as well as the anniversary of the birth of Adolph Hitler.⁷² Damage was done to large spaces on several facades of one of two buildings used by the school. Rabbi Levenhartz noted that the attack occurred on a building near a major street and probably was observed by passersby.

The April 19 assault occurred two years after an **arson attack on the same school**. At that time, Rabbi Levenhartz and his supporters appealed to outside organizations and individuals for assistance in enhancing security at the school, which is located in a poor neighborhood. Funds were requested for additional and better-trained security guards, security cameras, and fences surrounding each of the two school buildings. The appeal was unsuccessful⁷³

The 2010 daubing was done in several languages. One of two badly damaged walls is seen at right.

Photo: Tsirei Chabad.



Regarding more routine matters, Rabbi and Mrs. Levenhartz said that **total enrollment** at the school is now 392, a decline from 440 last year and 540 in 2007-2008. The preschool census is 72 and the lower school census (grades 1-4) is 115. Notwithstanding its enrollment loss, Simcha remains the largest Jewish day school in Kyiv. The preschool and lower school are located in one building, and the middle/upper school (grades 5-11, enrollment 205) is housed in a separate structure close to the first one. Although Simcha has accepted non-halachic Jewish children for several years, Rabbi and Mrs. Levenhartz said that almost all current first graders are halachically Jewish.

The **Jewish studies curriculum** of the school includes four hours weekly of instruction in Hebrew, two in Jewish tradition, and, for older pupils, one in Jewish history. Additionally, upper grade students participate in a shorashim (Jewish roots) trip to western Ukraine, a Shabbaton is available to about 70 people (pupils plus parents), all Jewish holidays are celebrated, and some youngsters stay overnight at the school to

⁷² The week of April 20 is a “traditional” period for antisemitic attacks by right-wing elements in the post-Soviet states. (Adolph Hitler was born on April 20, 1889.)

⁷³ A similar appeal after the April 2010 attack has been more successful. The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, which is active in a sister-city relationship with the Kyiv Jewish population, was among the major contributors to construction of fences surrounding the two school buildings.

participate in Shabbat services and activities. The school is strongly Zionist in orientation.

Regarding **computer technology** at the school, Rabbi Levenhartz said that the school has about 12 computers for basic instruction in a small computer laboratory. Additionally, several classrooms have single computers for student and teacher use; he would like to connect all school computers in a single network, but no one in the school knows how to accomplish such a task. He observed further that online distance learning in adult Jewish education would be very valuable for Jewish teachers of secular subjects at Simcha, most of whom need a “connection (связь)” with Judaism. However, he said, none of these teachers possesses sufficient computer skills or confidence to embark upon such a course of Jewish studies by distance-learning methods.

In response to a question, Rabbi Levenhartz estimated that 50+ percent of school pupils have access to **computers at home**. He is certain that this proportion is higher than the percentage of teachers who have home computers. However, he continued, although more youngsters than teachers have computers at home, not all school families with computers have access to the Internet.

Responding to a question about **parental support of Simcha**, Rabbi Levenhartz said that the school has been asking families to pay 300 hryvna (approximately \$30) per child per month for the last three years. Most parents understand the difficult situation of the school, Rabbi Levenhartz stated, and 95 percent pay something every month, although not all are able to pay the requested amount. However, several relatively wealthy families pay more than \$30 monthly. In answer to a question about **institutional support**, Rabbi Levenhartz said that the Jewish Agency is “friendly”, but provides no assistance; JDC offers some help for celebration of certain holidays, Avi



Chai finances the school Shabbaton, and the Ukrainian Jewish Congress supplied the school and larger Simcha community with matzot for Pesach.

Devorah and Rabbi Mordechai Levenhartz are respected in the Kyiv Jewish community for operation of a school that is responsive to community needs and for a general outreach program that is open to all Jews.

Photo: the writer.

Simcha operates a small **community outreach program** that assists elderly and impoverished Jews in the lower-class neighborhood in which it is situated. A **community synagogue** is located in one of the school buildings, and Simcha holiday gatherings include both school-affiliated and non-affiliated local Jews.

42. The **ORT school** was established in 2000 as a **lyceum**, an elite secondary school with a competitive admissions policy. In common with the Simcha school (see above), the ORT lyceum occupies two separate small buildings. It is located on the east, or less prosperous, side of the Dnipro River in a generally unattractive area.

Simcha currently enrolls 278 pupils in grades five through 11, an increase of 14 pupils over the previous academic year. However, the increase was achieved by adding a fifth grade to its previous enrollment of sixth through eleventh graders. Enrollment continues to decline in the upper grades, acknowledged Principal Yuri Kinkov.⁷⁴ Mr. Kinkov attributes the **enrollment loss** to the diminishing Jewish population. Fewer pupils enter the upper grades from year to year, he said, simply because fewer Jewish youngsters live in Kyiv from one year to the next.⁷⁵ Ninety-five percent of pupils are at least partly Jewish, Mr. Kinkov stated, and qualify for aliyah to Israel under provisions of the Israeli Law of Return.⁷⁶ The families of the five percent who are not Jewish, he said, pay for admission of their children to the school; technically, the payment is a contribution to the school welfare (благотворительный) fund that enables the lyceum to purchase various supplies and arrange necessary repairs to its two buildings.



Principal Yuri Kinkov and lead Jewish studies teacher Daniela Abramovich are seen in the photo at right.

Photo: the writer.

Although Mr. Kinkov stated in previous years that the remote location of the school and its lack of amenities (no sports hall, no assembly hall) are deterrents to enrollment, he now declares that these shortcomings are not factors in the reduced pupil census in the upper grades. Nonetheless, he acknowledged in response to a question, **ORT is seeking a new building** – and local education authorities have been promising new facilities for two years. He has identified a suitable school building in the same area, where ORT is now located. The envisioned structure dates from 1971 and currently houses a school that is dwindling in enrollment due to the general demographic decline. It has a sports hall and an assembly hall, he said; however, ORT would need to modernize the science laboratories, a task that he believes can be accomplished. Such a building would enable the entire ORT lyceum enrollment to be united in one building,

⁷⁴ Schools with lyceum status are not permitted to enroll youngsters below the fifth grade.

⁷⁵ Anecdotal information suggests that the ORT lyceum may also be less elite than it once was. The Perlina school (see below) is referring some of its less promising pupils to ORT.

⁷⁶ ORT schools frequently enroll some non-Jewish youngsters for reasons of public/community relations.

he said, and it would provide appropriate space for sports, school assemblies, and holiday celebrations.

