

CIRCA

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MUSEUM OF THE SOUTHERN JEWIS The mission of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life is to preserve and document the practice, culture and legacy of Judaism in the South. The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience operates under the auspices of the Institute.

Southern States Jewish Literary Series Presents Joyce Antler: "You Never Call! You Never Write!"



Joyce Antler

Professor Joyce Antler knows not only that Jewish mothers have a lot to say, but also that there is a lot to be said about Jewish mothers. She recently published a lively book to explore that very subject: *You Never Call! You Never Write! A History of the Jewish Mother*. Antler and her book will be coming to Alabama this fall, riding the Southern circuit as part of the ISJL's Southern States Jewish Literary Series. Touring with the ISJL, Antler will visit three Alabama communities: Birmingham, October 25th; Florence, October 26th; and Huntsville, October 27th.

Dr. Antler is the Samuel Lane Professor of American Jewish History and Culture at Brandeis University, where she teaches in the American Studies Department and the Women's and Gender Studies Program. She is the author and editor of many books on Jewish and women's history, including The Journey Home: How Jewish Women Shaped Modern America; Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture; America and I: Short Stories

by American Jewish Women Writers, The Challenge of Feminist Biography, and Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of A Modern Woman. She is the chair of the Academic Advisory Council of the Jewish Women's Archive.

The Southern States Jewish Literary Series is a distinguished series of discussions and book signings with leading authors of newly released works on the Jewish Experience, creating a vibrant literary circuit throughout the ISJL's thirteen-state region. By bringing together larger "anchor" communities with smaller communities who might not be able to support such a program on their own, the ISJL helps to increase access to quality Jewish cultural programming in the region. This Alabama tour is made possible in part by the Alabama Humanities Foundation and the Birmingham Jewish Foundation. For more information, visit www.isjl.org and click on "Cultural and Art Offerings." Check it out – it will make all the Jewish mothers in your life very happy.

Looking Back, Looking Forward: A Letter from a 5-Year ISJL Education Community



Wendi Ochs

It was the spring of 2003 and Temple Beth El Religious School in Pensacola was feeling that strange sense of relief that comes when the school year ends. We really needed a break, because the school year was becoming increasingly stressful. Between dealing with students, families, and a variety of Jewish activities, holidays, and countless disjointed lesson plans, we were overwhelmed. There was a lot of Jewish interest, a lot of passion – and a lot of confusion. Our goals for creating a wonderful Jewish educational experience for our children were getting blurry. We were, as they say, getting nowhere, very fast.

And then along came the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, our ISJL.

Rumor had it that Macy B. Hart had been listening intently to the needs of small Southern Jewish communities, and specifically, their longing for an

education program that would be nuanced, meaningful – and easily implemented by volunteer teachers. So a team was assembled to bring forth a new curriculum to meet the very specific needs of congregational schools that had (for the most part) volunteer teachers with limited teaching experience and limited time; schools with volunteer leadership and small, mixed-grade classrooms, schools with limited Jewish or Hebrew literacy. It would be a major challenge.

I volunteered to attend the first ISJL Education Conference in August 2003. A small but enthusiastic group of congregational leaders came to that momentous first conference. We were excited; we were reluctant; we were anxious for something to improve our process and transform our programs. We knew we could do better, we just didn't know how to go about it. (continued on page 3)

Message From the Institute Board Chair



I have written more than a few of these letters for *Circa*, sometimes they are serious, sometimes humorous. I always try to engage the reader. Maybe you'll pick something up from my letter that will cause you to support our efforts. I've never really written poetry, except for a few love sonnets for my wife, Bz. But I was thinking.... poetry well-suits what is happening at the ISJL. For at its core, we are an emotional work in progress. You can read in the rest of this newsletter all the facts, all the goals, all the accomplishments, which lengthen with every new edition of Circa. But how can I convey to you the emotion of the achievement? The enjoyment? The satisfaction? The importance? Sometimes one earns the right to take a bit of risk. Thus, at the risk of failure, my attempt. I call it:

Southern Fruit

It is dry outside. History's sustenance has all but moved on. But inside, a child sparkles with Hebrew song, connecting to the past, her teacher projecting the future upon her.

She grasps a smiling rabbi, whose Hebrew name sounds funny but comfortable.

Her family gathers, again, celebrating survival, singing history's laments, less lonely than before, connected to more, knowing they are not forgotten.

Her growth, now more secure, fills surrounding hearts with warmth. She owns knowledge of her place, her responsibility, her legacy, all sown with the best tools of her more urban brothers and sisters.

She grasps a smiling rabbi, whose name no longer sounds funny, but she is discomfited by her departure.

Just behind her, in the distance, hands join to provide more. She will return, so will others. Bringing with them the fruits of millennia. Some of it in spiral notebooks, some on spinning disks, some in tightly wound strings, and some in soaring spirit. Spirit so well seen in sewn sheepskin also tightly wound, also spiraling, also spun. The words, the legacy, the challenge.

She is a part of it. She hasn't seen it yet, but she feels the belonging. She feels *klal*. She grows, even where there was drought.

It is no longer dry outside. The rain has come. The cotton grows high, the rice fields flood, the drawl sounds warming. The fruits of millennia reappear as sweet peaches, bright scuppernongs, and the red-ripening summer fruit of the vine.

She grasps a smiling rabbi, now feeling her own hands, each clinched on her opposite shoulder.

L' Shalor

Day Tanenbar

Message from the Institute President



My wife Susan and I have had much to celebrate lately. When we met almost 38 years ago, we began a life journey. Along the way, we were joined by our three children. We nurtured and exposed them to many adventures, preparing them to leave our home and create new lives of their own. During Thanksgiving of 2006, our oldest daughter, Leah, married Eric. Just over two months later, our youngest daughter, Hannah, married Will. Now our son Micah has asked Hilary to join him as they prepare to marry sometime in the (hopefully not too distant) future. We have been blessed that Susan's and my parents have played an active and involved role in our family's life. For obvious reasons, I have been thinking a lot about family lately, and have reflected on how the Jewish community can and should be seen as if it were one extended family.

