



Dear Midwest Region Brothers,

As my term as Midwest Region FJMC President comes to a close, **I would like to congratulate our Board of Directors on the phenomenal achievements we made over the last two years. The entrepreneurial spirit displayed paved the way for change resulting in numerous positive outcomes for the community.**

For background, my presidency had **three goals**:

1. **Fill initiative gaps in the community** (ritual, social, athletic for Jewish Men) that may increase club membership, especially for men under 50 years of age.
2. **Enhance value of FJMC membership** for clubs to improve existing programs to increase attendance and improve revenues each by 25 percent and
3. **Promote health and wellness for our Region Men.**

Net, we set out to capture Men's hearts and souls with these goals, and we did a great job in all three areas, making a difference in the lives of numerous Jewish Men and their families.

We started out with a new logo and branding. "**Stimulating leadership with innovative initiatives**" and "**being change agents**". Our logo shows Men celebrating *havdalah* holding the torch burning bright. This reflects who we are: the ones illuminating the path forward, the change agents of the Conservative movement. This set the tone and "esprit de corps".

By Fall, 2013 we had launched two new programs:

- **A Softball Tournament and BBQ** was held on August 11, 2013 that was extremely well received by Chicago area men. Three clubs participated and over 45 men played and an estimated crowd of 25 watched the games and enjoyed the BBQ. The tournament quickly **morphed into a softball league for Jewish Men's Clubs** with Commissioner Michael Salberg from North Suburban Synagogue Beth El and President Greenberg as an assistant. The league in 2014 had 6 teams with over 90 men participating. Congregation Beth Judea Men's Club won 3 Playoff games and was the first League Champion on August 3, 2014, almost 1 year since the 2013 event. Region provided trophies for the league. The league has expanded to 12 teams for the 2015 season and will include over 150 players.
- **A Tu B'Shavat Haggadah and Seder was issued to Clubs** in fall, 2014. Men and their families could use this to experience and learn about nature and the environment. Men's Club could partner with other arms of the synagogues to run seders with families. The Haggadah and Seder were issued to each club at no cost to them.

By Winter, 2014 we launched our improved Man of the Year Program to include a Youth of the Year with a fund raising aspect for participating Youth Departments. This had some very note worthy achievements:

- Our web site was modified to include event registration and payment. In addition, you could pay for ads and download templates to prepare an ad. We accepted credit card payments via Paypal to speed collection of revenue.
- The dinner cost for the Chicago event was kept at a low cost of \$36 (same as in 2010) so that youth and their families could afford to attend the event. The food quality was excellent for both the 2014 and 2015 events. Ditto for St. Louis programs.

- Congregation Beth Shalom hosted the 2014 event, the first time the event was held there since my involvement with Region (at least 10 years).
- We celebrated our Jewish youth who are our future Jewish leaders and the current Jewish Male role models, while becoming a fundraiser. Midwest Region agreed to return 50 percent of ad revenue for youth ads to the individual participating Youth Departments. The results were stellar:
 - In 2015, all ten clubs had Youth of the Year Honorees vs. seven in 2014.
 - For the 2014 and 2015 programs, we returned approximately \$ 2,000 ad revenue to the individual participating Youth Departments.
- The ad book revenue went through the roof. In 2014 and 2015, we raised \$5,935 and \$8,225 gross revenue respectively. 2015 revenue smashed the 2013 record by about \$2,000. The silent auctions raised approximately \$3,400 for both 2014 and 2015. The outstanding results were significant in that we substantially increased support for Men to attend the 2015 Convention.
- Attendance for 2014 and 2015 in the Chicago area was approximately 600 and in St. Louis about 260. We touched close to 900 people with all these events.