Commenting further on the **school welfare fund** (благотворительный фонд), Mr. Kinkov stated that all families help the school, although some do not contribute every month and some pay much less than others. Municipal authorities, he noted, view such assistance as a sign of overall parental support for the school and are likely to favor those schools that are able to generate assistance from a large proportion of school families.

In response to a question about **institutional assistance**, Mr. Kinkov said that the city has reduced financial support to all schools in the wake of the economic crisis. **ORT** continues to provide aid for technology in the school and also funds a Shabbaton for ninth graders, which is held at a nearby resort. **Avi Chai** supports two additional Shabbatons, one for sixth and seventh graders together and another for eighth graders. Avi Chai also funds Israel Independence Day festivities; however, Mr. Kinkov continued, Avi Chai has suspended earlier assistance for several afterschool clubs. Neither the **Jewish Agency** nor **Nativ** provide any support to the school.

The ORT lyceum has received a grant from **Hewlett-Packard**, Mr. Kinkov said, that included 25 laptop computers plus curriculum material in business education and entrepreneurship. The curriculum is being used in regular school classes and in afterschool clubs.

Daniela Abramovich, an Israeli, has been the lead Jewish studies teacher in the school for five years. Widely admired, Mrs. Abramovich may be in her final year at ORT because the Israel Ministry of Education usually compensates Israelis teaching abroad for a maximum of five years. Mrs. Abramovich said that pupils in grades 5-7 have six **class periods of Jewish studies each week** – three in Hebrew language, and one each in Jewish tradition, Jewish history, and Jewish music. Pupils in grades 8-11 have five class periods in Jewish subjects each week – three in Hebrew language, and one each in Jewish tradition and Jewish history. All Jewish and Israeli holidays are observed, and Jewish tradition and other aspects of Jewish life are emphasized in the Shabbatons that are arranged for pupils in grades 6-9.

In response to a question, Mr. Kinkov said that ORT sometimes accepts **transfer students** from other Jewish day schools. In the past year, he said, two have transferred in from the Perlina school, two or three from Simcha, and one from School #128. Additionally, several youngsters have entered the ORT lyceum from the Mitzvah school, which is an elementary school enrolling children through grade seven. (See below for information about other Jewish day schools in Kyiv.)

Answering another question, Mr. Kinkov stated that ORT lyceum **graduates** attend a variety of post-secondary institutions in the city, including the prestigious National Taras Shevchenko University of Kyiv, the proprietary International Solomon University, and a number of other colleges and institutes. ORT lyceum pupils, he continued, are well-

prepared for the standardized national examinations that now are important in determining post-secondary school admissions.

43. The **Perlina school** is a second Kyiv Chabad school operating outside the Ohr Avner network. It occupies an attractively renovated former pre-school structure and has been building its enrollment grade by grade with the intention of forming a full 12-grade school, along with its preschool. It recently installed an extensive new playground and a youth soccer field. However, its current premises are too small for its expansion plans and Rabbi Yonatan and Mrs. Ina Markovich, Perlina directors, have been searching for a site on which to develop a middle/upper school.

The current school census is 142 pupils from preschool through grade nine, the same number as last year.⁷⁷ However, acknowledged Mrs. Markovich, enrollment remained stable only because Perlina added a ninth grade in 2009-2010. **Enrollment actually dropped** in some preschool and lower/middle school classes for several reasons, explained Mrs. Markovich. First, she declared, she and others in the school administration pro-actively counseled 21 less able (способные) youngsters out of the school, encouraging them to transfer into other Jewish schools, such as Orach Chaim, Simcha, ORT, and a yeshiva in Moscow. As had been anticipated, the remaining pupils were able to devote more attention to English and Hebrew, two of Perlina's strengths, without being distracted by weaker students. Indeed, their mastery of the two languages increased markedly and the school has acquired a reputation for excellence, thus attracting more pupils in the preschool and lower grades. Second, continued, Mrs. Markovich, a very difficult winter caused some families to transfer their children to schools closer to their homes; once they had purchased the new books required in these schools and became accustomed to different routines, some of the children remained in the neighborhood schools after the end of winter.

Rabbi Yonatan and Ina Markovich are implementing significant changes in the Perlina school.



Photo: the Markoviches (in 2009).

Offsetting the lack of appropriate science laboratories in the school, Perlina pupils in grades 6-9 are transported to a nearby university for **science laboratory sessions** twice each month. The school also has used the **computer facilities** at the Jewish Agency building, which are more extensive and sophisticated than those at Perlina.

The Markoviches continue to look for a **second building** and are optimistic that recession-induced lower real estate prices may enable a purchase. They have several

⁷⁷ The peak enrollment of the school, 170 youngsters, was reached in 2007-2008.

properties in mind, they said, each of which would require extensive renovations for use as a high-quality school.

However, said Mrs. Markovich, they also are considering **limiting enrollment** to just nine grades. As it happens, all but one of the rising tenth graders intends to transfer to Israeli schools under the Na'aleh program for tenth grade in fall of 2010. Therefore, they may change their plans and convert Perlina into an eight- or nine-grade school, instead of aiming for a full twelve-year school.⁷⁸

The **Jewish studies curriculum** at Perlina includes four class periods weekly in Hebrew language, two in Jewish tradition (taught in Hebrew), and one in Jewish history. The school also does kabbalat Shabbat (greeting the Sabbath) programming on Friday afternoons.

The Markoviches estimated that 60 percent of Perlina families have **computers at home**. Most of these families, they said, probably have Internet access; increased competition between local Internet providers has reduced the cost of such service, said Rabbi Markovich.

In response to a question, the Markoviches said that **all parents pay a fee** of 50 hryvna (approximately U.S. \$6.30) monthly for each child enrolled in the school. Although the fee is small, parents are more invested in the school and regard it more seriously because of the fee, stated the Markoviches.

44. The Markoviches took the writer to a new project that they are initiating, a **school for autistic children**. The impetus to start such a school has been an ongoing attempt by the Markoviches to educate autistic Jewish youngsters at Perlina; these efforts have failed, acknowledged the Markoviches, who recognize a need for a separate, dedicated program. So great is the demand for such education is that the normally ponderous and corrupt Kyiv education bureaucracy has issued them a 10-year operating license without even inspecting the facility, which, in any case, was not yet completed at the time of the writer's visit. The relevant official, who is known "to like envelopes", i.e., to expect envelopes containing bribe money, did not request payment of any kind.

