

At Legislative Breakfast, Officials Support Shema Kolainu

By Sydney Chang

Shema Kolainu (www.shemakolainu.org), a school serving the needs of autistic children and their families, recently held its annual legislative breakfast, which was coordinated by The Friedlander Group, featuring an array of local elected officials and community leaders from across the city who all voiced their commitments to the special-needs community.

The breakfast was emceed by Menachem Lubinsky, CEO of Lubicom Mar-

Cohen, who chairs the NYC Council Committee on Mental Health, for ensuring that the budget allocates funding for the autism initiative—a sentiment shared by Councilman Greenfield, who announced his and Cohen's triumph in increasing funding for autism by \$2 million as part of NYC after-school programs.

Dr. Alan Kadish, president and CEO of the Touro College and University System, was awarded the Excellence in Education Leadership Award and the artwork of



(L-R) NYC Public Advocate Letitia James, Menachem Lubinsky, Peter Rebenwurz, Dr. Joshua Weinstein, Milton Weinstock, Dr. Alan Kadish, NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer, and Ezra Friedlander



NYC Councilman Andrew Cohen addressing the Shema Kolainu breakfast

keting Consulting, and noted political and community advocate Kalman Yeger. Dr. Joshua Weinstein, founder of Shema Kolainu, opened the event by expressing his deep gratitude to the dedicated parents, Shema Kolainu staff, elected officials, and management staff who have grown and developed the school into what is it today, proudly declaring that since "day one at Shema Kolainu, we started with miracles, and the miracles have never ceased."

Also among those in attendance were NYC Public Advocate Letitia James, NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer, NY State Senator Felder, and NYC Councilmembers Andrew Cohen and David Greenfield. The program commenced with a Shema Kolainu parent describing the staff at the Shema Kolainu school as persistent and incredibly brave. Dr. Weinstein lauded the extraordinary efforts of Councilmember

Shema Kolainu students. As one of the leading higher-education institutions, Touro College boasts 18,000 students enrolled in 32 schools over four countries who go on to careers in the healthcare world. Touro College's Autism Center and Dr. Kadish's contributions to educating healthcare professionals to serve the needs of those with autism were also recognized.

Dr. Kadish eloquently captured the essence of the breakfast in shifting the focus away from himself towards honoring children with autism and those at Shema Kolainu who dedicate their lives to serving them. Milton Weinstock, board member, introduced Public Advocate Tish James, who emphasized the symbolism of the art presented to Dr. Kadish, as it is "the best . . . and most effective way [the students] can communicate . . . this is artwork of their world that we should enjoy and share with others."



NYC Councilman David Greenfield addressing the Shema Kolainu breakfast

Shema Kolainu also honored NYC Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services Dr. Herminia Palacio with the City Leadership Award. Dr. Weinstein, in presenting her with a painting by the children of Shema Kolainu, said to her, "I'm presenting you with this humble award to a humble person." She captured the importance of taking care of our youth and those most vulnerable by powerfully stating, "When our children and neighborhoods are healthy, our communities are healthy, and our city thrives."

Comptroller Stringer, who was introduced by Shema Kolainu's vice president Peter Rebenwurz, commended the hard work of the honorees and others, delivering a heartfelt message that as "parents and grandparents and guardians . . . when we look at our children, we think they can

do anything they want even if they don't start the race of life in the same way as other kids. We always believe that they can aspire to be anything they want . . . and Shema Kolainu levels the playing field for all of our children." He truly captured the heart of the school's mission, and the life-changing ways in which our children all benefit from the care and compassion they deserve.

The genuine and candid atmosphere of this year's event continues to exemplify the obstacles overcome and progress made when there is collaboration among various communities. The fight to raise awareness of autism and provide quality education to children with autism is greatly furthered by Shema Kolainu and all of the dedicated people who come together each year at these events. ❖

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