

Rewarding Jewish genius

Rabbi garners prestigious fellowship

by **Richard Greenberg**

Associate Editor

Rabbi Dov Linzer has made a name for himself by professionalizing the training of Orthodox rabbis, producing clergy who are known for being progressive, nondogmatic and extraordinarily sensitive to the needs of their congregants.

He hopes to do the same for another category of Orthodox rabbis — those who are in the classroom rather than on the *bima*.

The former Silver Spring resident now has an extra \$225,000 to help accomplish his goal, thanks to the Avi Chai Foundation, which last week named Linzer one of America's best and brightest communal leaders and awarded him \$75,000 per year for three years to enable him to translate his vision into reality.

The dean of modern Orthodox Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School in New York, Linzer is one of six recipients (four individuals and a team of two) of the inaugural Avi Chai Fellowships, which collectively constitute North America's largest cash award to emerging Jewish leaders, according to the organization.

Due to the magnitude of the grant — more than \$1 million total over three years — and its goal of spurring trailblazing Jewish creativity, the fellowship has been referred to informally as the Jewish version of the fabled MacArthur Foundation “genius” award.

The award granter, the Avi Chai

Foundation, is a New York-based organization devoted to fostering Jewish literacy, promoting Jewish peoplehood and strengthening connections with Israel.

“It was a huge surprise,” said Linzer, 41, who, like the other winners, did not apply for the award, and, in fact, did not even know he was under consideration until the highly secretive selection process was in its final stages.

Linzer, who graduated from Silver Spring's Yeshiva of Greater Washington, said he intends to develop a rabbi-educator track at YCT that will remedy what he termed “a dearth of deeply knowledgeable, text-fluent rabbi-educators” who can promote critical thinking among students in an “inclusive and nonjudgmental” environment.

The new track, he said, will prepare graduates to teach in day schools, yeshiva high schools and community schools. It will parallel YCT's existing pulpit-rabbi track and will feature several of same philosophical hallmarks that have made that course of study and training distinctive.

David Stone, who chaired the fellowship selection committee, described Linzer's project as “spectacular,” maintaining that it could have a “very profound effect” in Orthodox educational circles and elsewhere.

The forum for Linzer's experiment, YCT, was founded nine years ago by Rabbi Avi Weiss in an effort to promote openness and inclusiveness in the Orthodox world.

The institution is revered by some and scorned by others — lauded as a much-



Former Silver Spring resident Rabbi Dov Linzer, right, dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinic School in New York, confers with then-student, now Rabbi Nissan Antine, an assistant rabbi and director of education at Beth Shalom Congregation and Talmud Torah in Potomac. Linzer was recently awarded a \$225,000 fellowship by the Avi Chai Foundation.

needed breath of fresh air for Orthodoxy by centrists and those to the left, and derided by those on the right who accuse the school of being Orthodox in name only.

“If people weren't upset, I would think that we're not doing something right,” said Linzer. “As long as they're accurately portraying us, OK. But what I object to is people trying to pervert what we do and engage in slander and smears.”

Since it opened, YCT has placed 36 rabbinic graduates, 20 of them in Orthodox pulpits throughout North America, seven at Hillels or elsewhere on college campuses and the remainder at Orthodox day schools or community schools.

Among those graduates is Nissan Antine, 29, an assistant rabbi and direc-

tor of education at Orthodox Beth Shalom Congregation and Talmud Torah in Potomac.

He termed Linzer “a great role model and mentor,” who combines brilliant scholarship, “intellectual honesty” and “tremendous sensitivity” in seeking to “understand human needs and the human condition.”

The other Avi Chai Fellowship awardees are Betsy Dolgin Katz, North American director of the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School; Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, co-founder of the organization Mechon Hadar; Rabbi Menachem Schmidt, founder of the Lubavitch House at the University of Pennsylvania; and joint participants Ariel Beery and Aharon Horwitz, co-founders of the Presentense Group.

The Silver Spring shuffle

HDI out, HDS in at Congregation Har Tzeon

by **Debra Rubin**

Editor

A youthful racket will continue to Aresound on school days at Congregation Har Tzeon-Agudath Achim in Silver Spring, with last week's announcement that the Conservative *shul* will swap one day-school tenant for another.

Hebrew Day School will lease space at Har Tzeon to be vacated by the Hebrew Day Institute, which had announced earlier this year that it would rent larger quarters at Tikvat Israel in Rockville in time for the next school term.

The timing was fortuitous, according to HDS head of school Rabbi David Serkin, who said school officials were beginning to sense that officials at the Silver Spring Jewish Center, where the school has been housed for more than 30 years and which has a rapidly growing

preschool, “were not sure they wanted us.”

SSJC's rabbi, Herzel Kranz, however, said Friday that he was taken aback by the announced move because he thought talks over extension of the school's month-to-month rental agreement had been ongoing.

However, HDS board president Laura Goldman said she had informed Kranz as far back as February that the school was trying to negotiate a lease with Har Tzeon in order to secure more space to grow. In addition, she said she promptly told him last week that the lease — a three-year agreement — had been signed.

“We think that a new building would give us the kind of space we need to expand our offerings and still be close to the Silver Spring area where our student body comes from,” said Lauren Shaham, a school spokesperson.



Chaya Kranz does face painting for youngsters attending the 2006 Purim carnival at the Hebrew Day School in Silver Spring. HDS is moving to Congregation Har Tzeon-Agudath Achim in Silver Spring.

The relocation, she said, will give HDS access to a library/media room, two additional classrooms, a large social hall for supplementary activities and a modern playground.

In addition, Serkin said, “being the

sole tenant gives us a lot more flexibility, as opposed to sharing the facility with the nursery school.”

HDS has 85 students, and Shaham

See **HDS**, next page