The Markoviches themselves hold no certification in special education. However, they visited several different schools for autistic children in Israel and conferred with specialists there to develop plans. They have obtained a two-story building near Perlina that formerly was used as a preschool and are in the process of renovating it. The new building will contain four suites of rooms, two suites on each floor. Each suite will be self-contained and accommodate up to ten children. The intent is to open the school to a broad range of autistic youngsters, not just Jewish children; Jewish content will be

⁷⁸ Mrs. Markovich was born in then-Leningrad and Rabbi Markovich was born in far western Ukraine near the Hungarian border. Both moved to Israel as children with their respective families and they consider themselves Israelis. Their older children have left Ukraine to attend Israeli Chabad high schools. They are sympathetic to Zionism.

available for Jewish families, said the Markoviches, but the Jewish atmosphere at the school will be very discreet.

An **informal network of families with autistic children** has developed from past Perlina efforts to work with them. So far, without any publicity, said the Markoviches, about 100 families, Jewish and non-Jewish, have expressed interest in enrolling their children at the yet-unnamed school. Some of these families paid for the school building and for a significant portion of the renovations. Their commitment to such a program in its initial stage of development reflects their frustration with the lack of opportunities for autistic children in the Ukrainian capital. The Markoviches are seeking additional funds for school furnishings and a playground.

Mrs. Markovich said that one of their immediate priorities is the engagement of a **trained specialist**, probably a foreigner, to define the range of ages and disabilities that will be accepted at the school. The school must develop a sophisticated diagnostic center that will be able to identify autistic youngsters while they are still infants. The Markoviches also will need to hire one or more additional foreigners to provide advanced training to local teachers; some local teachers are already “on call”, but Mrs. Markovich believes that many will require better preparation to provide the quality of instruction and care that the Markoviches and parents desire.

Rabbi Yonatan and Mrs. Ina Markovich are remodeling the former preschool seen at right into a school for children with autism. The building is in a pleasant residential area.

Photo: the writer.



A **major problem in working with special-needs children** in Ukraine, said Mrs. Markovich, is parental failure to acknowledge that their children require special attention when the children are young enough for therapies and education to have optimal effect. Such stigma is attached to these youngsters that parents feel ashamed and tend to blame the children for such negative behavior as apparent rudeness or laziness and then conceal them at home or turn them over to a boarding institution when they are expelled from conventional schools. Mrs. Markovich expressed amazement and admiration for Israeli programs that work with autistic children under one year of age. Obviously, she observed, pediatricians must be trained to recognize signs of such conditions.

The school for autistic children will open as soon as the premises are ready and appropriate staff are onsite, said Mrs. Markovich. Obviously, it does not need to follow a conventional academic calendar. Tuition will be charged, she stated, but the school still will require outside operating funds for which no source has yet been identified.

45. The writer was unable to visit the two other Jewish day schools in Kyiv. **School #128** is a general public school with a Jewish division. The Jewish section was established in 1990 by the Israeli government in its drive to develop secular Jewish Zionist schools in major cities across the Soviet Union. Establishment of the Jewish section was attractive to the larger school because a relationship between the Israeli government and ORT led to the placement of 10 computers and related technology in School #128 at a time when few other public schools had any computers at all. The ORT computer lab is available to all pupils in the school; an updated ORT program is in use at School #128 today.

Reflecting **general demographic decline** in Ukraine, total enrollment in School #128 has dropped significantly in recent years. According to those familiar with the school, the **number of Jewish pupils** has declined more substantially than the overall enrollment, leading to suspension of the Jewish studies program in several grades. Further, because the non-Jewish principal of the larger school is viewed as “uncooperative” regarding the Jewish program, according to one ORT official in Ukraine, considerable doubt exists regarding the future viability of the Jewish section at School #128. Nonetheless, reports were circulating in Jerusalem and Kyiv that the **Masorti (Conservative) movement** was considering a relationship with the Jewish section, perhaps attempting to develop it as a Jewish school similar to their day school in Chernivtsi.

The **Mitzvah school** includes preschool and elementary school divisions that enroll about 100 youngsters up to age 13. The school is sponsored by Rabbi Moshe Reuven Asman of the Brodsky synagogue.

46. Two **residential programs for Jewish children** operate in Kyiv, each of which enrolls its youngsters in day schools associated with the sponsoring rabbi. As noted, Chief Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich sponsors separate homes for boys and girls that now accommodate about 30 youngsters in total, less than half of capacity. Rabbi Asman operates two group homes, each with a capacity of about ten youngsters. However, financial support for these homes is problematic.

47. The **Hillel student organization** operates on a city-wide basis in Kyiv, as it does elsewhere in the post-Soviet states, rather than as a campus organization as is its approach in the United States. It attracts 400 to 500 students to its programs every year, said Iosif Akselrud, its director, and about 150 every month⁷⁹. At the time that he met with the writer, Mr. Akselrud was awaiting the arrival of Hillel management from Washington who would attend the initial meeting of a local board of directors of **Hillel CASE**, the acronym that denotes the umbrella organization of 12 Hillel student groups in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, i.e., the former

⁷⁹ The largest Hillel in Ukraine, as reported in materials prepared for an April Hillel board meeting in Ukraine, is the group in Odesa, which attracts 800 young people every year.

Soviet Union excluding Russia and the Baltic states. In addition to his responsibilities in Kyiv, Mr. Akselrud is the chief executive officer of the Hillel CASE division.

The establishment of **a functional indigenous board of directors** is a watershed moment in the life of many Jewish organizations in the post-Soviet states. More commonly, such nominal groups have been functional in name only, operating in reality under the firm control of a foreign organization unwilling to cede or share authority. In some cases, the outside groups have been justifiably concerned about endemic corruption in the region; however, maintenance of hegemonic control for the purpose of preserving absolute power over the group in question appears to be the primary motivation of some outside organizations.

Hillel CASE, said Mr. Akselrud, will be led by businessman Aleksander Granovsky, graduate of a Kyiv university and a former Hillel student activist. He will be joined by five additional successful Jewish businessmen who have pledged to raise \$400,000, about 19 percent of the Hillel CASE budget, during their first year; they have set 25 percent as a goal for 2012. **Hillel International** and the Moscow-based **Genesis Philanthropic Group** remain responsible for the majority of the Hillel CASE budget, but both groups have been working with Hillel CASE to establish governance procedures, fundraising capacity, and financial practices. A competent Kyiv-based financial officer has been engaged to oversee all financial transactions.



Iosif Akselrud, right, is one of the most successful Jewish fundraisers in the post-Soviet states. His success outstrips that of his Hillel counterparts in Russia.

Photo: the writer (in 2009).

