REPORT ON

JEWISH COMMUNITY LIFE IN UKRAINE
(Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Krivoi Rog, Kyiv)

A Visit in Late March and April 2014

The writer visited Jewish communities in Ukraine during a period of two and one-half weeks in late March and April, 2014. She entered the country in Dnipropetrovsk on March 26, made a two-day visit to Kharkiv and a daylong visit to Krivoi Rog (Krivyi Rig) during a ten-day stay in Dnipropetrovsk, and concluded her journey in Kyiv on April 11.

Ukraine is a country somewhat smaller in size than the American state of Texas. It shares borders with seven other countries: Russia to its east and north; Belarus to its north; Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary to its west; and Romania and Moldova to its southwest. Until February 26, 2014, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov alone formed its southern border; in late February, Russian troops entered and occupied the former Ukrainian autonomous republic of Crimea, thus adding Russia to the list of Ukraine's southern neighbors.

Ukraine is divided into 24 provinces or oblasts. The capital city of Kyiv has a special status, as did the Crimean seaport of Sevastopol, the home of the Black Sea naval fleet of Russia.

Ukraine in spring 2014 was a country in shock, its government having been toppled by a spontaneous, leaderless, organic uprising. The insurrection began on the night of November 21, 2013, when up to 2,000 protestors gathered on the Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Ukr., Майдан Незалежності; Independence Square) in response to a government decision to suspend preparation for concluding an association agreement with the European Union. The agreement would have provided Ukraine with financial
support for reforms in almost all aspects of Ukrainian society and the subsequent loosening of political and economic ties with neighboring Russia.¹

Spurred by widespread use of social media, Maidan crowds swelled in the coming weeks and months. The protesters expanded their agenda and railed against the corruption that permeated Ukrainian life, the conspicuous greed of government officials and oligarchs, and general economic mismanagement. They called for judicial reform, modernization of the education system, better medical care, and greater attention to ecology. Above all, they demanded a better future for their children. Notwithstanding the great number of demonstrators, reaching 400,000 to 800,000 on weekends, the crowds remained orderly, the atmosphere was peaceful and safe. Although the Maidan and Kreschatyk were lined with shops, including expensive boutiques, no looting occurred.

Assisted by taxi drivers and subway workers, demonstrators erected barricades and built encampments to accommodate a continuing protest, hoping that their persistence over time would force the government to resign. Financial support was sought and gained through collection boxes and other means of local fundraising. Makeshift kitchens and medical stations were built, all staffed by volunteers. Representatives of international organizations attempted to act as intermediaries between protestors and the Ukrainian government.

Government security forces initiated action in mid-December to clear the square of demonstrators, barricades, and encampments. Although injuries occurred, many protestors held their ground and, in fact, some seemed re-energized by the police action. The government took no measures to address the agenda of those in Maidan. Several small rightwing groups among the demonstrators generated concern and

¹ Independence Square is the central square in Kyiv. Located on the Kreschatyk, Kyiv’s main thoroughfare, the Maidan has been the traditional locale for various gatherings and festivities throughout Ukrainian history. Since the beginning of the contemporary Ukrainian independence movement in 1990, the square also has been the site of large political rallies and protests.
spawned substantial anti-Ukraine propaganda; local observers claimed that these groups were marginal and without influence.2

The first deaths occurred on January 22 when three Maidan activists were killed on a nearby street in clashes with local police; a fourth Maidan protestor, who had been kidnapped by unidentified forces one day earlier, was found dead on January 22 on the outskirts of the city. Five additional Maidan activists would be killed in the next several weeks. The deaths generated protests in different cities throughout Ukraine, only to be followed by five additional Maidan-related fatalities between January 25 and February 13.

The Maidan crisis peaked February 19-20 when well-armed snipers atop nearby buildings shot at demonstrators, killing approximately 100 individuals and seriously wounding many others (some of whom would die later).3 On February 21, President Viktor Yanukovych left Kyiv, appearing in Kharkiv on February 22 before fleeing to Russia. The Ukrainian parliament declared him unable to govern, and a temporary functional new government was installed on February 28 until elections could be held in May.

