

Rabbi Jonathan Freirich of Temple Beth El to Shave Head to Raise Awareness of and Funding for Pediatric Cancer Research

During the 125th Annual Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) Convention, Rabbi Jonathan Freirich of Temple Beth El will join over 60 male and female Reform Rabbis when they shave their heads to raise awareness of and funding for pediatric cancer research. In addition, some participants are shaving in their home communities, including several Reconstructionist and Conservative colleagues who were moved to join their Reform peers in this important endeavor.

The "Shave for the Brave" event will take place on April 1, at the CCAR Convention, which will be held at the Fairmont Chicago Millennium Park. The CCAR is the representative organization of nearly 2,000 Reform Rabbis, the world's largest group of Jewish clergy.

The rabbis' "Shave for the Brave" fundraiser benefits St. Baldrick's, a charity committed to funding childhood cancer research. So far, the CCAR Rabbis have raised over \$330,000 for St. Baldrick's, and hope to reach their

goal of \$360,000.

"I am honored to participate in the 'Shave for the Brave' fundraiser, and to support St. Baldrick's in their efforts to research pediatric cancer, and find a cure," said Rabbi Jonathan Freirich of Temple Beth El. "I hope that my small sacrifice of hair will bring attention to the cause of conquering childhood cancers."

"The role of a rabbi is to right wrongs identified in the world, and the 'Shave for the Brave' event allows rabbis to do that, by raising awareness of pediatric cancer and helping to work towards a cure," said Rabbi Steven A. Fox, CCAR Chief Executive. "We are proud and honored that the CCAR Convention could host this inspiring event."

The connection between the Reform Jewish community and pediatric cancer advocacy began with the story of Samuel Sommer, the son of Rabbis Phyllis and Michael Sommer. Phyllis Sommer serves Am Shalom in Glencoe, IL, and her husband has served Con-



Rabbi Jonathan Freirich will say good-bye to his curls (temporarily) on April 1.

gregation B'nai Torah in Highland Park, IL and North Shore Congregation Israel. The Sommers had documented Sam's battle with cancer on their blog, "Superman Sam." From the blog, there came an outpouring of support from people all over the country who sympathized with Sam and his family. Rabbis across denominations prayed Mi Shebeirach for Sam's recovery.

In October 2013, Rabbi Phyllis Sommer and Rabbi Rebecca Schorr had the idea to organize a massive fundraiser, "36 Rabbis Shave for the Brave," in which 36 rabbis would shave their heads, raising awareness of the reality that only 4% of United States federal funding for cancer research is earmarked for all childhood can-

cers. The initial fundraising goal for "Shave for the Brave" was \$180,000, to fund pediatric cancer research. "We have surpassed our initial goal, but will not stop. Not now; not ever," says Rabbi Rebecca Schorr. Sam succumbed to leukemia in December 2013. Rabbis of "Shave for the Brave" are banding together to help save other families from having to go through what the Sommers went through. "[We are] slightly *meshugennah* ('crazy' in Yiddish), but very devoted rabbis who are yearning to do something," explains Schorr. "We couldn't save Sammy; perhaps, though, we can save others like him."

The "Shave for the Brave" event will take place at the CCAR Convention after a Loss and Mourning Service, led by Rabbi Rex Perlmeter.

St. Baldrick's is a volunteer-driven, non-profit charity that is committed to funding pediatric cancer research to find cures for childhood cancers and to give survivors long and healthy lives. The group has helped organize thousands of head-shaving events since 2000 and has raised millions of dollars for pediatric cancer research.

You can visit www.stbaldricks.org/participants/my-page/682150/2014 to make a donation to St. Baldrick's in memory of Samuel Sommer.



About the CCAR

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, founded in 1889, is the oldest and largest rabbinic organization in North America. As the professional organization for Reform Rabbis of North America, the CCAR projects a powerful voice in the religious life of the American and international Jewish communities. Since its establishment, the CCAR has a rich history of giving professional and personal support to Reform Rabbis, providing them with opportunities for study, professional development, and spiritual growth beginning while they are still in seminary, through mid-careers, and into retirement. The CCAR is uniquely positioned to meet the ongoing needs of its nearly 2,000 member rabbis (virtually the entire Reform rabbinate) and the entire Reform Jewish community. For more information please visit the CCAR's website at <http://ccarnet.org/>. ☆



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