If we consider all Jews to be part of one family, we must acknowledge that we have neglected our most vulnerable members. The institutionalized Jewish world has focused their attention and resources on those who live in big urban centers. Our "country cousins" nationally are usually ignored. At the ISJL, we believe that every member of the Jewish family, or k'lal Yisrael, deserves love and attention. All too often I have heard funders and leaders ask about the numbers of people we are serving, with little sense of understanding of the responsibility for Jews in smaller and mid sized underserved communities. These isolated and often neglected congregations raised their children, who then moved away, leaving their parents and grandparents to sustain Jewish life in these declining communities. Both Susan and I grew up in small towns in Mississippi before settling in the "big city" of Jackson. Although we may have left our home towns, we still care for our parents who remain there. I'm sure many of you do the same thing. If we do

this for our own family, why can't we do it for the family of Israel? Why don't we reach out to these communities through sharing resources, loaning Jewish professionals, and synagogue partnering to mention just a few options?

The ISJL is challenging the status quo by advocating that we treat every Jewish community as if it were a member of our own family. Too often, what we call "the Jewish community" is really a series of disconnected islands. By taking this family approach, we can begin to forge a true Jewish community. After the 1990 and 2000 National Jewish Population Studies, Jewish leaders began to scramble to find programs to ensure the future of an American Jewish community that seemed to be in decline. Yet none of these programs were based on the idea of one community caring for each other, regardless of number. If we invest now in programs that treat all Jews as part of one family, no matter where they live, we will build a stronger American Jewish community.

The ISJL continues to devote its resources to delivering not just rhetoric, but meaningful opportunities. We have been gratified to see larger communities beginning to understand their responsibility in serving all members of the Jewish family. This issue of Circa is full. It contains stories of progress and service. What we offer can be so easily replicated in other areas of the country; we are just starting the process for our area. I believe the reason we have been so successful thus far; the reason we now have 22 staff members in just a few short years, is because we hear the voices that many have determined are too faint to acknowledge. We are a young organization and our hearing is very acute. If you listen carefully, you will surely hear what we hear.

(LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD - continued from page 1)

The conference changed all those who attended. We were introduced to a new curriculum that an inexperienced teacher could use and be effective with. There were education professionals from the field who were willing to share their knowledge and offer their expertise. There was complete sensitivity to the need for flow and connectivity from one grade to the next. There was commitment to improvement of the curriculum as we started to use it, and commitment to professional development for our staff. We were handed boxes of lesson plans and activities for every day of the Jewish school year. We were told to "Go and teach, go and learn."

We were incredibly excited and grateful. We couldn't wait to get back to start using what we had learned, what we had shared, the resources we had obtained. We made connections with others in nearby communities. We had all received a fantastic gift.

Fast forward to August, 2007:

Pat Langnau's fifth graders have been students here at Temple Beth El's School for Jewish Living since Pre-School. They now arrive every Sunday morning eager to learn and happy to be here. The classroom is bright and filled with Jewish posters, maps of Israel and the Hebrew alphabet. This class has had the good fortune of being students here when the ISJL curriculum was in its first year of use and throughout its first five years. These children are products of the special spiral approach to learning – the hallmark of the ISJL curriculum - that has helped to move them from an elementary level of Jewish learning to a more advanced level of thought-

ful understanding.

They have been influenced by teachers made confident through the benefit of lesson plans and activities prepared for them by professionals in the field of Jewish education; teachers who have taken advantage of professional education conferences and all that the ISJL program has had to offer in the past few years. These children have had the opportunity to absorb Jewish concepts one level at a time. They have experienced the variety of activities, songs and stories that the ISJL lesson plans have offered them over the past several years. Families of these children have become involved in their learning through a variety of activities including student portfolio days. They have all benefited from the involvement of the ISJL education fellows who have helped through phone calls, professional teacher development and weekend visits to our Temple and school.

These young, Jewish boys and girls in Pensacola, Florida seem to reflect the joy and pride in their Judaism that we so hoped they would. Are they special children? We think they are. We know that they are products of an excellent Jewish education program that is brought to them with professionalism, enthusiasm and love. What more could anyone ask?

Our thanks go to all those at the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. We invite all of you to Temple Beth El School for Jewish Living some Sunday morning to see the fruits of your incredible labors!

B'Shalom.

Wendi Ochs, Pensacola, Florida Temple Beth El School for Jewish Living Education Committee Chair

ED CONFERENCE 2007: Program Keeps Expanding

The ISJL's July 2007 education conference drew 135 participants, representing 50 congregations. This reflects monumental growth from the 35 synagogues and temples that participated last year. This year's conference was underwritten in part by the Grinspoon Foundation, and attended by a representative from the Covenant Foundation, another of our funding partners in the vital work of bringing quality Jewish education to the region. The first day kicked off with an energetic double keynote session by Sarah Singer Nourie, education consultant and

The 2007 Education Conference launched the 5th year of the ISJL Education program. Photo by David Rosen.



author of Quantum Teaching. Sarah enthusiastically introduced participants to the concept of targeting every student's learning style with fun and exciting activities. Sarah Singer Nourie set a strong tone for the rest of the conference; the next two days were filled with speakers, workshops, delicious meals, stimulating conversations, a song session and even a stand up comedy show. The three other keynotes were led by the ISJL's own Rabbi Batsheva Appel, Dr. Kerry Olitzky from the Jewish Outreach Institute, and Sid Singer from the Community Foundation for Jewish Education in Chicago. The breakout sessions followed four educational themes: the teacher, the learner, the setting and the subject matter. This new clustering of sessions offered participants access to a range of options, from the nuts and bolts of teaching with the ISIL curriculum, to useful tricks to use in the classroom. Overall, the conference was a great success and everyone left energized for the upcoming religious school year.

Postcards from the Road

by ISJL Rabbi Batsheva Appel



What happens when you're a rabbi living in a relatively small Jewish community? You wind up teaching not only Jewish people, but also our friends and neighbors. So much of the work of the Institute's rabbinic department takes place outside the walls of synagogues, encompassing the larger community. In this realm of my rabbinate, I often represent both the Institute and the Jewish people.