Viktor Yanukovych as President of Ukraine.


A few days earlier, on February 23, pro-Russian protesters initiated rallies on the Crimean peninsula,4 an autonomous oblast of Ukraine with a majority Russian population and home to the Russian Black Sea fleet at a Russian naval base in Sevastopol. On February 28, the same day that the new Ukrainian government was installed in Kyiv, Russian troops began to deploy at strategic locations in Crimea. On March 1, the Ukrainian government stated that up to 16,000 Russian military were positioned on the peninsula; Russia declared that its troops had entered the territory at the request of Viktor Yanukovych, already in Russia. Crimea's parliament proclaimed on March 6 that the region wished to leave Ukrainian jurisdiction and join Russia; after a controversial referendum on March 16, it was stated that 97 percent of voters supported

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2 The two groups were Svoboda (Свобода) and Right Sector (Правый сектор). Periodic denials of antisemitism aside, Svoboda leaders have made many antisemitic statements; Right Sector was described to the author by a prominent qualified observer as anti-antisemitic. Each group polled approximately one percent in the May 2014 national elections.

3 See pages 97-99 for an interview with Marina Lysak and Masha Pushkova, two Kyiv residents who assisted wounded protesters on Maidan and organized medical care in Israel for some of those requiring continued medical attention.

4 Russian-speakers refer to Crimea as "Krim" (from the Russian Крым).
a proposal to unite with its larger neighbor. Ukrainian troops subsequently withdrew from the territory.

Beginning on March 1, Russian separatist demonstrations and subsequent occupations of Ukrainian state buildings occurred in several large eastern Ukraine cities, including Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv. Although some local residents were among the participants, the instigators were believed to be Russians who had crossed the porous border between the two countries. Notwithstanding the reality that many local people are of Russian ethnicity and prefer the Russian language, many also are bilingual and reliable Western-administered polls show a strong majority of the population in eastern Ukraine favor continued union with Ukraine and reject accession to Russia.

In contrast, another major city in eastern Ukraine, Dnipropetrovsk was awash in Ukraine blue and yellow flags and patriotic billboards, nearly all of which had been paid for by local residents. Arriving in the city on March 26, the writer saw no Russian flags or banners. Pro-Russian demonstrations had been few and non-violent.

Unlike Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts, Dnipropetrovsk oblast shares no borders with Russia. Infiltration of Russian agitators was, therefore, more difficult. Further, although some of the same 'rust-belt' industries that dominate its eastern and southern
neighbors also can be found in Dnipropetrovsk, the economy of Dnipropetrovsk generally is better balanced, reflecting more enlightened oblast governance and economic policy that encourages private initiative and independent business development. Nonetheless, economic growth in Ukraine had stalled during the past several years, seriously affecting local individuals and institutions.

Throughout her trip, the writer heard accounts of economic distress afflicting both individuals and institutions. Economic conditions, already dire in 2013, had deteriorated even further in the past year. Factories and service industries had closed, no new investment had occurred. The Ukrainian currency (hryvnia) had declined substantially in value and, accordingly, imports (including medicine) had become more costly. Responding to increasing Ukrainian independence, Russia raised the cost of natural gas exports essential to Ukraine. Inflation was 30 to 50 percent, depending on specific sectors of the economy. Unemployment was growing.

Additionally, Ukrainians worried about rising crime; although some in eastern Ukraine believed that local police were more concerned about infiltrators from Russia than neighborhood criminals, individuals in Kyiv attributed swelling crime to police fleeing their posts in response to citizen hostility. Police under Yanukhovych were widely perceived as corrupt, brutal, and too tightly aligned with the then-departed President.