Although Mr. Akselrud was undeniably proud of Hillel accomplishments to date, he also indicated **some apprehension about the future**. He cited fundraising pressure, declining interest in Jewish education among students and young adults now that it was no longer new and “exotic” as it had been during the immediate post-Soviet years, and competition from other activities currently claiming the time of students. In addition to full- or part-time employment, the target age group now has other social opportunities, such as bowling and a variety of nightclubs, he said.

Aware of the writer’s interest in **Dnipropetrovsk**, Mr. Akselrud commented that the new Hillel professional team in that city was doing excellent work, including outreach at several universities and institutes in other cities in the region that did not have their own Hillel.⁸⁰ Material that Mr. Akselrud had prepared for the Hillel CASE board meeting

⁸⁰ The specific reference was to Donetsk, one of Ukraine’s great university cities, apparently not recognized as such by JDC when it established Hillel in Ukraine some 15 years previously.

showed that Dnipropetrovsk, with significantly fewer Jewish students than Kyiv, was nonetheless attracting more Jewish students to Hillel than was Kyiv Hillel in Kyiv.

In response to a question about **potential cooperation** between Kyiv Hillel and a young adult group planning to establish a **Moishe House** in Kyiv, Mr. Akselrud said that he foresaw no difficulties in relations between the two groups. Hillel in Kishinev [Moldova] works closely with the Moishe House in that city, he noted; in fact, the chairman of Kishinev Hillel lives at Kishinev Moishe House.⁸¹

Answering another query, Mr. Akselrud described his volunteer role as lay chairman of **Limmud** in the post-Soviet states. Recurring symposia on a variety of Jewish topics, Limmud conferences have attracted large numbers of young post-Soviet Jews, many of whom find synagogues, particularly the Orthodox synagogues that dominate Ukraine Jewish religious life, unattractive. The connection with Limmud is natural, said Mr. Akselrud, noting that Jewish education in both Hillel and Limmud is secular and informal. Hillel activists, he continued, have managed the organizing committees of Limmud conferences to date. Limmud is good for Hillel in that it provides Hillel members with leadership opportunities and also serves as a “tool” for recruiting young people to Hillel. Hillel participants, as well as others, all pay registration fees, to attend Limmud events.

Mr. Akselrud also serves as part-time executive director of **United Jewish Community of Ukraine**, an organization that is described elsewhere in this report.⁸²

48. Due to time constraints, the writer was unable to visit **several other Jewish educational institutions** that she had visited in the past. These include the Kyiv Aish Hatorah outreach program, International Solomon University, the Judaic studies program at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, and the Jewish Fund of Ukraine/Kinor Center.

Rabbinic Presence

49. Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, a native of Brooklyn and a Karlin-Stolin hasid, is the official Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine. He arrived in the country in 1989 and presides over the Great Choral Synagogue⁸³ in the Podil district of Kyiv, an area of significant

⁸¹ The Moishe House program subsidizes the rent of a small group of Jewish young adults in apartments or houses in exchange for the commitment of such groups to organize Jewish events for other young Jews in these premises. At the time that this report is being written, about 30 Moishe Houses exist in ten different countries.

⁸² See pages 74-75.

⁸³ The *Great Choral Synagogue* on Schekavitskaya street in the Podil district of Kyiv should not be confused with the *Main Choral Synagogue* in the same city. The latter, better known as the Brodsky synagogue, is larger and more centrally located. Built with funds contributed by Lazar Brodsky of the

Jewish population prior to World War II. In the 20 years that he has served in Kyiv, Rabbi Bleich has developed a number of Jewish community institutions, including the Orach Chaim day school, homes for Jewish children from unstable families, a Jewish summer camp, an assisted living residential center for elderly Jews, a matza factory, the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, and the Kyiv Jewish Religious Community.

Rabbi Bleich's native English and familiarity with American culture have facilitated easy access to American representations in the Ukrainian capital. He also represents Ukrainian Jewry in the European and World Jewish Congresses as well as in other international Jewish organizations. Yet he is increasingly an outsider, noted more for his absence from the country while attending to family matters, fundraising, and appearances at international conferences than for local presence. Further, he is a Karlin-Stolin hasid in a country in which Jewish religious life is dominated by Chabad. His outsider status, compounded by ongoing economic developments, is felt within his own institutions in Kyiv. His various umbrella organizations have shriveled, his publications have ceased, his day school is withering, and his own synagogue no longer is open on a daily basis.



Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine, is seen in a 2005 photo.

Photo:

http://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/press_releases/2005/Kyiv/index.html. Retrieved August 26, 2010.

In Rabbi Bleich's absence, the writer spoke with Yevgeny Ziskind, the executive director of Rabbi Bleich's operations. Mr. Ziskind stated that the new **education building** constructed to the left of the historic Podil synagogue is functioning as planned. It accommodates two separate learning programs – a yeshiva and a heder – each enrolling about 30 individuals. The building also includes a dormitory for the yeshiva students, two apartments for yeshiva instructors and their families, and a kitchen and dining room. The second building, which is positioned to the right of the synagogue, is non-operational, awaiting a donation of approximately \$1.2 million for installation of electricity and certain other systems, as well as furnishings. Intended as a **community building**, it is designed to including a large multi-purpose hall for community events, a small hotel (16-20 rooms), a mikveh, and a store selling kosher food and Judaica items. Aleksander Rodnyansky, a Kyiv communications magnate who financed the exterior construction of the community building, has made an oral commitment to complete the project, but appears to have lost interest in the endeavor, said Mr. Ziskind. In fact, Mr. Ziskind continued, Mr. Rodnyansky may have lost interest in Ukraine altogether

wealthy sugar industry family at about the same time as the Schekavitskaya street synagogue, the Brodsky synagogue was confiscated by Soviet authorities in 1926 and converted into a workers' club. It later became a variety theater and a children's puppet theater. After substantial international pressure, the Brodsky synagogue was returned to the Jewish community in the 1990's and restored. Rabbi Moshe Reuven Asman, an independent Chabad rabbi, presides over the Brodsky synagogue.

because he is spending more and more time in Russia in pursuit of commercial ventures there.

Failure to complete the community building, stated Mr. Ziskind, has **delayed certification by the city of the entire project**. Because the plan for construction of the two buildings was submitted to authorities as a single undertaking, inspection of the education building cannot be implemented separately. Therefore, city authorities have not completed any sanitary or fire inspections and, technically, the building is operating illegally and could be closed by the authorities at any moment.

Due to the **high cost of heating the choral synagogue**, Mr. Ziskind said, it is open only on Shabbat and holidays. On other days, minyans are held in the study hall of the yeshiva in the education building; the yeshiva students are joined by 15 to 20 other men for prayers. **Shabbat services in the choral synagogue** draw 70 to 100 people, Mr. Ziskind stated.

