

Backstage at the White House Chanukah Reception

KEILI COHEN

On Wednesday, December 9, President Obama hosted the annual White House Chanukah Party, an event for which it is very difficult to receive tickets. It is one of the few non-partisan events left in Washington DC.

Upon arrival, guests were serenaded by the Maccabeats, Yeshiva University's *a cappella* group, as well as singer Lipa Schmeltzer.

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, a guest of honor at this year's Chanukah party, led the candlelighting ceremony. He reminded partygoers of the Maccabees' struggle "for liberty, for freedom of religion, for our traditions, for their ability to celebrate their own identity."

While addressing his guests, President Obama expressed the inspirational messages of the Chanukah story: the weak prevailing against the strong, freedom over tyranny and light over darkness.

The prestigious guest list included U.S. Ambassador Dan Shapiro, Republi-

can Rep. Lee Zeldin, Rabbi Abraham Shemtov, Rabbi Levi Shemtov, President of Israel Reuven Rivlin, Israeli Ambassador Ron Dermer, Mr. Abe Foxman, Mr. Malcolm Hoenlein, Mr. John Ruskay, former Congressman Henry Waxman, Mr. Sol Werdiger, Mr. Joseph Stamm, Mr. Ezra Friedlander, Rabbi Chaim David Zwiebel, Mr. Abba Cohen, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough as well as Mr. Alan and Mrs. Judy Gross. It was at last year's Chanukah party that President Obama announced Alan Gross's release by the Cuban government.

"It was an honor to be able to attend the White House Chanukah party this year," said Mr. Ezra Friedlander, CEO, The Friedlander Group. "What a privilege it is to not only live in a country that allows people the liberty of openly practicing their religion but celebrates their traditions alongside them."

Having a Chanukah reception at the White House is a reminder to American Jewry that embracing our religion is in sync with being a good American."



The Friedlander Group

L-R: Mr. Shlomo Werdiger, Mr. Malcolm Hoenlein and Mr. Gary Torgow.



The Friedlander Group

L-R: Mr. Ezra Friedlander, Ambassador Dan Shapiro, and Mr. Joseph B. Stamm.

Hasc Center Offers Support Program to Help Families

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In the world of special needs the focus is primarily on the individual who is displaying the disability.

But over the course of the work performed by HASC Center, which spans several decades, it has become increasingly clear that there are a host of collateral individuals who are also impacted upon when there is a child, sibling or other loved one who has special needs. They need help to cope with the issues they encounter, to get answers to the questions they may harbor and to get the support that will dispel the sense of isolation and loneliness they may experience.

To address this unmet and underfunded need HASC Center initiated support groups for mothers of children with special needs in Williamsburg and Boro Park, and also

sponsored intermittent recreational and social events. The overwhelming success of these programs confirmed HASC Center's observation concerning the unaddressed need for such interventions.

As a result, HASC Center took the initiative to formalize the overall scope of its work in this arena and established a formal Family Support department to complement the HASC Center network of residences, day programs, vocational training, mental health and medical services. This department is headed by Bracha Lavernoff, who coordinates, organizes and inspires each facet of the specially designed supportive programming. Members of the team include Blima Chaimowitz, Beilu Freund and Devorah Kahn.

Family Support department activities are pre-scheduled on a monthly basis with a host of specialty programming which coincide with the Yamim Tovim or other special times during the year. A special highlight of the Family Support program is the Women's Retreat which is conducted on an annual basis in a resort that provides relaxation and a haven from the stresses and tensions of their

everyday routine.

The HASC Center Family Support department is extremely proud of a relatively new program designed to focus on and provide an outlet for the brothers and sisters of siblings who have special needs. At these monthly encounters siblings are able to gather in separate groups for boys and girls to have fun, hear words of *chizuk* and inspiration and have an opportunity to bond with peers who might share similar experiences and concerns.

Recently, the Boro Park Mothers Support group met at the HASC Center facility located on 63rd Street. The 35 women enjoyed hearing Mrs. Shlomtzky Weiss and noshing on salad, sushi and other delectable treats throughout the evening. Groups were split up by table and each table was surrounded by moms who had children with the same or similar diagnoses, thereby encouraging support and networking. The Williamsburg Mothers Support group enjoyed a similar program.

The 39 girls from the Williamsburg sister workshop enjoyed dancing with Mrs. Neustein at the HASC Center facility located

at South 8th Street. They had pizza, fries, and plenty of nosh, and played an ice cream identification/personality game, all headed by Esther Yitty Dym.

In the Boro Park Sister workshop, 60 girls enjoyed a night of musical fun with a special trampoline program with Rivky Braun. Reizy Weingarten completed the evening by helping the girls design their own personalized mugs, bursting with color.

On one evening, 56 boys ages 6-13 from Boro Park, Williamsburg, Crown Heights, Flatbush and Kensington enjoyed an event that took place at the HASC Center 63rd Street location. The featured speaker was master storyteller, Rabbi Fishel Schachter. Additionally, there was an exciting donut decorating workshop and colorful wax candle-making workshop. Each boy enjoyed pizza and French fries, soda and nosh as well. This exciting event was coordinated by Meir Fogel, and Rabbi Mendy Salgo enthusiastically interacted with the boys and staff members.

These programs are open to all individuals who feel that they would benefit from similar events.