The rich texts and traditions of Judaism have many lessons, stories and perspectives that we can share and interpret with our friends and neighbors. As I mentioned in my last article, in Monroe, Louisiana, I was asked to participate in an interfaith panel on the Book of Job, wrestling with the concept of bad things happening to good people. The transcendent human experience of seemingly unjust trials being thrust upon innocent individuals is one with which we all must grapple – and my role here at the Institute provided the chance to bring the Jewish voice and view to that very human issue.

Coming together for interfaith endeavors enriches us individually and communally. The opportunity for cultural exchange we have is unprecedented, and local examples of emerging interfaith bridges are numerous: The Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference had a series of interfaith dialogues this summer; Broadmoor Presbyterian Shalom Group was formed this summer by a group of Jackson area women who gather monthly and listen to speakers address matters of faith; several churches joined forces with Habitat for Humanity to build a Peace House and celebrate its completion with an interfaith event called "Festival of Faiths." In June, as part of the Mississippi Coalition for Racial Justice, I stood on the steps of the State Capitol and gave an invocation for the ceremony kicking off "The Welcome Table," a year-long program promoting dialogue on race in Mississippi. The kick-off event included different faith traditions as well as diverse racial and ethnic cross-sections of the community, fostering a shared experience of acceptance and regional pride.

Art is another shared experience, bringing communities together to appreciate creative works

- and providing more opportunities for engagement through interpretation and expression. In conjunction with the current exhibit, "Between God and Man - Angels in Italian Art," the Mississippi Museum of Art has monthly interdisciplinary panels on specific pieces from the exhibition. The August panel included a rabbi, an art historian, a poet, and a musician. Each of us spoke about Francisco Solimena's painting "Hagar and the Angel." The art museum program was eye-opening for all. Soon after that program, another museum, the International Museum of Muslim Cultures held a September interfaith discussion about Abraham/Ibrahim, Hagar, Ishmael/Ismail, and the Angel. Participating in that event at well, it was fascinating to approach the story again in a very different context, particularly since the story is so important in Islam. The learning continues, and the connections with our fellow men strengthen as we share in each others' wisdom.

While community development, arts and culture are joyful occasions to come together as one human family, sometimes it is tragedy that creates the strongest ties. I returned to the Gulf Coast on August 29th for a sunrise service in observance of the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. This time, there were two rabbis participating in the service. The New York Board of Rabbis, in conjunction with the United Jewish Communities, placed a rabbi on the Gulf Coast to work with the Jewish professionals and other clergy in the area to provide pastoral counseling and support. Rabbi Myrna Matsa began her work in November and has been working hard with similarly placed clergy from other faith traditions as the work to rebuild continues. A huge amount of work, physical, emotional, and spiritual, remains two years after the storm – just as a huge amount of work remains in the areas of poverty alleviation, social justice, and acceptance of diverse groups.

Situated here in the Deep South, there is still such important work to be done in the realm of interfaith and intercultural dialogue, exchange and understanding; I am blessed to live in a time and place where I can be engaged in this holy work.

TASTE OF TORAH

"May the words of Your Torah be sweet to us . . . " from the morning liturgy

When we begin the study of Torah, the hope is that the words that we learn will be sweet and that we will always crave more. With Taste of Torah, once a week the ISJL offers a brief message tied to the Torah portion written by our Director of Rabbinic Services, Rabbi Batsheva Appel. In some of our communities, Taste of Torah is used as a *d'var Torah* at Friday night services. To sign up and see how sweet it is, please go to: www.isjl.org/rabbinic/taste_of_torah.htm.

Seventh Season of ISJL's Jewish Cinema South

The 2007-2008 season of the Jewish Cinema South network of regional film festivals kicks off with two festivals in October: the Middle Georgia Jewish Film Festival in Macon, Georgia; and the Mobile Jewish Film Festival in Mobile, Alabama. Ringing in its first season, the Middle Georgia Film Festival will include acclaimed feature film "Live"

Filmmaker Jack
Baxter will speak
at the screening of
Blues by the Beach.
Photo courtesy
of PaxAmericana
Productions.



The Rape of Europa opens Mobile's festival. Photo courtesy of Menemsha Films.



and Become." A French film about the mysteries of survival, identity, and the healing force of love, "Live and Become" is set in 1985, when "Operation Moses" (the Israeli airlift of thousands of "Falasha" Ethiopian Jewish refugees fleeing oppression in their native country) is underway. The Middle Georgia festival will also present "West Bank Story," a comedy about two families warring over their falafel stand businesses. Offering "a little dancing, a little singing, and a lot of hummus," this original film won Best Short Film at the 2007 Academy Awards. Other films at this year's festival in Macon will include "All I've Got," an Israeli drama about the road not taken and what might have been, and "Wondrous Oblivion," a coming-of-age-story wherein the game of cricket creates a connection between a young Jewish boy and a Jamaican man living in London.

Mobile, a Jewish Cinema South pioneer community, will be celebrating its seventh season. The Mobile Jewish Film Festival will open on Sunday, October 21, 2007 with the screening of "The Rape of Europa." Based on Lynn H. Nicholas' book of the same name, this timely documentary tells the epic story of the systematic theft, deliberate destruction and miraculous survival of Europe's art treasures during the Third Reich. The Mobile Museum of Art, co-sponsoring this film, will host this event at the museum. Thomas McPherson, Director of the Mobile Museum of Art, will speak in conjunction with the film

The Mobile Jewish Film Festival continues on Thursday, October 25, with a special school screening of the film "Pesya's Necklace." Following the film, Agnes Tennenbaum, a survivor of Auschwitz, will share her incredible story. This school presentation is in partnership with UMS-WRIGHT and the Gulf Coast Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education. The next three films of the Mobile Jewish Film Festival will be screened at the Hollywood Theatre, Sunday October 28 through Tuesday October 30, including a Monday night showing of the real-life drama "Blues by the Beach," featuring filmmaker Jack Baxter in person.