A **student club**, which offers a more religious orientation than Hillel, attracts about 90 young people, said Mr. Ziskind. Many participants are graduates of the Orach Chaim school or other Jewish day schools.

The **matza factory** that operates in a small building behind the synagogue produced 170 tons of matza this year, compared with 117 in 2009. All 170 tons were sold, Mr. Ziskind stated, some of it in special packaging for Chabad, JDC, or other customers. It is distributed throughout the post-Soviet states.⁸⁴

50. The writer was unable to meet with Rabbi Moshe Asman, rabbi of the Brodsky synagogue, or with Rabbi Aleksander Dukhovny of the Progressive movement. Although Rabbi Yonatan Markovich presides over a small prayer hall, he is concerned more with his Jewish education programs in the city than with synagogue matters.⁸⁵

51. The writer met with a five-person delegation from the **Masorti (Conservative) movement**, which has been struggling to establish a presence in Ukraine without the leadership of a rabbi or any other trained fulltime professional. The group also lacks permanent premises in which to meet. It currently convenes in the modern quarters of the **Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine**, popularly known as the **Vaad**, with the permission of Iosif Zissels, Chairman of the Vaad.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The Kyiv matzot factory produces machine-made matzot. Shmurah, or handmade matzot, is made in Dnipropetrovsk under the supervision of Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki.

⁸⁵ For material about the education programs of Rabbi Yonatan and Mrs. Ina Markovich, see pages 63-65.

⁸⁶ See page 74 for further reference to Mr. Zissels and the Vaad. These premises are located at the National University of Kyiv – Mohyla Academy and include several classrooms and two small auditoriums.

The Masorti movement offers a variety of classes and activities designed to appeal to a broad age span, said delegation members. Their largest year-round program, is a **Sunday school** that attracts about 60 youngsters between the ages of five and 16 who meet at the Vaad premises between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. for classes in Hebrew, Jewish history, Jewish tradition, and English, and activity circles in Jewish music, dance, and art. The youngsters are accompanied by 10 to 15 adults, both parents and grandparents. Such gatherings are larger during holiday periods. A light lunch is provided.

Four separate groups – two for university/institute students, one for young adults up to the age of 35, and one for middle-age and older adults – each meet twice weekly in 90 minute sessions for **Hebrew-language ulpan**s. Each group includes 13 to 18 participants for a total of 62 individuals studying Hebrew under Masorti auspices. In addition to Hebrew, the classes include elements of Jewish tradition and observance of all Jewish holidays. The delegation emphasized that **Midreshet Yerushalayim**, the Russian-language arm of the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem, covers all expenses for these classes and that the Jewish Agency is not involved.

Vladimir Sapiro, standing at rear, is the lead Hebrew teacher in the Kyiv Masorti program. Other teachers/leaders are, from left, Talia Kepler, Ilana Shevchenko, Ksenia Pasion, and Lena Grebnaya. Two of the women are graduates of the Masorti day school in Chernovits.



Photo: the writer.

Youth activities include a Jewish literature circle, a **Marom** (Conservative youth group) circle, and a leadership group training to become counselors at the Masorti camp (see below) and assist in holiday celebrations. Participants in the leadership group are selected from young people attending **Camp Ramah Yachad**, the Masorti camp in Ukraine.

Shabbat services are held once each month. A **Jewish cinema club** convenes after the end of Shabbat on Saturday evenings. Other adult activities include a Jewish **literature club and a drama club**. Some Hebrew students have become so proficient in the language that they are beginning to write poetry in Hebrew so a **Hebrew poetry club** also has been formed, said Vladimir Sapiro, the lead Hebrew teacher.

Camp Ramah Yachad convenes for 10 days every summer in Mukachevo in the Carpathian Mountain area of western Ukraine, involving children and teens from throughout Ukraine. Following the camp for children, a family camp is held at the same site.

Other Masorti activities held **outside Kyiv** include **Marom youth seminars** during the school year in Lviv, Chernivtsi, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Kirovograd. The seminars seek to reinforce material to which the youth were exposed in summer camp. In **Donetsk**, Masorti activity also includes a Sunday school, a continuing Marom group, and an ulpan. A Masorti day school, which recently joined the ORT school network, operates in Chernivtsi.

The Masorti group was very enthusiastic about their mission in Ukraine. They also expressed appreciation for Roman Stamov, a Russian-speaking Masorti rabbinical student currently at the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem, who visits Kyiv periodically as part of his student rabbi experience, and said that they hope that he becomes the first **Masorti rabbi** in Ukraine. They also hope that Gila Katz, the outgoing director of the Midreshet Yerushalayim program, spends more time in Ukraine following her impending retirement. Ms. Katz now comes to Kyiv to lead holiday celebrations and direct Shabbatons.

Although they are grateful for provision of the **Mohyla Academy premises** for their various programs, they find this space not completely satisfactory and would be grateful for use of another site that is more flexible. Most of the Academy rooms are formal in their layout with desks and other furniture in fixed positions; they cannot move furnishings to accommodate dance classes or other activity, they said. Further, they share the premises with the Vaad, which sometimes is awkward.

Welfare

52. The writer did not visit the JDC **hesed**, which, she was informed, was closed. Whether or not it is operating in any form, it has become clear over the past several years that it was progressively curtailing services due mainly to ongoing budgetary cutbacks. Further, its ill-suited location in a very problematic building has caused numerous difficulties for Joint over the years, regardless of recession-induced economic constraints.⁸⁷ The absence of Dani Gekhtman, the head of JDC operations in central and western Ukraine, from the city precluded any possibility of discussing current Joint service delivery in Kyiv and the surrounding area.

53. The **Home for Assisted Living** sponsored by Rabbi Yaakov Bleich currently accommodates 27 elderly Jewish men and women on the second and third floors of a six-story building, a decrease in census from the 32 who were residents during the writer's most recent previous visit one year previously. The fourth and fifth floors, intended to accommodate additional individuals, have not been prepared for occupation and remain unfurnished and empty. Capacity occupation of the building is approximately 85 residents when all four residential floors are fully furnished. (The first

⁸⁷ See pages 103-105 in the writer's *A Spring Visit to Ukraine – March-April 2009* – for an account of her visit to the hesed one year previously.

floor includes communal facilities, including a kitchen and dining room, synagogue/social hall, and medical offices. The sixth floor is designed for commercial offices and apartments for community workers and guests.)

