

## Be-True Scores a Touchdown

Students across the globe are participating in Jews for Judaism's *Be-True* initiative, with students participating through events such as a live video web seminar held with students at the State University of NY at Oswego. Recently, more than 65 high school students, college students and young professionals gathered in Los Angeles for the 2nd Annual *Be-True* Student Leadership Conference. Guest speakers came from as far as Toronto and Miami to share their personal experiences with deceptive proselytizing and to promote Jewish identity.

*Be-True* was created in response to new trends in targeting Jewish students for conversion. There has been a shift away from the traditional highly visible street missionaries to more effective and covert tactics, including peer-to-peer proselytizing, where evangelical students are trained to witness to their friends on campus and to use the Internet to share their faith with Jewish students within the privacy of their homes and dormitory rooms. These methods account for the shocking statistic that 85% of Jewish students report that they have been confronted by someone who tried to convert them to another religion. It's not surprising when you consider that there are 70 million evangelical Christians in America who spend \$250 million each year targeting Jews for conversion.

Because assimilation and challenges to Jewish identity on campus continue to rise, *Be-True* is promoting critical thinking, pride, and knowledge to strengthen the identity of Jewish students of all backgrounds. The annual



Jews for Judaism's *Be-True* Student Leadership Conference keynote speaker, Jesse Cooper (rt), is introduced by education director Rabbi Zalman Kravitz. Jesse, a former football captain at Truman State University, captivated students with the story of his battle to maintain his Jewish identity in college.

*Be-True* conference is a major component in this endeavor.

***Be-True* was created in response to new trends in targeting Jewish students for conversion.**

Students representing twenty high schools in the Greater Los Angeles Area participated in the day-long conference along with college students from UCLA, USC, CSUN, SMC, Marymount College, Lincoln Law School, Moorpark College, Valley and Pierce Colleges, Touro College and UC Riverside, and from as far away as UC Davis and the University of Arizona.

Most students were recruited for this conference by friends who are leaders in *Be-True's* Campus Rep Program. Additionally, our newly designed *Be-True* website and many collaborating Jewish agencies are actively promoting *Be-True*. These include Hillel, BBYO, JSU, LA Hebrew High, Young Judea, Chabad on Campus and the Shalom Institute.

The conference program included presentations by three highly respected experts in the counter-missionary field as well as students and professionals whose experiences with other religions have ultimately led to a rediscovery of Jewish pride and identity.

The keynote speaker's story exemplified *Be-True's* message. Jesse Cooper, former

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EDITORIAL

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## The Mitzvah of Giving

Please support Jews for Judaism's international efforts by contributing financially because your support enables us to save Jewish lives.

We also accept in-kind donations, including property and stocks, and you can help us in perpetuity by remembering us in your Will or Living Trust.

By supporting Jews for Judaism, you not only get a wonderful mitzvah but also, at the same time, you benefit from a tax-deductible contribution. Every size gift is appreciated and tribute cards can be sent on your behalf.

# New Goldrich Media Center

## Jews for Judaism Educational Videos Now Available Worldwide



Jona Goldrich gives Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz a "thumbs up" and announces his generous gift to launch the Goldrich Jews for Judaism Media Center.

In our ongoing effort to provide cutting edge services that keep pace with the latest technologies, Jews for Judaism has launched the **Goldrich Media Center**. Mr. Jona Goldrich announced his generous gift at Jews for Judaism's 2008 banquet.

Today the internet is the most widely used source of information for most people, but not all the information they get is accurate. Additionally, not everyone with questions about Judaism, cults, or missionary claims is comfortable picking up a phone. Those who aren't are more likely to look online for answers in a quick, fast and easily accessible format. This is why sites like YouTube are so popular.

Jews for Judaism has initiated the **Goldrich Media Center** project to fill a void for students and the Jewish community by answering questions through a medium that speaks their language - internet videos. Integrated into the *Be-True.org* website, the **Goldrich Media Center** has the ability for disseminating important information on a mass scale in a very short time.

The Media Center was launched with a viral video featuring *Be-True* students, and educational videos featuring Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz. Personal stories from parents David Bennet and Elizabeth Yost, and students can be viewed anytime, anywhere.

The project consists of two elements. The first is the Library Component that archives current and past videos; the second is the Viral Component that sends our videos to other sites - such as YouTube, Facebook and MySpace - that have massive amounts of traffic. The videos all display a link back to our Library page so viewers can connect to the *Be-True* project.

Current video topics include *Jewish Identity*, *Paths of our Ancestors*, *Bible Roulette*, personal experiences with missionaries, and promotional videos for Jews for Judaism's *Be-True* student leadership program and student conferences.