The goals of Jewish Cinema South are to enhance Jewish life, strengthen Jewish identity, promote multi-cultural and multi-ethnic dialogue, and encourage tolerance and understanding, all while providing entertaining programming. This year's Jewish Cinema South film festivals promise to be illuminating, thought provoking, and entertaining. Two additional communities, Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Jackson, Mississippi, will hold their 2007-2008 festivals in January. For more information, visit www.isjl.org.

Brain Benefits from ISJL Gift

According to an article in the *Chicago Tribune* (6/15/07), donating to charity is good for your brain. The story introduces the field of Neuroeconomics – a collaborative effort of economists and psychologists working to determine how our brain governs our handling of money. According to findings at the University of Oregon, "...donating money to charity activates regions of the brain associated with pleasure." ISJL donors have known for years that their support warms the heart, now we know it's good for the brain too.

Besides the good feeling that your gift promotes, there's another part of the brain that wants to know a gift is good business and that your money has an impact. Since the *Make Future History* campaign was launched, the impact of your gift has grown considerably. You've seen stories in *Circa* about our programs and how you are helping preserve and celebrate our heritage as Jews not only in the South but throughout America. For example:

- Our educational program has grown from 36 congregations in 7 states last year to 49 congregations in 9 states for the 2007-08 school year. While it's entirely too early to know what the 2008-09 school year will look like, we have already had preliminary conversations with several new communities who have expressed interest in our program more than a year in advance. If you want to be sure your money has a significant impact this one program touches about 1,800 children and more than 300 religious school teachers each year.
- You've read a little about the Institute's summer interns too. We've been pleased to provide – and have benefited greatly from having students or recent graduates from Hebrew Union College, Cornell, Columbia, Brandeis and North Carolina with us this summer. We have six Education Fellows



MAKE FUTURE HISTORY

who are all recent college graduates, and other recently-hired staff from all around the country. In short, the Institute has become one of the premier training grounds for young Jewish professionals. We benefit from the enthusiasm, skills and dedication of young professionals and help launch careers that benefit our service area and wherever Jews gather and live. It does little good to develop leaders in Jewish camping, in NFTY, USY, BBYO, Hillel or on a birthright Israel trip if we don't put those leaders to work. That's one more way we *Make Future History* at the ISJL.

We appreciate every gift to the campaign and welcome your contribution whenever it's best for you. This year however, we would like to close the campaign in October - not long after the High Holy days. Knowing what our budget might be a few months in advance of 2008 will help us manage our growth and honor commitments we are able to make to communities in all of our 13 states. Even if you would prefer to make your actual gift in December, having your pledge in hand by the end of October would be a mitzvah. Please feel free to send your pledge (or gift) in the campaign envelope that accompanies CIRCA. You can also contact the Institute and we will be happy to get you a fresh pledge card. We're willing to bet that sending in a pledge card might just tickle those pleasure centers in your brain and it will certainly tickle ours.

ISJL adds Houston Regional Coordinator

Jennifer R. Deutsch has joined the staff of the ISJL as the organization's new Houston Regional Coordinator. Deutsch, a Houston native, will help give the Institute a greater local presence and assist ISJL staff and volunteers with development and programming efforts in the area. She joins Susan Jacobson in the ISJL Development Department, who serves in a similar capacity in Atlanta, Georgia.

"We're delighted to have Jennifer on our staff," said ISJL President Macy B. Hart. "She's an ideal addition to the organization. She grew up in Houston,

attended Greene Family Camp as did several of our staff, has family in Alabama, graduated from the University of Alabama and has an extensive professional career with the Jewish Federation in Houston.



She knows the community and understands what we call the *Southern Jewish Experience.*"

Snapshots of the Southern Jewish Scene

It's been a lively few months in the Jewish South. To share a sampling of some of the stories, smiles and simchas, we introduce a new Circa feature: snapshots of the Southern Jewish Scene. Share in the snapshots below!

FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS: The famous "web-



cam Bar Mitzvah student," Garrett Kuna, was called to the Torah as Bar Mitzvah on August 18, 2007. His long-distance teacher, Rabbi Batsheva Appel, officiated at the ceremony. Garret's simcha filled the pews and made his family, friends, and community proud – yasher koach!

Rabbi Batsheva Appel and Garret Kuna.

Fort Smith is a congregation consisting of 30 families, with no rabbi in place. The ISJL Rabbinic program gives communities like Fort Smith access to rabbinic support.

TULSA, OKLAHOMA: On July 26th, members of the Tulsa Jewish community hosted a reception for the Institute at the Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art. Thanks to Arthur Feldman, Executive Director, and Development Director Brenda Haggard for their help and hospitality, as well as to April & Richard Borg, Sandy Cardin, Karen & Barry Davis, Nancy & Andy Wolov and Janie & David Zemel for inviting the Institute to Tulsa and co-hosting the reception. Tulsa has deep roots with the Institute: the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation support helped establish the ISJL itinerant rabbinical program and continues to make it possible. As the

Susan Fenster, Maxine Zarrow, co-hosts Karen and Barry Davis, Miriam Freedman (Muskogee) and Malcolm and Paula Milsten, in front of stained glass windows originally commissioned by Temple Beth Israel, Houston, in 1908



ISJL does more and more work in Oklahoma, these connections will continue to flourish. The event to celebrate and share in the work of the Institute provided good schmoozing, and good food – including a cheese grits casserole and fried okra.

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE:

Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Congregation (AS-BEE) is hosting their 19th annual ASBEE-Kroger Kosher BBQ Contest and Festival. The festival will take place on Sunday, October 21st from 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. on the synagogue grounds,



and features teams competing against each other for top honors in ribs, chicken, brisket, beans, sauce, booth, and team name. It's a major family event, with children's rides and games, food for sale by the ASBEE Sisterhood gourmet cookers, contests for all ages, the ASBEE-Grizzlies 3 on 3 basketball tournament, and the 5th annual pickle eating contest. For more information, please contact the synagogue at 901-682-1611.



