

RALPH GOLDMAN

The Titan of Jewish Philanthropy

MICHAEL SCHNEIDER

*Hon. Executive Vice President, JDC and Hon. CEO of the World Jewish Restitution Organization,
New York*

Ralph Goldman's achievements in Israel are part of legend. He is the father of its JCC movement and founder of the Brookdale Institute and The Israel Center for Social Policy Studies, (now named the JDC Myers Institute and the Marilyn and Henry Taub Center for Social Policy Studies, respectively) and ESHEL. Before that he was a guiding spirit behind Malben, the program that gave Israel its first, rudimentary social services infrastructure in the early days of statehood. And before even that, he was the advisor to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on relations with the U.S. Jewish community and the founder of the Israel Education Fund. Prior to statehood he was a member of Teddy Kollek's team that worked tirelessly to evade the British blockade and, later, to prepare Israel militarily for the war of Independence.

With that illustrious background Ralph became the professional head of JDC in 1974. His first action was to scan the global Jewish environment. Although West European Jewry was fast recovering from the devastation of the Shoah, Jews in the Soviet bloc were trapped and rigorously monitored. In the Soviet Union itself, Jewish communal infrastructure had been totally destroyed. In the Middle East, Jewish communities were hostages, subjected to severe restrictions and vulnerable to the Moslem street every time Israel scored a success in combating Arab hostility. Similarly, the Jews of Ethiopia were suffering under the heavy hand of Mengistu.

These circumstances brought Ralph to his grand design. JDC, a strictly non-political agency, has been called "the most political non-political agency in the Jewish world." Indeed, although non-political, most of JDC's humanitarian activities have been in

response to political events affecting world Jewry.

Under his guiding hand JDC established its "Relief in Transit" operation with the Government of Israel to send food packages into the Soviet Union to sustain refuseniks and impoverished elderly Jews. Even more important, Jewish literature was at first smuggled into the region by countless couriers and later sent in officially by mail.

When the doors were finally opened for emigration from the Soviet Union, Vienna and Ladispoli were opened up as way stations for transmigrants to be processed for emigration to Israel and other lands. After the Iranian revolution Jews made their way to these facilities as well.

In 1979 Ralph successfully negotiated with the Hungarian government for JDC to work officially in that country from which it had been expelled after the Sinai Campaign. Shortly afterward he made similar arrangements in Czechoslovakia and also Poland. He forged new links with the Jews of Yugoslavia and reached out to the small community in Bulgaria. Although its projects initially were confined to welfare only, JDC gradually managed to build successful working relationships with Communist regimes and to expand its activities into Jewish education and other community-building activities.

Ralph sent emissaries to Ethiopia to scout out possibilities for rescue opportunities. Financial aid was sent to the Gonder province, and a health center and satellite clinics were established throughout the region. Before "Operation Moses" was successfully concluded JDC had sent aid to the Jews waiting for the airlift in the Sudan desert.

In Yemen contact was established with

Jewish leaders. In Syria negotiations were successfully concluded to allow young Jewish girls to emigrate, ostensibly as brides of Jewish men living abroad. Financial aid was sent to impoverished Jews in Damascus and Aleppo.

All these initiatives paved the way for JDC's successful involvement in the rescue of Jews from Moslem lands and Ethiopia in the 1990s in coordination with the Jewish Agency and the Government of Israel.

In 1989 Ralph achieved his greatest dream—official access to Soviet Jewry. After negotiating with senior officers of the KGB JDC was

invited to Gorbachev's Moscow. JDC was, at last, able to start its gargantuan task of rebuilding Jewish communal infrastructure in that last great frontier of the Jewish people. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Ralph stepped down as the professional head of JDC in December 1987. He continues to ply his trade, now as elder statesman and still as a creative initiator. He has long been a role model for a whole generation of professionals whom he has nurtured over the decades—inspiring them with his broad vision, infectious enthusiasm, and love for the Jewish people.

Jewish Communal Service Association Group Benefits

Retirement Plans

- Tax Sheltered Annuity Plans (TSA)
- UNUM Life Insurance Company of America (Administered by Lincoln National Life Insurance Co.)
- Metropolitan Life Insurance Company
- Nationwide Life Insurance Company

Insurance Plans

- Term Life Insurance
- Long Term Disability
- Long Term Care
- 24 Hour Accident
- Life Style Protection (Disability Protection For On-Going TSA Deposits)

For further information, contact:

JCSA Group Benefits

Irving M. Silberberg
irvsilberg@aol.com
919 234 3847

Brian M. Silberberg
bsilberber@aol.com
800 597 9245

Jewish Communal Service Association of North America

JCSA
Connecting & Enhancing Professional Leadership