Cues for creating future videos will be taken from viewers who will be able to request topics. Future topics will include: *Answers to Missionaries*, *Coping with Peer Pressure*, and *Promoting Critical Thinking*. General information about *Judaism and Jewish Practice*, *Life after Death*, and *The "Y" to Jewish Tradition* will also be available.

We would like to thank Jona Goldrich and the Goldrich Family Foundation for their visionary contribution that will have a positive and lasting effect on the Jewish community. ■

# Hollywood Director and Politician Team Up to Promote Jewish Identity

Jews for Judaism's September 24, 2008 Gala Awards Banquet honored Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and Emmy and Peabody Award-Winning Director Arthur Allan Seidelman.

The banquet hall was full to capacity with supporters of Jews for Judaism's work all over the world, and the event was an outstanding success. Renowned comedian, writer and actor Mark Schiff entertained the crowd as the Master of Ceremonies. The event also featured a special Guest Appearance by singer Michael Ian Elias. In addition to performing, Michael shared his inspirational journey back to Judaism from evangelical Christianity.

Dinner co-chairs Jona Goldrich and David Rifkind, and executive director Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz, presented awards to the honorees, two dedicated individuals who have worked tirelessly to promote Jews for Judaism.

Supervisor Yaroslavsky was presented with the *Community Leadership Award* for his passionate commitment to the Jewish Community and "Keeping Jews Jewish." A highly respected politician and activist, Mr. Yaroslavsky is also a great supporter and promoter of Jews for Judaism's important work. As he says:

*"I have witnessed the important work that Jews for Judaism has done in combating the sophisticated and well-funded conversion campaigns on our campuses and elsewhere. One never knows when this issue will strike our families, but when it does, Jews for Judaism is there to respond. They are unsung heroes in our community."*

Mr. Seidelman, the recipient of Jews for Judaism's *Jewish Tolerance & Values Award*, has received numerous awards for his directing and has more than 100 film and stage credits to his name, including *The Sisters*, *Grace and Glorie*, and *The Summer of Ben Tyler*. Also an avid supporter of Jews for Judaism, Mr. Seidelman told attendees at the banquet:



Banquet honorees Arthur Seidelman (lt) and Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky (4th from lt) are congratulated by banquet co-chair Jona Goldrich, supporter Stanley Black and director Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz.



Rabbis Zalman and Bentzion Kravitz are joined by Baruch Littman of the Jewish Community Foundation, and Evan Schlessinger and Jeff Susskind of the Jewish Venture Philanthropy Fund, in presenting Sarah Schefres with the first annual *Be-True* Student Leadership Award.

*"I am deeply honored to be receiving this award from Jews for Judaism, an organization on the forefront of the fight against bigotry and intellectual and spiritual coercion. Jews for Judaism is deeply committed to Judaism's highest tenets, which call upon us to fight for and defend a society based on justice and equality. I applaud Rabbi Kravitz's tireless work on behalf of Jews for Judaism and Jews everywhere."*

College student Sarah Schefres was presented with the First Annual *Be-True* Award by Jews for Judaism's education

director, Rabbi Zalman Kravitz. Sarah was recognized for her dedication, initiative and devotion in taking the *Be-True* program from concept to fruition and for the invaluable role she played in developing the *Be-True* video presentation that debuted at the banquet. The video can be viewed in the Media section at [www.Be-True.org](http://www.Be-True.org).

Two parents, David Bennett and Elizabeth Yost, each shared heartwarming accounts of how their families were helped by Jews for Judaism. Videos of their stories can be viewed by visiting [www.LA.JewsforJudaism.org](http://www.LA.JewsforJudaism.org). ■

# Faith on the 40 Yard Line

by Jesse Cooper

It's 7 a.m. and the sun is on the verge of rising. Most people are sound asleep this Saturday morning but no, not the Coopers. I rush to get dressed. My suit is already laid out for me from the night before. I hear my mother in the distance shouting, "Ready!" signaling it is time to go. I finish putting on my tie and out the door we leave, as a family, as one.

My little brother, all dressed up, looks like a "mensch," which is the word my family uses to describe a healthy young man. My father, in great physical shape for a man of his age, walks with purpose. And my mother is simply the proudest woman I have ever seen. Together we are the Cooper family; together we are Jews. The occasion is Yom Kippur which is the holiest and most sacred Jewish holiday of the year. It is the last time before the New Year that the Jewish people can make amends with God. Being the youngest son, my brother holds my father's tallit bag. This bag holds a yarmulke and a tallit, two items that must be worn by men inside the synagogue. I hold my own bag.