ATLANTA, GEORGIA: "Hallelu Atlanta" will be a Jewish music event to remember, featuring performers such as Craig Taubman, Joshua Nelson, and Debbie Friedman. The event takes place at 3:30 pm on November 4, 2007 at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta, as part of the "S3K Atlanta Initiative," creating a renaissance in synagogue life and affiliation. Hallelu Atlanta is a collaboration of local congregations, supported by the Marcus Foundation, the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta and the Atlanta Rabbinical Association. For more information visit www.doyouhallelu.com

GREENVILLE, MS: The 20th Annual Jay Mosow Memorial Delta Jewish Golf Open benefiting the Henry S. Jacobs Camp and the Institute of Southern Jewish Life takes place November 10 and 11, 2007.

WASHINGTON, DC: the Southern Jewish Historical Society convenes in the nation's capital for their annual conference, November 1-4, 2007.

Writing the Jewish History of New Iberia, Louisiana



The ISJL Digital Archive Project continues to grow. We are pleased to announce that the histories of twenty different Jewish communities in Louisiana are now available on our website (www.isjl.org). Much of the work in completing the Louisiana Digital Archive was done by our outstanding summer history interns David Rosen and Jason Schulman. David is currently a senior history major at Cornell University; Jason, a recent graduate of Columbia University, is studying in Israel this year. Below is an excerpt from the online history of New Iberia. History interns Jason Schulman and David Rosen. Photo by Stuart Rockoff.

New Iberia, Louisiana

In New Iberia, Louisiana, Catholicism is king. The city, established in the late eighteenth century and located just north of the Gulf Coast, found itself home to two different populations united by a common religion. Catholics from Andalusia, Spain settled there after arriving in nearby Bayou Teche and named the city *Nueva Iberia* in honor of the peninsula from which they emigrated. Also, thousands of Acadians, French-Catholics in Canada's Maritime Provinces, inhabited New Iberia during a southward migration after a British-ordered expulsion. In the early years of the nineteenth century, these two groups built an active economy in New Iberia based on shipping goods that arrived at Bayou Teche via New Orleans to other towns in the region.

While Jews never constituted a large percentage of New Iberia's population, their arrival in the 1870s changed the city's religious, economic, and social climate. One of the first Jews to arrive in New Iberia was Jacob Davis. Davis, who emigrated from Poland, opened a dry goods store in the downtown area and soon emerged as one of the most prominent citizens of the city. He fostered excellent relationships between the growing population of Jews and the city's native Catholics. When the Catholic community of New Iberia sought to raise money for the construction of a church in 1888, Davis contributed \$500, the largest donation of anyone, regardless of religion.

In addition to the Davis family, several other Iewish families arrived in New Iberia in the 1870s and helped to develop this expanding city. In 1871, Lazard Wormser settled in Jeanerette, a small community ten miles southeast of New Iberia, after emigrating from Alsace. He opened a small general store in downtown Jeanerette. Later, he established branches of Wormser's Department Store in downtown New Iberia and Franklin. Another Alsatian, Maurice Weil, came to New Iberia around 1870 and worked as a clerk in a local general store. One of his sons, Sam Weil, became the longtime assistant postmaster of Iberia Parish. A. Lehman and Co. was the largest department store in New Iberia in 1876. Several other families, including Weiss, Eiseman, and Kling, arrived in New Iberia within the decade and operated small merchandise stores in the area.

By 1885, fourteen Jewish families had made their homes in New Iberia and the surrounding area and

had begun to congregate as a Jewish community. Several years beforehand, an unknown Jew brought a Torah to New Iberia, which was kept in the Masonic Hall where a small group of Jews prayed together on the high holidays. Joseph Wise, who would become the first lay leader at the temple, led the services.

In 1897, this group of Jews that had been praying together at the Masonic Hall on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, organized Gates of Prayer and planned for the construction of a brick synagogue at the corner of Charles and Weeks streets in downtown New Iberia. This new congregation, under the leadership of Wise, Joseph Dreyfus, and Leopold Levy, strived to build the most beautiful temple possible and thus asked the larger Catholic community for financial support. "Now, when there have been churches to build, to repair or money needed by the Christians for churches or charity," the Weekly Iberian reported, "it mattered not what sect was asking help, our Jewish citizens have always promptly and liberally aided. The time comes when we can show our gratitude for past aid and we should gladly embrace it." This appeal proved wildly successful. In addition, the women of the congregation founded a sisterhood called the "Daughters of Israel" that raised \$1,000 from within the Jewish community towards the building of the temple. Construction of the temple concluded in 1904 with a dedication ceremony that featured keynote addresses by Jews and non-Jews

In its first year of existence, only ten families belonged to the congregation and a few students were confirmed by Rabbi Max Heller, the longtime rabbi at Temple Sinai in New Orleans. Soon thereafter, members of the Daughters of Israel organized a small religious school and a choir. This devoted group changed the name of their organization in 1913 to the Gates of Prayer Sisterhood and signed on as a charter member of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. In later years, members of the Sisterhood played an integral role in the development of both the local synagogue and the Jewish community. They sold thousands of dollars in war bonds during the Second World War and helped to form sisterhoods in other Louisiana regional centers such as Thibodeaux, Houma, and Opelousas. In 1959, the Sisterhood financed the construction of a non-sectarian chapel in the New Iberia Parish Hospital and one year later



Dr. Jacob Lahasky



New Iberia Temple



Wormsers Photos by David Rosen

purchased a new organ for the temple's sanctuary.

Questions of religious leadership have often concerned Gates of Prayer's congregants. Many small congregations in the area realized early on that by pooling their resources they could attract quality rabbis. As early as 1905, tentative plans called for "a circuit rabbi officiating in New Iberia, Lafourche, Crowley, and Opelousas." While many rabbis from throughout Louisiana have visited the congregation, Gates of Prayer has never had the services of a full-time rabbi with two fleeting exceptions. In 1933 and 1934, Gates of Prayer shared a rabbi with Rodeph Shalom in nearby Lafayette. In 1962, Gates of Prayer and Temple Shaare Zedek in Morgan City jointly hired Rabbi Leslie Sirtes to serve both congregations, though this arrangement only lasted for one year. Over the years, Gates of Prayer has usually relied on student rabbis from Hebrew Union College as well as lay members to lead services.

