

Building Community

**An Interview with Eric S. Goldstein,
Chief Executive Officer, UJA-Federation of New York**

EDITORS' NOTE *Eric Goldstein is a long-time active member in the Jewish community and served in a number of senior volunteer positions before being appointed UJA-Federation's CEO in 2014. Before joining UJA, Goldstein was a leading partner at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP. He served as Vice Chair of UJA's board, was a member of UJA's Executive Committee, and served as chair of UJA's Lawyers Division, Commission on Jewish Identity and*



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Renewal, and Global Strategy Task Force. He was a founding board member of Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education; President and Chair of the board of Manhattan Day School; board member of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), a UJA-Federation partner; President of the Beth Din of America; board member of the Ramaz School; and board member of DOROT, also a UJA-Federation partner. In 2013, Goldstein received the Torch of Learning Award from American Friends of the Hebrew University. He was also a participant in the Wexner Heritage Program.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF *UJA-Federation of New York (ujafedny.org) is one of the world's largest and most effective philanthropies, raising over \$200 million annually. Last year, through a network of nonprofits, it supported free legal services for 100,000 New Yorkers, funded 440,000 mental health counseling sessions, served 9.6 million meals to those in need, enabled 16,000 kids across New York to attend Jewish summer camp, and helped secure nearly \$475 million in government funding to support vulnerable communities. UJA also convenes the Jewish community of New York, bringing together more than 40,000 people each year at hundreds of events. Beyond New York, UJA also supports programs in Israel and nearly 70 countries around the globe.*

Will you discuss the history and heritage of UJA-Federation of New York and how the organization has evolved?

UJA-Federation is a merger of two separate entities. In 1917, a group of Jewish community leaders sought to create a central organization – a Federation – that brought

together 24 cradle-to-grave organizations to support the needs of the more than 1 million Jews then living in New York. These agencies included childcare agencies, programs for at-risk youth, hospitals, a home for the elderly and much more.

While Federation was concerned with local needs, the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), founded in 1939, had a purely overseas focus. It was created to help address the suffering of European Jews during World War II, and support the fledgling state of Israel.

In 1986, the two entities merged to create UJA-Federation of New York, whose mandate remains to care for the needs of the most vulnerable, both overseas and locally, and strengthen the Jewish future. The legacy is astounding. For more than 100 years, UJA-Federation has provided many billions of dollars to help people around the world, as well as strengthen Jewish life. The UJA annual campaign remains the single largest philanthropic effort by any local community, bringing together thousands and thousands of New Yorkers to address the greatest challenges around us.

What are the priorities for UJA-Federation of New York and the key areas it supports?

UJA allocates over \$150 million a year and a little more than half of our dollars go to social service needs. These safety-net services focus on taking people from crisis to stability and help break the cycle of poverty. Shockingly, one-third of the Jewish community in New York City, Westchester and Long Island live near or below the poverty line. It's a staggering statistic and surprising to many. In response to this overwhelming need, one of our biggest initiatives is the opening of two, one-stop social service centers in Brooklyn and Queens, in the densest areas of Jewish poverty. At these centers, clients will be able to meet with social workers and receive help for legal, vocational, financial, mental health and other needs.

We're also in the process of transitioning the nearly 20 food pantries in our network to a cutting-edge digital pantry system, which stresses client dignity and is overall more efficient. Rather than coming and standing on a long line for a pre-determined bag of goods,

you go online and choose the foods that you want. If you don't know how to go online, a social worker will do it for you. Compared to traditional pantries, which remain a critical resource, the digital system serves more clients, reduces food waste, and distributes more protein and fresh produce. It is both culturally sensitive and also meets any health or dietary concerns. Our goal is to holistically address the person or the family and then figure out how to change the current reality so that the person walks away with the tools needed to take care of themselves and their family.

Is the UJA-Federation of New York specifically focused on the Jewish community or is it a broader focus?

In general, our focus overseas is on the Jewish community, but we do get involved outside the Jewish community in times of crisis. We provided millions of dollars to Puerto Rico when there was a need. We had the ability to act quickly and sent 29 planes to Puerto Rico with supplies in the immediate wake of the crisis.

Our focus locally is much broader and we address the entire community. That said, we place great emphasis on Jewish engagement and believe in the importance of Jewish identity and Jewish communal connection. This is why summer camps are so important and why Jewish day schools are so important. This is also why figuring out innovative ways of engaging Jewish people at a time when they are Jewish because they choose to be – not because they have to be – is so important.

Is there a role for UJA-Federation of New York to play in addressing the rise of anti-semitism in the world?

There is absolutely a role for us to play. For decades, we've supported the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York (JCRC), which receives almost 40 percent of its annual funding from us. JCRC has been the principal place for the Jewish community to build bridges across New York to other faith-based organizations and local community leaders. JCRC is also an important resource to local Jewish institutions around security needs. In the current environment, we are spending more and more time with JCRC, thinking about how to secure the community and stem the growing tide of intolerance, hatred and anti-semitism. ●