As my family enters the service, we do not joyfully greet others for it is a time of atonement. At most there is a simple hello. The atmosphere inside the temple is solemn, but it is an event that is necessary in keeping our faith. It is our duty as Jewish people to practice and follow our religion. My father remembers his mother, who passed away before I was born. I never got to see my grandmother, and my father tells me she would have spoiled my brother and me like no other. I reflect on what could have been. I sit with my mother, my father, and my brother and we pray in silence, while the Rabbi leads and the Cantor chants.

For a Jewish male it is not easy to find many other people who share my faith. This is an especially daunting task while attending Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri. Kirksville's literal translation is Churchtown. I am the only Jew on the football team and one of approximately 20 Jewish students on a campus of around 6,000. I realize that there are Jews scattered throughout



Jesse Cooper, # 34, captain of the Truman State University football team, leads his team to a winning season while being true to his faith.

the nation with the greatest populations being in Florida, California, and New York, but in Missouri only about one percent of its five and a half million residents are Jewish.

**I am the only Jew on the football team and one of approximately 20 Jewish students on a campus of around 6,000.**

I am a native Floridian. I attended a public high school in Miami, Florida and earned a football scholarship to play for Truman. The area I grew up in has a pretty large Jewish population. Most of my best friends from high school are Jewish. I went to a separate Hebrew school to learn the language of my ancestors and to become Bar-Mitzvah'ed. According to Judaism a Bar-Mitzvah is the transformation into adulthood. Every Jewish youth has one at the age of thirteen. My parents in fact moved to a wealthier neighborhood so that I could go to a highly academic high school and also be surrounded by people that shared my faith. It is one of the only

neighborhoods in South Florida where the majority of people are not African American or Hispanic. There are also numerous synagogues in the city that I can attend.

What was my parents' main concern with sending me away to a Midwest town in Missouri? They wanted to know how their little Jewish boy was going to keep faith in such a non-Jewish setting. I am not going to lie. The answer is very hard to find. I had to start somewhere so the last two things and most important two things that I packed for college were my yarmulke and my prayer book. Little did I know at the time, those two items would soon make up my spiritual constitution.

I remember the first Sunday that I was up in Kirksville for football camp. There was a church service in the morning. I did not attend. The fact that there was church didn't bother me. However, the ignorance expressed by the teammates around me was another story. I overheard some guys talking about a handful of players that didn't wake up that morning to go to church. My name came up. The exact words were, "Those fools are going to hell."

Shocked. Taken aback to say the least. It was just the beginning.

During my first week of college one of my professors started to make a comparison with something that was done in class and an event that occurs in Sunday Mass. I don't know what happens in Sunday Mass because I have never been. My professor, supposedly an educated teacher, took for granted that everyone went to church. It hurt me inside because I was apparently on a different page. I kept to myself. I had to make a concentrated effort to remain true to my religious beliefs and values.

I would have to get used to this "everyone is a Christian" hegemony or I would crumble under my own beliefs. I had no other choice. Add this awkwardness with the transition to college and me living on my own and this quickly turned into some of the hardest times of my life. Then for a side dish take the stereotypes some of my own teammates would use such as, "rich like a Jew" or look at that "Jewish nose" and it got to the point where I would question my faith at night. Lying in bed I would just ask myself if it was worth it to have such strong beliefs and pride in my religion. I didn't know the answer.

**Lying in bed I would just ask myself if it was worth it to have such strong beliefs and pride in my religion.**

Just when it couldn't get any worse, it didn't! I got some calls from my grandparents and they told me how important it was to stay true to my beliefs and my Jewish faith. I discussed issues with my father and the grass on the other side started to turn a vibrant green. I learned how to become strong.



Jesse Cooper and a fellow Jewish student enjoy a Passover Seder at Truman State University.

I learned how to believe again. I put on that yarmulke and I opened that prayer book and read and recited prayers of hope. My soul was alive once again! My family helped me understand. My family helped me keep faith.

I'll never forget my first college football game. The team chaplain led the team in the "Lord's Prayer." I removed myself immediately from the kneeling crowd of players. Right then and there the tone was set. A new sense of respect was born because my teammates knew how much courage it took for me to walk away; for me to stand alone. As a freshman this was the hardest thing to do because I was new and I was young. As a sophomore, the freshmen saw me stand alone. As a junior, the freshmen and sophomores saw me stand alone. And as a senior, my team saw their Captain stand alone.

*Through Jews for Judaism's Be-True program I was able to understand that when an individual stands up for their Jewish beliefs, they are not only doing it for themselves, but they are representing the strength and resiliency of the Jewish people as a whole.*

As for my football career, I was a two time all conference selection, three time academic honor roll selection, and elected as team captain by my teammates in my senior year. I got the starting job at strong safety as a true freshman after my 5th game and didn't look back; 39 consecutive starts later it's safe to say that I definitely am blessed.

