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New Leadership Sparks Excitement at the Charlotte Torah Center

By Marcy Goldstein

"It's like falling in love over and over again. Learning and teaching Torah touches the soul on the deepest level and feels like falling in love with a person. It's hard to describe," explains Rabbi Chanoch Oppenheim when asked what he likes most about Judaism and being a Rabbi. "While I feel great after a workout, I feel infinitely greater after learning Torah. My passion is to bring Jews to this experience. My mission is to get people involved because when Jews really learn about the mitzvot, learning becomes enjoyable. I see it in people's eyes when they realize that Judaism makes sense, that the Torah is not a pain in the neck but rather a very big gift."

When speaking with Rabbi Oppenheim, I am struck by his enthusiasm for communicating Judaism to Jews at all levels of observance and from all the denominations. Dan Peck, President of the Charlotte Torah Center, said that "the CTC family is thrilled that Rabbi Oppenheim will be leading the organization to the next level of its growth. Charlotte is truly blessed to welcome a Rabbi with his background, capabilities, and enthusiasm."

Raised in a non-observant Jewish family in New York, Rabbi

Oppenheim traveled the road to becoming observant and thoroughly enjoys teaching people at all stages of spiritual growth. While earning his B.A. in Philosophy at Columbia University, he went on the Volunteers for Israel program; he lived on an army base and picked fruit in the fields of the Golan Heights. During his stay in Israel, he visited a yeshiva for the first time. He returned to college quasi-religious having realized that he had been dedicating himself to becoming an intellectual but had given almost no time to becoming knowledgeable in Judaism. At that point, his focus shifted toward learning Torah.

Rabbi Oppenheim studied at Kol Yaakov Torah Center in Monsey, NY and completed the bulk of his studies at Mir Yeshiva Kollel in Jerusalem. In 1996 he received smicha (rabbinical ordination) from Rav Yitzchak Kulitz, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. He also trained in pedagogy and pastoral psychology at Ohr LaGolah Leadership Institute. His first teaching job in 1996 was at Yeshivat Shaarei Yerushalayim. Three years later, he began teaching at Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem. He became a Senior Lecturer in



Rabbi Chanoch Oppenheim

Discovery Seminars and Jerusalem Fellowships, a Gemora (Talmud) Rabbi in the Beis Midrash program, a Marriage Education Counselor, and an Advisor for *madrichim* (counselors) on Aish programs. His teaching is imbued with an attitude derived from his years at Aish HaTorah: "[to provide] opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds to discover the beauty and meaning of their heritage in an atmosphere of open inquiry and mutual respect" (www.aish.com). He started the Dallas Area Torah Association community in Plano,

Texas where he lived before coming to Charlotte.

Starting August 1, Rabbi Oppenheim joins the CTC with his wife, Sara, who is also an accomplished and learned Jewish leader. She founded N-Aish-Ay, a women's organization that offers educational programs and social events for wives of future rabbis, educators, and other community leaders. Additionally, she worked as a dating coach for Aish HaTorah. She is highly regarded as a specialist in women's intimacy issues and has received many referrals from prominent Rabbis.

Rabbi Oppenheim has a clear vision for the CTC's growth: "My dream is that it should be a community where all Jews feel comfortable. We should be able to offer anything that someone needs from learning Torah, to making business connections, or helping to fix a flat tire. When you have a need and ask yourself, 'Who do I call?' the answer should be 'my community.'" Growing a community like this begins with feeling pride in Judaism. It starts with education, which happens to be this Rabbi's first name. Literally, "Chanoch" is etymologically



related to the Hebrew word "chinuch" meaning "education." Clearly, he embodies the essence of his name. He is a man filled with the desire to educate himself and others, both individually and in community.

The CTC is thrilled to welcome Rabbi Oppenheim, Sara, and their children, Eliezer (21), Berel (19), Chavi (16), Aaron (14), and Yehuda (9). They are excited to call the CTC, Shalom Park, and Charlotte their new home. The Rabbi is looking forward to working with other organizations to develop Charlotte's flourishing Jewish community. The CTC invites you to see programs and classes at www.charlottetorahcenter.com. Come by to meet and welcome the Oppenheims in person. ☆

Marcy Goldstein, Ph.D., is an adjunct lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She teaches courses on Globalization and Intercultural Relations with a focus on Asian religions.

Tikva Charlotte Announces New Director of Education

Tikva Charlotte is proud to announce that Karen Marjercsik will serve as the new Director of Education. Tikva Charlotte is an intimate religious school program that serves Jewish children with special needs. This successful school, now beginning its fourth year, is a collaborative program of Temple Beth El and Temple Israel and is designed to meet the religious education needs for students that need a more personalized approach to classroom teaching. Tikva Charlotte features a very low teacher to student ratio that allows each student to be taught in a way that meets his or her individual needs. The program emphasizes both Jewish Studies and Hebrew, and in fact several students have successfully completed their B'nai Mitzvah as part of the program. Tikva Charlotte serves children from K-12, and works with parents, teachers, and outside professionals to ensure the highest standard of education for each student.

Karen Marjercsik, the new Director of Education will bring many years of experience and expertise to Tikva Charlotte. Karen taught for 10 years in synagogues in Virginia and South Carolina and worked with adults with developmental disabilities. Since moving to Charlotte in the fall of 2006, Ms. Majercsik has taken on several roles in the Charlotte Jewish community. Karen works for Jewish Family Services as a clinician, career counselor, and the Volunteer coordinator. In addition, she has taught at the Consolidated Hebrew High and has taught at Temple Beth El as a B'nai Mitzvah tutor and the Sheva class teacher.

Tikva Charlotte is currently accepting registration for the 2008-2009 school year. If you know of a child who could benefit from this unique program or if you have any questions, please contact Karen Marjercsik at krmajercsik@hotmail.com. ☆



Making a difference for Jewish children with special needs, Karen Marjercsik has just accepted the position of Director of Tikva Charlotte.

Also inside ...



Rabbi Ben Tzion and Rochel Groner come to Charlotte to teach Torah Talmud and to direct the Friendship Circle, an organization for Jewish children with special needs. See page 7.