Another major program improvement was the Midwest Region FJMC Retreat which was held on May 2-4, 2014 at Starved Rock State Park, Illinois. The major improvements involved a combination of venue, speakers, kosher food (yes, meat!), libations, and plenty of ruach. Key achievements:

- Forty-four men attended including FJMC Executive Director Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Vice President Allan Gottesman, Midwest Region Spiritual Advisor Rabbi Aaron Melman and Toronto Region Representative, Neil Melman.
- **The theme was living a healthy lifestyle.** Guest speakers included Diana Carlson, a certified yoga therapist, and Corinne Cohen Grotenhuis, an Olympic weightlifter.
- Healthy *kosher* food was served, and every morning began with a nature walk. Chef Barry Brooks (Chef Bear) provided delicious *kosher* meals under the supervision of Rabbi Aaron Melman
- Shabbat afternoon activities included hikes, a whiffle ball game, a yoga class and an opportunity to get to know fellow retreaters.

It was so much fun, that we are doing it all over again in 2016. We expanded the Retreat to include an optional Thursday for those who want to hike the canyons before the event. We have reserved Starved Rock Facilities for Thursday, May 12, 2016 through Sunday, May 15, 2016.

A future FJMC program was piloted by Midwest Region- Creating a Minyan of Comfort: A New FJMC-Cantors Assembly Initiative.

Creating a Minyan of Comfort was successfully piloted in the Midwest Region in **November, 2014.** Participating in that pilot program were the Men's Club of Congregation Beth Shalom, led by Hazzan Steven Stoehr and the Men's Club of Congregation Beth Judea, led by Hazaan Roger Weisberg.

At Congregation Beth Shalom, 5 men participated in the three – 1.5 hour sessions held over three weeks. The course focused on ritual aspects of a Shiva Minyan (chanting, service flow, mood, concluding thoughts,) recognizing the audience needs and comfort level. (Knowledgeable vs. Uninitiated Worshipers), and laws regarding Shiva period.

Four men attended the Congregation Beth Judea course covering similar material during a single session.

Graduates of the course will be awarded a certificate of completion by FJMC and the Cantors Assembly at the Cantors Assembly Annual Meeting in Chicago scheduled for early May, 2015.

We continued programs that were rewarding and fun. Examples:

- The St. Louis Man/Youth of the Year weekend featuring Shabbatones on Friday evening, Mens Club Shabbat on Saturday, Social events on Saturday evening (dinner, Demolition ball, libations, ruach and more ruach), Sunday Shacharit , breakfast and workshop. Phenomenal planning and hospitality by our St. Louis Clubs and Region Officers.
- BBQ and Chicago Cubs vs. Milwaukee Brewers on Sunday, June 1, 2014, 1:10 pm • Miller Park, Milwaukee, WI. The Beth Israel Ner Tamid Club did a phenomenal job organizing these events.
- Fall and Winter Region Meetings at Clubs that were well attended by hosting clubs and Region Officers.

Anshe Emet Men's Club hosted the Fall Program on Sunday, October 6, 2013 with the theme: "MEN LIVING LONGER AND HEALTHIER - WHAT IS THE RECIPE?" The program featured Dr. Evan Lipkis and Dr. Scott B. Phillips. The presentation by Dr. Lipkis was very compelling concerning new diagnostic tests (called biomarkers) for heart disease. Dr. Phillips discussed "Common Sense Skin Care for Men," ranging from acne, wrinkles and reducing risk of obtaining skin cancer.

On **January 12, 2014** Beth Israel Ner Tamid Men's Club hosted a Midwest Region FJMC breakfast meeting. In addition to the usual business meeting, **communications consultant, Ben Merens**, gave a presentation on the art of listening.

Congregation Kneseth Israel's Men's Club hosted **the Fall Program on Sunday, October 26, 2014**. The after breakfast speaker was **Leonard Kofkin**, a member of Congregation Kneseth Israel's Men's Club and avid **genealogical researcher**. Leonard gave a commentary / slide show, entitled "My Town," describing what he learned about Jewish life in a beautiful and peaceful small European location where his relatives once lived. He described the residents who resided there for hundreds of years as well educated, devoutly religious, politically active, socially conscious, and friendly to visitors.