Viktor Popovich, manager of the facility, openly acknowledged that it was in a “**crisis**” situation due to lack of funds. Most residents pay for their units by selling their previous apartments and transferring the proceeds of the sale to a trust that provides income for ongoing support while in the Home. However, local economic conditions are such that banks will not provide credit to individuals who wish to purchase apartments that elderly people want to sell. Therefore, few potential residents are able to raise the cash necessary to finance their entry into the facility. A small number of residents pay monthly fees similar to rent in lieu of actually buying units, but the financial model for operation of the Home is based on an income-producing trust.⁸⁸

The Kyiv Home for Assisted Living is located in a pleasant residential area of Kyiv near public transportation.

Photo: Rabbi Bleich’s office.



Without sufficient income from the trust, Mr. Popovich continued, the Home is unable to furnish the units on the fourth and fifth floors, assuming that people were able to raise enough cash to occupy these quarters. Equally, Rabbi Bleich has been unable to raise money to cover ongoing **operating expenses**; thus, the facility is in need of very visible maintenance work and also has been forced to reduce the quality of food served. The previous roster of 40 employees, continued Mr. Popovich, has been cut to 20, and most salaries are paid four months late. Most of the remaining staff, Mr. Popovich said, would “run off” or “scatter” (разбежаться), but no other jobs exist in this poor economy to which they could run. At least the Home feeds them dinner or supper (depending on their work shift).

The Home for Assisted Living has not been properly maintained, as is obvious in the photo at right.

Photo: the writer.



Mr. Popovich also noted that the Home previously derived some income from renting space on the fourth and fifth floors to youth groups and others seeking **hostel-type**

⁸⁸ Each unit contains a full bathroom and a fully-equipped kitchenette. Mr. Popovich estimated the monthly per person cost of maintaining the facility at \$600-700.

accommodations for seminars and Shabbatonim. However, such facilities now are available on the outskirts of Kyiv at lower cost.⁸⁹

In response to a question, Mr. Popovich said that the home continues to operate a **day center** on the ground floor for 150 Jewish elderly. JDC started the program and then abandoned it several years ago, leaving Rabbi Bleich to find funding on his own. The program no longer provides full meals as Rabbi Bleich had done last year, said Mr. Popovich, but offers bread, tea, and water. Many elderly come, he continued, for companionship, large-screen television, and to use bathroom facilities that are better than those in their own apartments. In summer, he added, day center users appreciate the air conditioning. Somehow, participants find their own way to and from the Home; the Home no longer is able to provide transportation.

Ukrainian Jewish Organizations

54. The **Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine**, better known as the Ukrainian **Vaad**, is chaired by Iosif Zissels, a longtime Jewish community observer and leader in Ukraine. The Vaad works in four main areas: Jewish property preservation and restoration, as well as archival research; interethnic tolerance; representation of Ukrainian Jewry in various international forums; and operation of Jewish community programs in small Jewish population centers, focusing on summer camps for adolescents. The Vaad has sponsored heritage expeditions to places of Jewish interest in Ukraine, and Mr. Zissels himself is regarded as a capable analyst of Ukrainian Jewry. The writer was unable to meet with Mr. Zissels because he was out of town during the writer's visit.

55. **United Jewish Community of Ukraine** was founded in 1999 by Vadim Rabynovych as a successor to his previous organization, the **All-Ukraine Jewish Congress** (Ukrainian acronym **VEK**). Mr. Rabynovych, a controversial figure, stepped down in 2008, designating oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky of Dnipropetrovsk and Geneva as his successor. Spending most of his time in Switzerland, Mr. Kolomoisky is "a rare guest" in Ukraine, said Yosif Akselrud, the part-time executive director of UJCU. Mr. Akselrud estimated that his own responsibilities in VEK require no more than 15 percent of his time; he devotes 85 percent of his professional efforts to Hillel.

The goal of United Jewish Community, stated Mr. Akselrud, is to unite and support local Jewish communities. Its annual budget, Mr. Akselrud said, is approximately U.S. \$2 million, almost all of which is contributed by Mr. Rabinovich and Mr. Kolomoisky. VEK subsidizes synagogue repairs, holocaust memorials, and local Jewish newspapers in a number of smaller Jewish population centers. It shares costs on an equal basis with the Jewish Agency, Mr. Akselrud continued, of supporting a handful of local Jewish Sunday

⁸⁹ At one point, Rabbi Bleich thought that he had found at least one businessman who wanted to lease space on the sixth floor for business purposes, but the businessman demanded a separate entrance and elevator so that he and his clients would not come in contact with the elderly residents of the Home.

schools. It also supports groups of World War II veterans who meet to socialize and share meals.

56. The **Ukrainian Jewish Committee** was founded in 2008 as a Jewish lobbying organization at the initiative of Alexander Feldman, who serves as its president; it is roughly modeled on the American Jewish Committee, although it has no relationship with the American group. Mr. Feldman represents his native city of Kharkiv in the Rada (Ukrainian parliament) and is associated with the political party of Yulia Tymoshenko, a former Prime Minister of Ukraine. Having focused on combating antisemitism during a brief period of activism following its establishment, it has been much less vigorous since the decline of Ms. Tymoshenko's political fortunes.

International Jewish Organizations

57. The **Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI; Sochnut)** operates a multi-faceted program focusing on Jewish identity-building and encouragement of aliyah (immigration to Israel). In common with other Jewish organizations, it has faced severe budgetary constraints during the past several years and has curtailed some programs while preserving others only by working collaboratively with other organizations. At the time of the writer's visit to Kyiv, JAFI had just completed major projects related to the commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day and was preparing for festivities marking Israeli Independence Day.

Bilana Shakhar directs the JAFI mission in Kyiv and also is responsible for JAFI education programs in the area. She told the writer that JAFI had mounted a **major photo exhibit about the Holocaust** in a prestigious hall on the main avenue (Kreschatik) in Kyiv. Attendance goals had been achieved, and Sochnut was moving forward with a three-day **festival celebrating Israel Independence Day**. The festival is being planned cooperatively with the Joint Distribution Committee, Nativ, and Hillel. JAFI youth leaders were working with three Jewish day schools – Simcha, Perlina, and Mitzvah – on their own celebrations, said Ms. Shakhar; in response to a question, Ms. Shakhar said that JAFI budget constraints permitted substantive assistance only to three day schools, but lesser help would be extended to the ORT school as well because ORT had specifically requested such aid. She noted that such support helped the schools counter their own budget deficits.

Bilana Shakhar, right, is in her second year as head of the JAFI mission in Kyiv.

Photo: the writer.



