

September Is 'Shoe Time' For Families

By *Hamodia* Staff

All beginnings are difficult, as the saying goes. They're usually expensive, too.

Ask most middle class or low-income parents shelling out the hard-to-come-by extra money needed to get their kids ready for the school year. Clothes, uniforms, school supplies and, of course, school registration fees and tuition all add up to a summer's end assault on the check-book and credit card that takes a greater toll during the economic squeeze.

For large families, one of the costliest and unavoidable school season items is shoes. Sibling or cousin hand-me-downs might save a trip or two to the clothing store. But shoe hand-me-downs are less likely because people generally wear them until they're done. Plus, the way shoes fit is very individual.

"Shoes are a major expense. Sometimes you need to buy three pairs of shoes for a child over the course of the year," a Boro Park father of eight told *Hamodia*.

"It's particularly challenging because it's so much money at one time. There's weekday

shoes and Shabbos shoes — and then slippers and summer sneakers. And it's not an expense you can space out over an extended period of time," a father of seven from Boro Park added.

Last year's back pack might be capable of another year of service. But generally, the old shoes won't do for young feet that have grown another size.

"I ask my kids, 'Are you really sure you need a new pair of shoes?' and the answer is inevitably 'yes,'" one of the fathers said.

Sholom Warren, owner of Hamer's shoes on 12th Avenue in Boro Park, has been in the business for 35 years. He told *Hamodia* that many customers have become more cost conscious. Some who had been doing well financially and whose main concern used to be getting good shoes as quickly as

possible for their children are now in tenuous financial circumstances.

"Many people with large families now look for previous years models at lower prices," he said. The trend occurs particularly with younger children, who aren't fashion conscious, he said.

New shoes for children six or eight years old can cost as much as \$80 to \$110. Buying last year's styles can save \$20 to \$30 per pair.

"People are very happy with that," Warren remarked.

He also sees the lower priced goods, in the \$50 to \$75 range, moving quicker than in the past.

Yoily Bittman, owner at 14th Avenue Shoes in Boro Park, said he hasn't noticed a significant change in buying trends for children's shoes, despite the poor economy.

It seems to him that when it comes to buying shoes for the kids, parents forge ahead and make sacrifices elsewhere.

"For the kids, people don't look whether they have money or not."

He has seen customers cut-backs in men's shoes, however — in his opinion a sign that the

Seeking Jewish Votes



HILLEL ENGEL

Candidates for the offices of New York City comptroller and public advocate participated in a forum dealing with issues concerning the Jewish community, on Wednesday. The event was coordinated by The Friedlander Group and hosted by West Side Council of Jewish Organizations. L-R: Ezra Friedlander, CEO, Friedlander Group; Norman Siegel, esq., candidate for Public Advocate; Simcha Eichenstein, director of political and governmental services, The Friedlander Group; New York City Councilman David Weprin, candidate for comptroller; Michael Landau, founder and chairman of the West Side COJO.

men are taking the brunt of decreasing family spending on shoes.

Although not as numerous as clothing *gemachs*, shoe *gemachs* are an option in some communities. As of last week, two were listed in the *gemach* section of *Hamodia's* Monday daily — one in Flatbush and one in Lakewood. They offer shoes

that are in new or excellent condition. In addition, thrift stores like Sephardic Bikur Cholim's store on McDonald Avenue in Flatbush often carry new or hardly-used shoes.

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