Outside of the temple, members of New Iberia's Jewish community continued to make an impact on the larger society. The rise of the Louisiana Gulf Coast's oil industry in the early twentieth century presented new economic opportunities for Jewish merchants in New Iberia. Alphonse Davis,

who operated the Davis' family furniture store, invested significantly in the New Iberia Oil Company, a lucrative start-up in 1916 that pioneered drilling in Iberia Parish. Lazard Kling, one of New Iberia's earliest Jews, also invested in this company after serving as a dry goods merchant and President of The People's Bank. Alfred Lewald, who operated a large department store in downtown New Iberia, founded Enterprise Oil Company. Leon Dreyfus, an Alsatian immigrant and the president of Gates of Prayer for its first quarter-century, operated a hardware business that supplied local mills. In addition, Dreyfus served as President of the New Iberia and Development Company, which managed irrigating canals, cotton

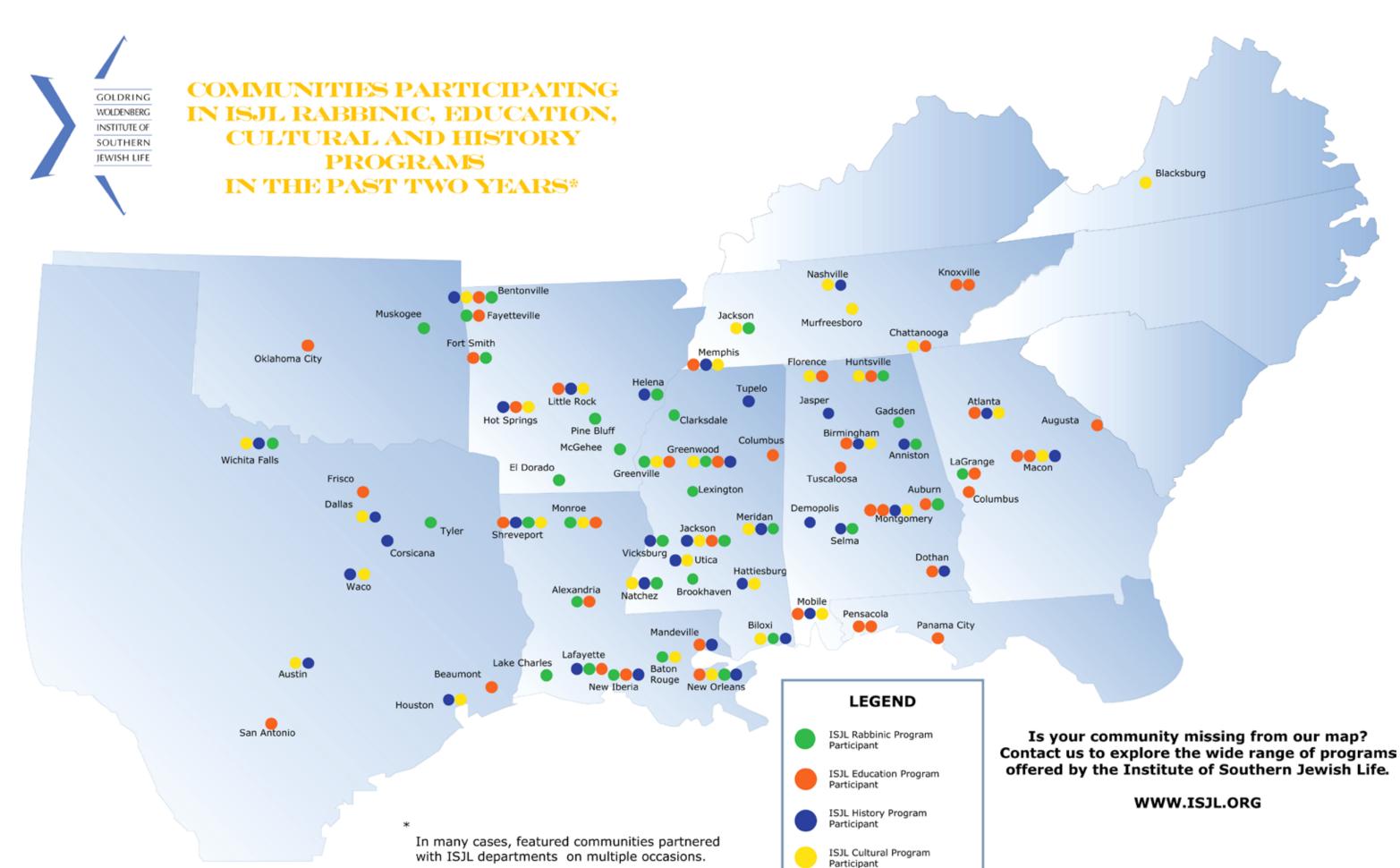
gins, a cotton oil mill, a rice mill, and a syrup mill.

Julius Scharff purchased the Elks Theater in 1919 and introduced movies into the establishment, which had before only put on theatrical productions and road shows. Under Scharff's management, the theater became the premier movie house in the region, showing the latest movies starring Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin. One member of the Jewish community even involved himself in state politics. Jules Dreyfus, who had served as a merchant, banker, and a rice mill operator, served on a small committee in 1916 to settle a famous dispute between the Town of New Iberia and Southern Pacific Railroad over plans for a municipal streetcar system. In 1920, Iberia Parish elected Dreyfus to the Louisiana State House of Representatives, where he served until his death in 1926.

While Jewish merchants once dominated the main street of downtown New Iberia, no Jewish-operated retail businesses remain in New Iberia. Instead, Jews in New Iberia and the surrounding area are most likely doctors, lawyers, and professors at the University of Louisiana in nearby Lafayette. Wormser's, which closed several years ago, was the last Jewish-owned store in town, though the building and its sign still remain. Over the last half century, the Lahasky family has become a central pillar of the New Iberia Jewish community. Doctors Bernard and Jacob Lahasky both settled in New Iberia in the 1950s after attending medical school. Their sons have also become doctors in town as the Lahasky family has been caring for the health of New Iberians for over 50 years.