The general Jewish Agency **Jewish education program in Kyiv and central/western Ukraine** includes Hebrew-language ulpan (six in Kyiv and nine in other cities in central and western Ukraine, each charging fees and each including Jewish identity components), distance learning Russian-language courses through the Israel Open University (seriously curtailed due to budgetary pressures), birthright Israel/Taglit trips (3 buses of 40 each from Ukraine), MASA education programs in Israel (five to 10 months in duration; 321 participants from Ukraine in 2009-10, including 94 from Kyiv), summer camps (probably two sessions, each for 130 campers from Kyiv alone), and Sunday schools in Kyiv, Lviv, Cherkasy, and Belaya Tserkov.

The **MASA program** – university and post-university courses of study in Israel for five to 10 months – offers “huge potential”, said Ms. Shakhar, but a marketing campaign is required to acquaint the Jewish public with all of its options. Accordingly, JAFI is staging a “MASA festival” in which different programs will be explained and take-home information will be provided. She noted that some of the highest-quality programs, such as those offered by the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya and the Technion in Haifa – require co-payments that are difficult for Ukrainian Jews to manage. Nonetheless, she continued, Ukrainians have paid up to \$5,000 for MASA programs in the past and she expects that more will do so in the future. Forty percent of past MASA participants from the area have made aliyah to Israel within a short period of completing the MASA course, said Ms. Shakhar.

Ms. Shakhar observed that many Ukrainian Jewish young people and their parents are “ignorant” about Israel, Judaism, their Jewish heritage, and the possibilities for building fruitful lives in the Jewish state. Israeli education programs, she continued, must “compete” with full scholarships to prestigious universities in such countries as Germany and the United States – and these countries mount attractive recruitment campaigns that JAFI cannot afford to replicate.

The **JAFI Beit Agnon Youth Club** offers various educational, cultural, and recreational programs for Jewish youngsters. The writer visited sessions of two programs funded by the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, the **Bar/Bat Mitzvah Project** and **TZROR**. Each attracts about 30 youngsters plus parents. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah project is marketed to Kyiv youngsters who attend JAFI summer camps; they are invited to participate in a two-year program that meets on 30 Sundays during the school year for instruction in Jewish tradition, Hebrew language, Jewish arts, and computer skills, and



they attend a Shabbaton with their parents or grandparents. At the end of the two-year program, the youngsters become Bar- or Bat-Mitzvah. Many continue in JAFI teen programs and some go to Israel in the Na'aleh high school or other programs. (See below.)

Rabbi Aleksander Dukhovny, a Progressive rabbi, teaches a Bar/Bat Mitzvah class about the Ten Commandments.

Photo: the writer.

Both the Bar and Bat Mitzvah and Tzror programs convene at the Kyiv JAFI center for about five hours on Sundays, including a light lunch. Parents and grandparents meet in concurrent classes geared to adult needs. Participants arrive at the JAFI center on their own, but JAFI pays for their transportation to their homes at the end of each Sunday session because the programs conclude after dark in winter.

Tzror offers a similar program for younger children. Some participants are the younger siblings of pre-teens in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah classes, but others families learn of the program independently and arrange admission of their children.

A Tzror art class meets at the JAFI center. Most art work is on Jewish themes.

Photo: the writer.



JAFI also operates a **teen club** that absorbs many of the youngsters who complete the Bar/Bat Mitzvah program, as well as young people who are new to Jewish Agency school-year programs. Some newcomers are recruited through JAFI summer camps, but others learn about the clubs through word-of-mouth.

Aliyah to Israel from central and western Ukraine included 430 individuals from central and western Ukraine in the first three months of 2010, an increase of 19 percent over the same period in 2009, said Ms. Shakhar and JAFI aliyah counselors. The major factors spurring aliyah for young adults and young families, stated the aliyah counselors, are local economic distress and family reunification with family members who already have settled in Israel. For older people, they said, access to better health care in Israel also is a factor.

The **most popular aliyah and absorption programs**, responded the aliyah specialists to a question, are “First Home in the Homeland”, which settles families on a kibbutz while they study Hebrew, and various professional programs that prepare olim (new immigrants) for work in Israel in fields for which they have been professionally educated in Ukraine. Hebrew classes are geared to their professional needs, and attempts are made to upgrade their professional skills to Israeli standards. Although JAFI budgetary pressure has reduced the number and range of such professional programs, those that remain are in great demand. Individuals who join family and friends already in Israel usually go directly to the cities/towns in which their relatives/friends live and then participate in municipal ulpan and absorption programs. Notwithstanding the economic crisis that has reduced the number and variety of absorption programs, a good selection remains for people who are adaptable and enjoy a good family support system. However, aliyah may be difficult for single and elderly people, said the aliyah specialists.

The **Na'aleh and Selah student programs** remain very popular and are likely to attract even greater numbers of participants in the coming year because of the poor employment market in Ukraine. Eighty-one youngsters in central and western Ukraine passed the Na'aleh (high school in Israel) exam in 2010, JAFI staff said, and they expect most of them to enroll in the 2010-2011 program (in comparison with 36 in 2009-2010). Thirty-eight high school graduates passed the Selah (university in Israel) exam several weeks prior to the writer's visit; JAFI is still awaiting their decisions about participation in the program, but expects that the number will be greater than the nine who accepted scholarships in 2009-2010.

Many JAFI local employees, including aliyah coordinators, work **part-time**, whether in Kyiv or in outlying areas, said Ms. Shakhar. A large proportion are young and all are well-screened by JAFI before enrolling in JAFI training programs. JAFI endeavors to create a friendly and productive atmosphere in all aspects of its work and understands that many local JAFI employees are "testing" JAFI and Israel and attempting to learn as much as possible about Israel before making aliyah themselves. Obviously, said Ms. Shakhar, she is a Zionist, but she thinks that economic conditions alone should persuade Ukrainian Jews to leave Ukraine and migrate to Israel. Poor Ukrainian health care, including the high cost of purchasing medicines and the need to bribe physicians and others for even basic care, are other reasons to leave Ukraine and settle in Israel.

58. The writer was unable to meet with Dani Gekhtman, the veteran director of the **Joint Distribution Committee** in central and western Ukraine, because he was out of town at the time of her visit.

Observations

59. The Jewish population of Ukraine continues to decline, a casualty of assimilation, intermarriage, low fertility, high mortality, and emigration of younger age cohorts. Emigration is increasing, reflecting economic insecurity in Ukraine and reunification of families in Israel. An intermarriage rate believed to exceed 80 percent creates complex situations for Jewish groups that prefer to confine their programs to halachically Jewish individuals.

Jews from smaller cities and towns are migrating to larger cities – and sometimes abroad – leaving elderly and otherwise less able Jews behind in Jewish population clusters so small that delivery of welfare and other services cannot be sustained economically by conventional international Jewish organizations. Increasingly, non-establishment groups, such as Chabad Lubavitch and the Massachusetts-based Adopt-a-Bubbe program, are becoming providers of basic welfare assistance without financial support from the Western Jewish populations charged with such responsibilities.