A little over four years have passed since the last time I went to temple with my family. I am done with football now and graduating soon with the aspirations of becoming a chiropractor. I feel at one with myself now.

I have learned not to let others control my destiny. I am the only one with that power. Even though I am far away from my family I will take what I have learned from them and empower myself with devotion to my heritage. I know that is what they expect from the Jewish son they have raised. It is said that one must set goals in life in order to be successful. My goals have been set during the time I have been away at college and I can safely say goal number one has been achieved. I can say it with pride. I have kept faith! ■



# Be-True Scores a Touch Down

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football captain of Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, had the courage to maintain his Jewish identity in front of his peers by refraining from kneeling and reciting the Lord's Prayer during prayer circles prior to each game. Jesse, who graduated from Truman State in 2008, spoke about the challenges of playing football and staying Jewish on a Midwest college with only 20 Jews out of a population of 6000. His inspiring words were enhanced by a PowerPoint presentation that included a clip of the final football game of his career. He encouraged students to Be Strong, Be Proud and *Be-True* to their Jewish identity. (See Faith on the 40 Yard Line, page 4.)

Breakout session highlights included renowned professionals such as Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz, whose interactive program "*The Power of Persuasion: What do Cults, Tele-marketers and Terrorists have in Common?*" promotes critical thinking and is popular at schools, organizations and synagogues in Southern California and around the world. Mr. Lee Weissman, a specialist in Eastern religions, spoke about his time with Buddhism and his rediscovery of Judaism; and Rabbi Michael Skobac, a world-renowned expert in the differences



Rabbi Zalman Kravitz explained the challenges Jewish students encounter on campus during a special session for current and new Be-True Campus Reps at the 2nd Annual Be-True Student Leadership Conference.

between Judaism and Christianity, taught students about responding to missionary "proof-texts" and the historical roots of Christianity.

## Jesse Cooper encouraged students to Be Strong, Be Proud and Be-True to their Jewish identity.

Jews for Judaism's education director, Rabbi Zalman Kravitz, and education and program coordinator, Talya Messeri facilitated a *Be-True* Campus Rep Program workshop. The Campus

Rep Program enables students to earn incentives - including \$500 scholarships towards Jewish enrichment - by becoming resident "experts and activists" regarding peer-to-peer proselytizing on their individual campuses.

The conference closed with a personal Jewish identity session led by *Be-True* Campus Rep, Shayna Sorrentino, and a panel discussion with the guest speakers. The atmosphere was one of excitement, exuberance, and enjoyment of learning and of being able to openly share thoughts and ideas with professionals and peers. One student felt that the conference was incredible because "the overall unity of the group felt like one team with one goal."

Another student commented, "I am so thankful I was invited and I leave feeling empowered and grounded with my Jewish roots. I know NOW how to effectively confront someone of another faith who tries to get me involved."

Another said, "The difficult thing was picking one session over another to go to! I can't wait to visit the media section of the *Be-True* website to see the videos and photos of the sessions I missed."

*Be-True* is sponsored by the *Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles*, the *Jewish Venture Philanthropy Fund* and the *Goldrich Family Foundation*. Its mission is to strengthen Jewish identity and arm students with tools to hold their own against the challenges they encounter on campus.

Learn more by visiting the *Be-True* website at [www.Be-True.org](http://www.Be-True.org). ■



Education and program coordinator Talya Messeri (top left), welcomes high school and college students as they register for the 2009 *Be-True* Student Leadership Conference.



# Jews for Judaism's Aleph Club Goal Set at 365

Difficult financial times require innovative planning. Fortunately, Jews for Judaism had a head start and began implementing a forward-looking fundraising plan developed with a grant from the Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation early last year.

Each and every supporter is a valued partner in Jews for Judaism's important work. Providing a key foundation for the organization's funding - and a sustainable base on which to build support for our counseling and educational services - is the role of Jews for Judaism's rapidly growing Aleph Club.

The Aleph Club is comprised of dedicated and generous supporters who have committed to contribute an annual gift of \$1,000 or more. Aleph Club funds represent an important part of our annual operating budget.

Participation in the Aleph Club contributes to a stable funding source for the organization and helps maintain our nearly three decades of unbroken service to the Jewish community and fiscal responsibility.

We have set an initial goal of 365 members, one for each day of the year.

Throughout the year members receive special acknowledgments, tokens of appreciation, and invitations to exclusive social and educational events.

