

Jewish Communal Service Association **94th Annual Conference**

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PRESIDENTIAL REPORT One More Moment on the Bima

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The time of leaving office can present an opportunity for a valedictory moment. I wish to focus that moment on change, the economy, and Jewish communal service.

The Jewish Communal Service Association (JCSA), recognizing the need to strengthen its presence in the North American Jewish community, engaged JCSA/APA leadership over the past 4 years in an introspective process to enable a year-round bonding of communal professionals on issues of mutual concern. While the Association examined and redefined its internal structure, external events were having a profound impact on our communities and on our professions.

Our institutions of social redress and communal continuity are not immune from the critical changes that have overtaken our economy and that are reshaping the world. Our ability to support and serve the needs of international Jewry while maintaining the social health and welfare of our North American constituents is being severely tested. The strains on Israel and the pressures on Jews to flee from xenophobic ethnic polities will require extraordinary resources from the Jewish community as we struggle through the most severe recession since World War II.

The last recession of 1982 began to direct our attention to irreversible changes in our economy. But this early warning was soon lost as we experienced the financial, real estate, and private sector services boom of the mid-1980s and the promise of still newer riches tied to the growing electronic information age. As heavy industry died, a field devoid of Jewish leadership, the private service sector grew, a field heavily invested with Jewish leadership. Our programs of communal services expanded in tandem with the good fortunes of those who supported our fund drives.

This period of unabated largesse is now over. Business will never be the same as usual as our Jewish institutions face the severe consequences of attenuated philanthropic and government funding. As long as our very existence as social service delivery systems is tied to the economic health of the communities we serve, adjustment to economic change will drive our survival strategies, despite the fact that most of us have more clients and/or consumers of services than we have had in the recent past.

Our 1992 JCSA Annual Conference told us much about today's condition. Major plenary sessions sounded the themes of economic impact, membership empowerment, and demographic change. An on-site career support seminar for professionals attending the Conference was offered to those who lost or were in danger of losing their jobs, or who were concerned for the tenure of their colleagues.

Two years ago JCSA still considered the paucity of new talent for our fields of service

to be a major crisis in the profession. *Recruitment* and *Retention* were key thrusts of the Association's activities for almost a decade. Today, in contrast, we are engaged in the odious task of creating clientele from our heretofore communal healers.

We must articulate to our respective constituencies our current experience. In contrast to major manufacturers and retailers, we are *not* experiencing a drop in consumer demand. We have to eliminate the popular oxymoron, "doing more with less," which has become a fallacious and destructive cliché in our field. You do less with less unless revenue vacuums are filled with alternative income sources. Responsible nonprofit agency policy is not just a matter of balancing a budget while allowing for a breach in your social contract. Service purges can have merit if they force us to dust off traditional program icons that may have historical value but have lost their current relevance and should be removed from the shelf. However, wholesale adaptation of management paradigms drawn from industry, such as downsizing, restructuring, and other forms of corporate patois, is designed to put a progressive face on the harsh reality of simply not having enough resources to meet legitimate service needs. Unlike the current industry climate, the needs of our Jewish communities require more production from our agencies, not less. Tzedekah is a growth business. Our product is service. The redress of familial breakdown and of economic disintegration in the Jewish community requires more attention than ever before. Furthermore, with the striking data on Jewish assimilation from the Council of Jewish Federation's (CJF) 1990 demographic study, Jewish Community Centers and Jewish educational institutions have become a demand product.

In the short run, many of us will have to respond to the consequences of current philanthropic and government shortfalls in what has been characterized as a severe unforgiving process. But for our future, we must engage our lay leadership in their understanding of the acute differences between corporate structural change in a post-industrial global economy and the need to maintain services that enable our Jewish constituency the ability to negotiate these very socioeconomic revolutions it has to bear up to today.

In the last decade, our society has removed from the national agenda social justice and altruism as preferred values. Our Jewish heritage cannot countenance such a shift.



David P. Kleinman, Chair of the 1992 JCSA Annual Conference (left) and Ronald I. Coun, JCSA President, 1990-92

Our leadership is not so far removed from their predecessors' missions of service that effective agency initiatives in fulfilling the social contract should be abandoned. We who serve as professional Jewish communal leaders, with full recognition of funding realities, can advocate for the needs of our clients and, with our lay leadership, claim a seminal role in the creation and allocation of future resources.

Without wearing fiscal blinders, JCSA needs to pool the collective problem-solving skills of its membership and develop for the field our own paradigms for resource creation and service advocacy that can be transferable to local Jewish communal planning. If we purport to be change agents for our clients, we can be no less for ourselves.

The prodigious talent that was assembled by our JCSA Annual Conference Program Committee addressed these issues. While our colloquy was invested in some of the most thorny concerns we have ever had to confront in our organizational life, the presenters who engaged us offered hope as well as candor in their assessments. The overall attendance, although less than previous years, revealed a growth in the presence of new Jewish communal workers. First-time attendees filled the "Scholar-In-Residence" session, carried the dialogue beyond the appointed hour, and exhibited a new vitality and a conscious pragmatism as they addressed their issues and expectations.

I hope that all Conference attendees will carry the discourse into their own communities. I also hope that all those who presented sessions at the Conference will add to our body of knowledge by contributing articles to the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*.

In a recent open address to all graduating young adults this year, Elie Wiesel put forward these guiding principles: "The realization that what I receive I must pass on to others. The knowledge that I have acquired must not remain in my brain. I owe it to many men and women to do something with it." Annual Conferences can serve merely as a cathartic experience by enabling us to share concerns of the moment, or they can be a stimulus for future activity if we take what we learn, move it off the bima, and do something with it.



Hexter Seminar Presenter Malcolm I. Hoenlein, Executive Director of the Presidents' Conference (Second from right) with Ernest M. Kahn, JCSA President, 1992-94; Sanford Solender, Seminar Chair; and Joel Ollander, JCSA Executive Director.



1992 Hexter Keynote Speaker Stephen D. Solender, Executive Vice President of the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.



Lynn Jacobs, Co-recipient of the *Journal* "Article of the Year" Award (right), presented by *Journal* Managing Editor Gail Naron Chalew (Co-recipient not pictured is Sherry Berliner Dimarsky).



Paula Mack Drill, Recipient of the 1992 Louis Kraft Award, with Jonathan S. Woocher, Award Committee Chair (right) and Herman Sainer, Award Committee Honorary Chairman (other recipients not pictured are Wendy Chesnov and Melissa Glaser Rubin).