Jewish education and Jewish identity-building opportunities often have been abandoned in such areas.

60. The international Jewish organizations supported by North American Jewish federations – the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and World ORT – all have sustained major reductions to their budgets as a consequence of the global economic crisis. JDC and JAFI both have trimmed operations across Ukraine.

JDC, in particular, appears to be adrift in Kyiv, victim not only of current financial stringencies but also of past decisions about facility acquisition and use. Important changes in JDC professional staff deployment are underway in the Ukrainian capital; the organization faces a major challenge in defining and implementing appropriate services.

61. The February 2010 national elections in Ukraine and subsequent April 2010 Kharkiv Accords with Russia have generated significant changes in the role of Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia, Europe, and the broader world. Many observers believe that Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich compromised Ukrainian independence in exchange for short-term economic and political advantages.

Concurrently, some constriction of basic human rights, including freedom of the press, has occurred in Ukraine. To date, these changes do not appear to have had major impact on the Jewish population, but Jews historically have prospered in free societies and suffered in those with political constraints.

62. Antisemitism is strongly rooted in Ukraine, and popular anti-Jewish bigotry continues to exist in the country. However, President Yanukovich and his allies are believed to be pragmatic and eager for good relations with the Ukrainian Jewish population, particularly Jewish businessmen whose success is necessary for Ukrainian economic advancement. Mr. Yanukovich is not associated with the Ukrainian nationalism that was a feature of his predecessor's tenure. The Ukrainian government also is mindful of the approximately 400,000 Jews of Ukrainian background now living in Israel and wishes to maintain good relations with them and with the State of Israel.

63. Individuals familiar with Jewish communal life in the two largest Ukrainian Jewish population centers – Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk - rarely fail to note the immense difference in Jewish life between them. Kyiv, the national capital, might be expected to boast a vibrant Jewish collective soul alongside its government and diplomatic activity, business enterprises, cultural attractions, and educational institutions. Its rich Jewish history might have generated a vibrant Jewish present. Yet Jewish life in the city often seems moribund. Such individuals as Iosif Zissels, Iosif Akselrud, Rabbi Motti

Levenhartz, and Rabbi Yonatan and Mrs. Ina Markovich all seem to be competent, even more than merely competent, in their respective positions. However, none has been able to inspire a significant portion of the Jewish population and, arguably, none perceives broad collective inspiration as his or her responsibility. No Kyiv institution has become a magnet for Jewish community life.

Clearly, none of the community/congregational rabbis in Kyiv has provided the type of leadership so ably exercised by Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki, Chief Rabbi of Dnipropetrovsk. Perhaps during his first decade in the city Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine, was a more compelling figure, but his authority has wilted as his presence in the country has ebbed.

As in other post-Soviet cities, prosperous local Jewish businessmen have been enlisted by rabbis to build or renovate imposing synagogues and related structures, but their role as donors has not grown into that of community leaders. In Kyiv, several wealthy Jews have established Jewish organizations, but such institutions rarely are more than one-man shows, owned and controlled by one or a very few individuals according to whims of the moment; when they lose interest, contributors reduce or terminate financial support, leaving their creations foundering. A large number of wealthy Ukrainian Jews now live abroad, returning for occasional business meetings.

To be sure, lack of responsible indigenous Jewish lay leadership is a reality throughout Ukraine and not unique to Kyiv. However, as the national capital, Kyiv is a city of singular consequence. The emergence of a Ukrainian version of the Moscow-based Genesis Philanthropic Group is awaited.

64. Dnipropetrovsk, too, has its leadership problems. The extraordinary leadership exercised by Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki probably has suppressed the emergence of indigenous lay leaders, especially those who are uncomfortable in an environment in which Chabad activity is conflated with the larger Jewish population. Within the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad philanthropic infrastructure, the same individual has been the lay leader of its philanthropic fund since its inception, and the existence of protective indigenous family clans among Chabad employees is apparent to local Jews and foreign visitors alike. Wealthy families are said to be accorded preferential treatment within Chabad institutions, even its day school.

65. Although Jewish lay leadership and concentrated rabbinic power in some Jewish population centers may be problematic in Ukraine, it is important to recognize the emergence of proficient, even visionary, indigenous Jewish professional personnel. Vyecheslav/Zelig Brez of Dnipropetrovsk is among the first western-style managers of complex Jewish communal structures to appear anywhere in the post-Soviet states; notwithstanding certain pre-modern practices intrinsic to local rabbinic leadership, Mr. Brez is an able, forward-looking executive director of the multi-faceted Dnipropetrovsk Chabad community. Kyiv-based Iosif Akselrud of regional Hillel has proved to be a

skilled local fundraiser. Capable service-delivery managers can be found within JDC heseds in both Ukraine and Russia even as their financial support has diminished, and many skilled teachers and principals trained in local secular institutions have made successful transitions into Jewish day schools.

66. Although terms of participation in the STARS (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers) program were mandated by its initial funders, these have continued under program modifications initiated in Dnipropetrovsk and subsequently applied elsewhere in Ukraine. Conditions of participation remain exclusionary. Further, the remuneration of students in STARS/NBS and related programs, openly and accurately referred to as *bribery* even by supervising rabbis, creates tension with others practicing a more traditional approach to Jewish education and community-building. The tension between STARS/NBS and Hillel in Dnipropetrovsk reflects this reality. The implications for developing an inclusive and compassionate indigenous Ukrainian Jewish community are troubling.

67. Many Ukrainian Jewish university students and other young adults appear to be just as “wired” as their counterparts in the West, possessing and using handheld communications devices and computers with skill and creativity. However, this comfort level with modern technology seems to have eluded many individuals only a few years older, including many whose young children are exposed to computers in Jewish day schools. The cost of computers and of Internet service may remain prohibitive for some sectors of the Jewish population, but it is likely that social and cultural constraints, rather than economic factors, are more important in impeding optimal utilization of contemporary communications technology among Ukrainian Jews.

68. Although the writer visited Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk, the two largest Jewish population centers in Ukraine, she was unable to travel to Odesa on this journey. Perhaps no discussion of Ukrainian Jewry is completely valid without consideration of Odesa, justly recognized for its Jewish cultural and intellectual life (and for its rabbinic battles).

Betsy Gidwitz
Chicago, IL USA
September 8, 2010

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs and translations are by the writer. In most instances, modified Ukrainian orthography is favored over Russian orthography.