On Sunday, March 29, 2009, Jews for Judaism hosted its first Aleph Club



Jews for Judaism Aleph Club members pose outside the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery where they attended a private showing of an exhibit by Southern California Israeli artists.

event at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery in Barnsdall Park. The event was a wonderful opportunity for Aleph Club members and Jews for Judaism's board and staff to mingle.

**Each and every supporter  
is a valued partner  
in Jews for Judaism's  
important work.**

Following a brunch, Aleph Club members received a briefing from our director, Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz,

concerning developing threats to Jewish survival and new innovative programs that respond to these challenges. After his talk, members were treated to a tour of the gallery and a private showing of the art exhibition "From There to Here: Contemporary Southern California Artists from Israel." The tour was led by Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery curator Sara Cannon, who is also a Jews for Judaism board member.

To discuss funding possibilities and become an Aleph Club member dedicated to keeping Jews Jewish, please contact Rabbi Kravitz at 310-556-3344. ■



Prior to our art gallery tour, Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz briefs Aleph Club members on the latest proselytizing trends and Jews for Judaism's cutting edge activities.



Sara Cannon, Jews for Judaism board member and museum curator, shows Aleph Club members some of the creative, interactive art on display at the museum.

# Programs that Inspire and Enlighten

In addition to counseling, an essential component of Jews for Judaism's mission is presenting inspiring educational programs. During the past year our six international centers provided 25,000 client services including 15,000 participants in our educational programs, and our website received more than 2 million hits. To schedule a presentation call 310-556-3344.

## Our most popular lectures include:

**The Power of Persuasion** - *What Do Cults, Telemarketers & Terrorists Have in Common?*

**Missionary Impossible** - *The Jewish Response to Missionaries*

**Kabbalah and The Red String** - *Cult or Consciousness?*

**A Rabbi Cross-Examines Christianity** - *Discovering the Real Messiah!*

**Evangelicals and Israel** - *Trojan Horse or Knight in Shining Armor?*

**Messianic Fever** - *Redemption, Enlightenment or Vision?*

**Is Religion Killing Judaism?** - *The Search for Happiness and Spirituality*

**Jews for Judaism Counter-Missionary Survival Seminar**

Jews for Judaism offers these programs and more in coordination with organizations of all denominations.

## Some of our recent presentations were held at:

Aish Hatorah LA • American Jewish University • Be-True Student Leadership Conference • Camp JCA Shalom • Camp Ramah • Chabad Centers at CSUN, SMC, UC Davis, UCLA, and USC • Hillels at SMC, USC, CSUN, Pierce and Valley College • JSU at Marymount College • JSUs at several public high schools • Los Alamitos Hebrew High • Los Angeles Hebrew High • Louis B. Silver Religious School • NCSY • New Jewish Community High • Sedrot Kids • Sinai Temple Hebrew High • Temple Adat Shalom • Temple Ahavat Shalom • Temple Beth El • Temple Menorah • Temple Sollel • Young Israel of Century City • YULA Boys and Girls School

## "Letters and Quotes"

Thank you for the counseling regarding my son, who is in a transitional living program in Utah. He needed an affordable program like this, but because Rabbi Zippel in Salt Lake City warned me that a number of Jews were converted to the Mormon religion, I was very anxious about this decision. You counseled me that my first obligation is to save his physical life. You also gave me several potential options to reduce his exposure to missionaries. Your sending me a copy the Mormon missionary manual enabled me to discuss their strategies with him ahead of time. I greatly appreciate your considerable help.

*Jack Abramson, Los Angeles*

Your lectures are always informative and eye-opening to a danger our students were generally ignorant of before. Thank you for creating a greater awareness and inspiring them to get involved.

*Ghira Hershoff, Los Angeles*

I was confused by my Christian friends until I discovered the Jews for Judaism website. Although it took some time to review the material, it answered all my questions and kept me Jewish.

*David Hirsch, College Student*

## PREPARE YOUR TEENS FOR COLLEGE



Imagine your child's first week away from home living in the college dorm. There is a knock on the door followed by an invitation to participate in a "Human Scavenger Hunt" where students meet for pizza and beer. Sounds like fun until they discover that the party also includes a Christian Bible study.

How do you prepare your children for these encounters? Who can they turn to for help? How do you teach them to deal with peer pressure concerning religion, drugs and sex?

Jews for Judaism is introducing a new program for parents of high school seniors getting ready to start college. You can invite your friends, and host an enlightening **Action Group**, to discuss the challenges awaiting your children on campus. Speakers include Jews for Judaism rabbis and mental health professionals who understand the spiritual and physical issues your children will face. Call 310-556-3344 today to schedule your Student Prep Action Group, now.