Over the last half century, Gates of Prayer has experienced a decline in membership. In 1950, when the congregations added a social hall and classrooms to its building, Gates of Prayer had fifty member families; today, there are only 25 member families.

Although their numbers have dwindled, the Jewish community of New Iberia remains active. A student rabbi from Hebrew Union College serves Gates of Prayer once a month and on the high holidays. When Hurricane Rita destroyed part of southern Louisiana in September 2005, the temple marshaled its resources to assist with the purchase and distribution of medications for evacuee families. Each year, the Sisterhood plans a wildly popular corned beef luncheon and many non-Jews lend a helping hand in the making of the sandwiches. The sandwiches, which sell out in advance every year, have Jews and non-Jews lining up around the temple for a taste of this Jewish specialty which can be otherwise hard to find in Cajun Country. In the years to come, Gates of Prayer will continue to serve as a communal place where Jews from throughout Acadiana can come to celebrate and grieve, teach and learn, and pray and socialize with one another.



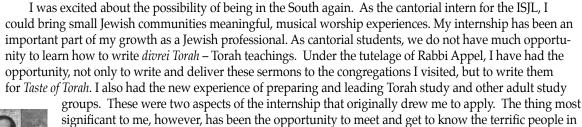
Updated August 16, 2007

ISJL Summer 2007 Interns Share their Stories

Sharon I. Kunitz, Cantorial Intern (Rabbinic Department)

This has been one of the most wonderful summers of my life! (Considering I turned 50 this summer, that's saying a lot.) Being a girl from the South – Huntsville, Alabama, to be exact – spending my summer with the ISJL was like being home again. In addition, the staff was friendly and supportive, and all are earnestly excited about the work they do for the Institute. I came away from my experience with an eagerness to tell everyone I know about this marvelous organization.

Cantorial student Sharon Kunitz with pianist Josh Weiner. Photo by Batsheva Appel.





the communities I visited. It was a full summer – I traveled to El Dorado, Bentonville and Fayette-ville, Arkansas; Monroe and New Orleans, Louisiana; Gadsden, Huntsville, Auburn and Anniston, Alabama; and Vicksburg, Mississippi. I also gave a concert at Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Mississippi. The warmth and hospitality I experienced will stay with me for a long time to come. Thank you to the ISJL staff for a summer I'll never forget!

Sharon recently received the Cantor Goldstein Prize for her studies at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion. The Goldstein Prize is awarded to "the student[s] who has demonstrated masterful learning of and passion for Hazzanut." She is now continuing her fourth year at the School of Sacred Music.

Courtney Ferriter and Rachel Jarman (Museum interns)



Courtney Ferriter

Courtney: My summer travels while in college have taken me to some interesting and exotic areas, but Utica, Mississippi has without question been the most remote location. But if my summers have taught me anything, it is that sometimes being isolated from the rest of the world is not so bad, and Utica was no different in that respect. You learn to find beauty in small things, like watching Lake Gary slowly fill up over the summer thanks to the steadily increasing rainfall, and relating to a guest you're touring through the museum who appreciates all the rich history that many of the campers tend to take for granted.

From painting our office yellow, to learning how to accession items acquired by the museum, to getting to see some fascinating donations in the storeroom, to noticing the evolution of the Reform movement's prayer book while taking inventory of *siddurim*, I have learned a great deal in the weeks I have spent working at the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. Learning about the Institute and the work it does has given me hope for the continued survival of Judaism in the South. I believe that knowledge and education about one's religion and culture are of paramount importance, and it has been such a delight to work for and with folks who feel the same way. With a heartfelt "Shalom Y'all," I returned home with that flame of hope rekindled for the generations of Jews to come.



Rachel Iarman

Rachel: At the museum this summer I had the opportunity to sort through donations, cataloging and archiving personal items that weave together a history of Southern Jews. My favorite, despite the teasing from my coworkers, was a collection of Southern Temple Youth Group (SoFTY) scrapbooks documenting the events and people of the region from about 1960 to 1975. Smiling at their strange hairstyles and fashion, I wondered at the hidden meanings behind the awkward smiles and captions. I wondered what these kids from 1963 would have thought about their book being cataloged into the museum archive. Discovering the meaning and then sharing it with others is what I enjoyed most about my time at the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience.

I may have spent my days inside the walls of the museum, but some of my most memorable moments were discovering how the history that makes up the collection relates directly to the community living at camp, through campers whose parents had attended years ago. I matched some of the last names of campers to the names I had seen in the museum, and met staff that have spent over ten summers in Utica in order to provide the same experience they had for future generations. I learned something about the smiles from 1963, as I became part of the smiles of 2007, and I am thankful to have had the opportunity to be a part of the Southern Jewish experience.

The Future of Oral History

We are pleased to announce that the Oral History program is up and running—sprinting, in fact. Since the arrival of our new Oral Historian, Sarah Litvin, in mid-June, we have collected new oral histories from Jewish Mississippians in Jackson, Vicksburg, Cary, Indianola, Greenville, and Cleveland and are in the process of a major project to collect the oral histories of Jewish Alabamans from Florence to Dothan and everywhere in between. If you know a Jewish Alabaman who has a unique life story to tell and/or is a particularly engaging storyteller, please contact Sarah at (601) 362-6357.

In other news, Katrina's Jewish Voices, the project in partnership with the Jewish Women's Archive to collect oral histories of Jewish people in New Orleans and on the Mississippi Gulf Coast affected by Hurricane Katrina, is rapidly near-

ing completion. Dr. Rosalind Hinton, the project's New Orleans-based Oral Historian, has collected 80 digital video interviews, while the ISJL and JWA have been conducting additional interviews with people who resettled in other parts of the country after Katrina. By the end of December, transcriptions for all of the interviews will be completed. The full collection of digital videos and transcripts will be transferred to the ISJL Oral History department where it will be open to the public. The history and education departments are already discussing the rich potential of this project to help develop new pieces of the ISJL curriculum.