On **January 18, 2015** Beth Israel Ner Tamid Men's Club hosted a Midwest Region FJMC breakfast meeting. The after breakfast speaker was **Mitch Nelles**, aka Thunder, gained Wisconsin fame as a co-host of the **ESPN** sports radio show, "Homer & Thunder" for the past eight years. Mitch is also a member of the Beth Israel Ner Tamid Men's Club and led bierkat after breakfast. Mitch's presentation stirred things up when he covers topics such as sports rivalries between fans in Illinois and Wisconsin. He stirred up pride when he talked about Jewish athletes.

The Region Clubs continued to grow and excel with programming.

In 2014, eight **Region Clubs received the FJMC Quality Club Award**, a key metric of club quality.

For background, the award is given each year to member clubs who meet established criteria at the International, Regional and local levels. The criteria also are a blueprint for a club to follow in planning its yearly programming. The award, an engraved 15 year perpetual plaque, is presented in even numbered years at a regional event and in odd numbered years, 2015 being one, at the FJMC Biennial Convention.

2014 MIDWEST REGION QUALITY CLUB WINNERS WERE:

- Congregation Beth Shalom, Northbrook, IL
- Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid, Glendale, WI
- Beth Hillel Congregation B'nai Emunah, Wilmette, IL
- Congregation Kneseth Israel, Elgin, IL
- Kol Rinah Men's Club, University City, MO
- Congregation B'nai Amoona, St. Louis, MO
- Congregation Beth Judea, Long Grove, IL
- North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL

The same clubs received the Quality Club Award at the 2013 Convention in Danvers, Massachusetts. We anticipate to increase this number at the 2015 Convention.

Region Club Membership is another metric of club health. Thirteen Men's Clubs participated over the last two years in the Midwest Region FJMC. **Membership** in these clubs **increased** from 1,094 (August, 2012, 14 Clubs) to about 1,305 as of April, 2015.

Despite our great progress, **there are challenges that need to be addressed.**

First, Yellow Candle Sales to Clubs are in a downward trend with the 2015 sale being about 20% below that of 2014. In addition, the majority of Region Clubs do not sponsor Yom Hashoah programs, especially breakfast and speaker combinations. They do not even partner with other arms of the synagogue regarding such programs. New initiatives need to be developed to counter these trends, possibly working in the rise of anti-Semitism to draw interest of Men and their families. Another option is to adopt a French or Belgian Conservative Synagogue to increase anti-Semitism awareness and raise funds to send them Yellow Candles.

Second, we need to continue the entrepreneurial spirit and innovate new initiatives. This starts with hearing and understanding the voice of the consumer. It is recommended that the Region and its clubs hold focus groups or other market research techniques with men of different age groups to learn of needs that should be addressed by Men's Clubs and Regions. This should be done every several years to stay ahead of the curve and innovate new initiatives addressing needs. We need to continue to offer new and improved programs to our member clubs driving **value of being members, and increasing club membership and engagement.**

Third, Men's Clubs need to be more interactive with each other in the Region holding joint programs. In addition, Clubs need to share their calendars with Region so their programs can be shared with Clubs across the Region. This is why we have a Calendar in our website powered by Google Calendar. Clubs need to leverage this better so others can share learnings.

Fourth, the Region meetings are a great venue to meet men and officers in our clubs. **The problem** with these meetings are that **only men from the host club and Region officers attend.** Despite having our calendar out well before Region clubs, the Clubs still are over programmed with calendar conflicts. This creates road blocks for men in other clubs to attend Region meetings. This is not necessarily a bad thing (it is good to have active clubs), but hosting clubs need to understand the new reality. **Perhaps, multiple clubs partnering to host a Region meeting might help solve the problem.** Other solutions may exist.

In closing, the Region has grown with major new and improved initiatives, is financially sound, and has a new board with leaders who can continue our role as the "change agents" of the Conservative movement. I am proud of what we achieved, and look forward to working with our new Board of Directors as a Past President.