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JCC To Honor Leon Levine

Leon Levine, distinguished Jewish community visionary and philanthropic pacesetter, will be the guest of honor at the 1998 Jewish Community Center Gala. The black-tie event, co-chaired by Center Vice-President Jill Newman and Lori Sklut, will be held on Saturday evening, February 14 at the Westin Hotel in uptown Charlotte.

Veteran Charlotteans are certainly familiar with Mr. Levine, founder, chairman and CEO of Family Dollar Stores, Inc. and renowned civic leader. Newcomers who delve into the Charlotte Jewish community's history will quickly learn how Leon's sensitive recognition of the need to create a unique place where all Jews in Charlotte would meet, socialize, learn, worship and share their cultural heritage helped to shape the conceptual design and practical development of Shalom Park. His gifted analytical and planning skills, coupled with his compassionate

humanity and deep "commitment to helping others achieve their dreams" served to motivate those with some initial resistance to

exceptionally generous financial contributions by naming the Jewish Community Center building after Leon and his beloved wife, Sandra.

Leon's gracious agreement to allow the Jewish Community Center to honor him at its 1998 Gala creates a unique opportunity to raise significant funds for the Jewish Community Center Endowment Fund. The Endowment will provide substantial income, on a yearly basis, to help the Center fulfill its obligation to provide a comprehensive set of quality programs and services for the community.

Leon's good friend, Jill Newman and his daughter, Lori Sklut agree that, "The evening will be a memorable one as we celebrate Leon's accomplishments as a preeminent leader in the Jewish community and the city of Charlotte. We urge everyone to save the date and reserve your seats early — it's going to be a fabulous party!" ☆

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overcome their apprehension and conceive the "shared dream" that is Shalom Park. In 1986, the Jewish community recognized his dynamic leadership and

ANALYSIS

Finally, the First Chink in the Wall

Unexpectedly, the conversion battle has broken barriers between Israel and the Diaspora

By Ephraim Sneh

For the last few weeks, all sides in the battle over the conversion bill have taken a time-out. It's possible that the internecine cease-fire will allow a government-sponsored committee to reach a reasonable agreement and head off a split in the Jewish world over the legislation, which would deny state recognition to non-Orthodox conversions performed in Israel. In the meantime, surprising as it seems, the struggle over the law has already had a positive impact — on Orthodox relations with Reform and Conservative Judaism, on Israeli understanding of Diaspora pluralism, and on Diaspora-Israel relations.

First of all, the boycott of Reform and Conservative Judaism by the Orthodox, particularly in Israel, has been broken, and a religious dialogue has begun in Judaism.

To show what a sudden, crucial change that is: several months ago, I met with the chief rabbis of Israel, Yisrael Lau and Eliahu Bakshi-Doron. I proposed a new

charter for the Jewish people, intended to heal the rift between the secular and the Orthodox. The charter, I suggested, would have four points:

- An agreement on the character of Shabbat in the Jewish state that would respect both religious and secular lifestyles — for instance, closing Orthodox neighborhoods to traffic on Shabbat, while allowing public transport in other areas.

- Increased study of the Jewish heritage in secular schools, along with study of democracy in religious schools.

- Establishment of a national council to which any bills with religious significance would be sent for preparation in a spirit of mutual consideration and agreement.

- Creation of a forum of rabbis from the three major denominations that would discuss issues of Jewish law and seek to reach wide agreement within the Jewish people.

The chief rabbis gave their blessing to the first three points.

The fourth point they adamantly rejected. I was surprised by the emotional intensity of their opposition to Reform and Conservative Judaism, their denial of those movements' legitimacy.

Now look what's happened: One of the first results of the battle over the conversion law is the creation of a committee including representatives of all three denominations to seek an agreed solution to the crisis. Even the brief meeting of Reform and Conservative representatives with former chief rabbi Avraham Shapiro had value as a precedent — though Shapiro quickly broke it up. I've learned from long experience in a very different sort of negotiations, with Arabs, beginning years before the Oslo Accords, to see the significance in small breakthroughs, in the first cracks in the walls of hostility.

Another important result is that the controversy has increased Israeli's awareness of the pluralism that exists in the Diaspora, and especially among North American Jews. Until recently, 98 percent of Israelis had no idea what the fuss over the conversion law was about. Today there's much greater awareness, especially among decision-makers, of the non-Orthodox movements' existence and their desire for equal status in Israel as well.

The third result, in particular, has long-range implications that

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Religion in the Schools

*Jewish Community Relations Committee
Forms School Issues Ad Hoc Committee*

In an effort to address the issue of religion in the schools, the School Issues Ad Hoc Committee has been formed as a sub-committee of the Jewish Community Relations Committee. The committee is chaired by Jackie Fishman and Tammy Seigel.

The ad hoc committee began its work by putting together a survey about how Jewish families perceive religion in the schools. The survey was sent to over 300 families in the Jewish community. Over 90 surveys were returned representing 36 schools. It was clear from the majority of responses that there are various concerns about the role of religion in the schools.

Feedback from the surveys indicated that the subcommittee needed to divide its work into three areas: Charlotte Mecklenburg Administrative Issues to address issues of religious tolerance within the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, Community Issues to build coalitions with other religious denominations and Parent Issues to increase parental awareness and involvement.

Members of the ad hoc committee have already met with representatives from the

Student Services Department of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools to discuss revisions to the "Religion in the Schools" policies for the public school system. The policy has been developed in order to avoid infringement of individual rights and to set forth a position concerning certain religious issues.

Once the policy revisions are complete, the committee will form a coalition with other religious denominations to build consensus for its passage by the Charlotte Mecklenburg School Board.

Additionally, a community forum is being considered for parents with representatives from the school system to explain the policy and its implications.

A calendar of Jewish holidays will also be sent to principals for distribution to teachers in the schools to heighten awareness about major Jewish holidays. Parents are encouraged to follow up with their child's teacher to open dialogue on these issues.

If you are interested in participating or want further information, contact Cary Bernstein, 366-5007, ext. 209. ☆

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