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Boro Park Hatzolah: Our Mission Is Saving Lives



Rendering of new headquarters for Boro Park Hatzolah

By the Friedlander Group

Hatzolah coordinator Mendy got a *chasunah* invitation from someone he didn't know.

After checking with the rest of his family, none of whom recognized the name on the invitation, he figured it was probably a mistake. "These things happen," he said to himself, "especially when you're busy making a *simchah*."

But last week, Reb Mendy got a phone call from a Mr. S. "Reb Mendy," he said, "I was hoping to see you at my daughter's *chasunah* last night. Where were you?" Reb Mendy was taken by surprise. He remembered the invitation, but he had no clue who this man was. "Please refresh my memory," he said.

And so the caller did. Seventeen years earlier, Mr. S's four-year-old daughter, Baila, had fallen down a flight of steps and sustained a deep cut to the face, which was gushing blood. The S. family called Boro Park Hatzolah, and Reb Mendy arrived at the scene.

"You took my daughter under your wing," Mr. S. reminded him. "You brought her to Dr. M., who is tops in the field of microsurgery. He stitched up Baila so well that you can barely see a scar. Not only that, but you stayed with her the entire time. I'll never forget the *chessed* you did that day. Now, seventeen years later, I wanted the *zechus* of dancing with you at her *chasunah*."

Reb Mendy was so moved by this gesture that he attended Baila's *sheva brachos*. This genuine expression of *hakaras hatov* will always remain with him.

Reb Mendy knows that membership in Hatzolah is a tremendous *zechus* for him and his *chaverim*, but also a tremendous responsibility. And while Baila's story, *baruch Hashem*, had a happy ending, not every story does. "You see a lot of difficult things," says Reb Mendy, "and sometimes it gets to you." It's the Bailas out there who keep this cadre of dedicated rescuers

going day after day.

About Boro Park Hatzolah

Boro Park Hatzolah was founded in 1972 by community *askanim* who were concerned about the overburdened New York City EMS system. In 1976, they began transporting patients to hospitals in station wagons. In 1978, they purchased their first ambulance. Now, over 30 years later, they are the largest volunteer ambulance service in the United States, with 150 members who come from a variety of backgrounds.

While other Hatzolah organizations service a very specific area, Boro Park Hatzolah covers a wide range of neighborhoods, including Bensonhurst, Seagate, Bay Ridge and Park Slope. That means calls come in from as far away as 1st Avenue and 65th Street, and the industrial area near Bush Terminal. It also means that a large number of volunteers must be on call at all times in many different locations.

Boro Park Hatzolah responds to about 12,000 calls annually, which translates into 33 a day. This, of course, means plenty of calls in the wee hours of the night, in snowstorms, during heat waves, and in all kinds of emergencies and disasters. Boro Park Hatzolah works closely with local hospitals, the Police Department, the Fire Department, EMS, the Department of Sanitation, and the Department of Transportation. Its exemplary response during the horrific events of 9/11 is legendary; the members' survival simply cannot be explained as a natural phenomenon, and is a source of wonder and *shevach vehodaah laHashem* to this day.

Timing is everything when it comes to emergency responding. Boro Park Hatzolah boasts an exceptional response time to most calls, generally well under three minutes, thanks to its sophisticated, computer-aided dispatch system, which helps

dispatchers and drivers pinpoint the location of the emergency with greater accuracy, and its large, diverse membership.

Once Hatzolah brings a patient to the emergency room, members will stay with him or her until proper care is administered by hospital personnel. According to Boruch, Boro Park Hatzolah coordinator, "We have been instrumental in opening three new stroke centers in area hospitals — Methodist, Lutheran and Maimonides Medical Centers. We are advocating for CT scans in the emergency rooms to save precious time in cases of strokes and cardiac situations, *R"l*. We are also working on a 24-hour CT room that will be available for emergency cardiac catheterizations. This organization is a constant advocate for improving patient care at local hospitals."

There are plenty of *chessed* organizations in our community, of course. From Tomchei Shabbos to Bikur Cholim to Chaveirim to *gemachs*; the list is endless. But when someone's health is on the line or they are experiencing a medical crisis, the place to turn is Hatzolah.

Location, Location, Location

For the past 20 years, Boro Park Hatzolah has been operating out of its headquarters on 16th Avenue and 53rd Street. Although the location has run efficiently for some time and served its purpose well, the truth is that the organization has long outgrown it. The 40 original members have increased nearly fourfold, and although the cramped space is somewhat inconvenient for Hatzolah members, it can be downright devastating to the community at large. If Hatzolah cannot perform optimally and efficiently at all times, it poses a danger to everyone in its area of service.

It became apparent to Boro Park Hatzolah's coordinators that a larger, more efficient base

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