If you are interested in bringing Sarah to your community, or know of someone whose story should be captured and preserved, please contact slitvin@isjl.org or call 601-362-6357.

Synagogue Partnering Event Brings Communities Together

Members of The Temple in Atlanta make themselves at home at Beth El in LaGrange. Photo by Jackie Newman.



Israel Deputy Consul General Oren Rozenblat. Photo by Jackie Newman.







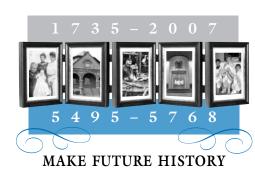
Last year, a group of Atlanta rabbis was introduced to the concept of a "synagogue adoption" program. Modeled on the idea of American synagogues "adopting" congregations overseas, the ISJL encouraged larger, well-resourced congregations to partner with smaller Southern communities and work with them to build relationships and increase opportunities for strong programs and connections with smaller communities within their own region.

Two Atlanta congregations, The Temple and Sinai, were matched in the inaugural year with communities in La Grange, Georgia, and Auburn, Alabama, respectively. On August 26, The Temple of Atlanta sponsored an event held at Congregation Beth El in LaGrange, and invited the other partner congregations to join for the event. La Grange, whose congregation currently has about twelve member families, saw their pews filled with members of their own congregation, members from The Temple, and friends from local churches and civic groups who crowded in the sanctuary to hear Israel Deputy Consul General Oren Rozenblat speak on the current situation in Israel.

Following the discussion with General Rozenblat, a light supper and shmoozing gave everyone the chance to meet and socialize. The Synagogue Partners program is designed to foster connections between small congregations in remote areas, and large established congregations as a way of strengthening both communities – and the warm, haimish event in LaGrange was a powerful and moving example of what this program has to offer. For more information on the Synagogue Partnership program, email information@isjl.org.

2007 ISJL Contributions

The ISJL annual campaign has been a successful effort for several years and it looks as if 2007 will be another good year. We adopted the theme: *Make Future History* and your gifts will do just that. You can help preserve and celebrate our history and build a stronger future in Jewish communities throughout the south and the United States. In this and future issues of CIRCA you can see the impact our education, history, museum and rabbinic programs have on hundreds if not thousands of Jews in communities just like yours.



With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends its thanks to everyone who made a contribution between January 1 and August 1. Gifts received after this period will be recognized in the next issue of CIRCA. Again, *thank you*.

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Leonard Weil

-Carolyn Wampold Beller

Iack Wormser -Carla Wormser

IN HONOR OF:

Lou Ginsberg's recovery -Susan & Macv B. Hart -Lynda & Don Yule -Betsy & Joey Samuels

Carol Ginsburg's birthday -Barbara Joseph

Esther Greenberg's birthday -Amy & Richard Greenberg

Mateo David Hammer -Jenni & David Hammer

Jerry Herson's birthday -Nancy & Isaac Eberstein

> Eve & John Herzfeld's anniversary -Susan & Mark Glazer

ISJL's Katrina Efforts -Stephen Richer

Deborah Iacobs' birthday -Merrill & Michael Stern

Beth Kander -Vera Davis

Cantorial Intern Sharon Kunitz -Rabbi Valerie Cohen

Samuel A. Lack becoming a Bar Mitzvah -Valerie & Milton Kassel

Betty Lee & Ben Lamensdorf's granddaughters B'nai Mitzvah-Patricia & Lauren -Sarah & Jonathan Jacobs

Hugh & Louise Lamensdorf's *birthdays* -Sandra & Ron Blate

-Emilie Thost

Charles Marcus' Bar Mitzvah -Terry & Bert Romberg -Bette & Bennett Miller

Ieanette & Fred Nichols 70th anniversary -Charles & Esther Lee Kim-

erling family Iared Orkin

-Lois & Maurice Joseph Beth & Steve Orlansky

-Helene & Maurice Tuchman

Mary Lynn & Arnold Perl -Sheryl & Morton Gorden

Barbara & Maury Riff's birthdays -Janet H. Brueck

Flo Selber's recovery -Reva & Ellis Harť -Susan & Macy B. Hart

Irving Shaw's birthday -Susan & Mark Glazer Bette Shornick -Vera Davis

Jay Silberberg's birthday -Del & Harold Silberberg

Ray Solomon's birthday -Scharf - Kligerman Family

Amy Steinberg -Lorraine & Barry Steinberg

Louis Stern's birthday -Miriam Cohn

Shirley Strauss' birthday -Steve Strauss

Dr. Rick Streiffer -Jenni & David Hammer

Andrew Terkel's ISIL Fellowship -Amy & Arnold Terkel

Janie Zemel -Jane Mudgett

10th Anniversary Temple Beth Israel Choir -Jackson, MS -Vera Davis

The Peddler's Cart

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Looking for the perfect holiday gift? Want to welcome a new baby into a family? Need the perfect family game? The new Peddler's Cart items are sure to supply a unique, Jewish gift for Southerners and non-Southerners alike!

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The Apples to Apples Jewish Edition board game is sure to be an instant family classic. The award winning card game of hilarious comparisons will entertain while expanding your knowledge of Jewish themes. It's as easy to learn as comparing apples to apples! This game nearly sold out at the ISJL annual education conference, so order yours right away! Ages 12 to adult, 4 to 10 players.

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As per request we are thrilled to offer a Shalom Y'all travel mug! Dual-wall insulation, frosted blue acrylic outer and a leak-resistant stainless steel lid, this tumbler will stand up to all life's adventures. Last year our staff traveled 79,488 miles, how far will your tumbler go?

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This adorable onesie makes sure the babies in your life say "y'all" from the start! Start your little one off on the right southern Jewish step – adults are sure to coo over its message too! Highest quality 100% cotton, 3 snap crotch and finished sleeves and hems in 2 bright and baby-friendly colors! Available colors: Kelly Green with white letters, size 3-6 or 12-18 months. Royal Blue with white letters, size 3-6 or 12-18 months.

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SAVE THE DATE!

2008 ISJL Education Conference will be June 22-24 in Jackson, Mississippi.

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