Amidst this mounting hardship, Ukrainian Jews with whom the writer spoke expressed solidarity with the new direction that Ukraine had taken. They supported the Ukrainian turn toward Europe. They spoke approvingly and gratefully of the financial and other assistance offered by wealthy Ukrainian Jews to Ukraine as a country and nation. Some found their new adversities overwhelming and feared for their own future - and/or the future of their children - and spoke of emigrating. At the same time, most said that their own identities had changed as a consequence of Russian action; they now saw themselves not just as Jews, but as Ukrainian Jews.

**Responsible estimates of the size of the Jewish population** in Ukraine range from 100,000 to 350,000, with the largest single number - 20,000 to 65,000 - residing in the

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5 Ihor Kolomoisky, an oligarch and strongly-identifying Jew from Dnipropetrovsk, had been appointed governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast. It was broadly known that he and his Jewish banking partner, Hennady Boholubov, were providing financial support to the Ukrainian armed forces. They are major supporters of Jewish community life in Dnipropetrovsk.

6 According to the Jewish Agency for Israel, aliyah (immigration to Israel) from Ukraine increased 141 percent during the first six months of 2014 over the first six months of 2013. Emigration of Jews from Ukraine to the United States also has increased in 2014 related to 2013.

7 The nationality of Soviet citizens was indicated in the notorious “fifth paragraph” of their compulsory internal passports or identity cards. According to Soviet practice, Jewish ethnicity was considered a nationality and all Jewish citizens were indicated as such in these important documents. The concept of a “Ukrainian Jew” or a "Russian Jew" was a contradiction in terms, according to Soviet custom. Thus, the self-identification as a "Ukrainian Jew" is a major change in self-perception for Jews in Ukraine.
capital city of Kyiv. Dnipropetrovsk is believed to have the next largest concentration of Jews, probably between 25,000 and 40,000, followed by Kharkiv with a slightly smaller number of Jewish residents. Odesa may be home to approximately 20,000 Jews. About 50 percent of the Ukrainian Jewish population is believed to be elderly. The total Jewish population has declined significantly in recent years, mirroring and exceeding a decrease in the Ukrainian population in general.8

The writer interviewed 76 individuals during her travels in Ukraine, including five diplomats attached to foreign representations. The diplomats are not identified by name or position in this report. The writer also communicated with three additional individuals by telephone and/or e-mail with reference to this report.

Dnipropetrovsk

Founded in 1778 on the banks of the Dniepr River, Dnipropetrovsk was known until 1926 as Ekaterinoslav, in honor of Catherine II (Catherine the Great) whose troops conquered the territory. As the Soviet Union consolidated its power in the 1920’s, place names associated with the tsarist period were changed to reflect Communist control.9 Currently the third largest city in Ukraine, following Kyiv and Kharkiv, the population of Dnipropetrovsk is slightly over one million. It was a closed city until mid-1990 due to its extensive military industry, particularly Yuzhmash, a producer of intercontinental ballistic missiles, booster rockets, and related products.

Dnipropetrovsk continues to be a center of heavy industry, hosting factories producing cast iron, rolled metal, pipes, mining and agricultural machinery, large appliances, and transportation equipment. Other prominent industries in the city include food processing and apparel manufacture, the latter for European firms. Notwithstanding the current economic crisis that affects the local economy, just as it affects the remainder of the country, economic conditions in Dnipropetrovsk are somewhat less severe than in most other areas of Ukraine. The oblast government is considered among the most

8 The estimated population of Ukraine in July 2014 was 44,219,413, a steep decline from the estimated 1991 population [at the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union] of 53 million. The estimated 2014 Ukrainian birthrate is 9.41 per 1,000 population, compared with a death rate of 15.72 per 1,000 population, i.e., significantly more people die than are born. The estimated Ukrainian life expectancy at birth in 2014 is 63.78 for males, 74.86 for females. (See CIA - The World Factbook at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html. Retrieved July 3, 2014.

Population loss reflects poor health care, inadequate nutrition, substance abuse (tobacco, alcohol, narcotics), aging of the population, low fertility, high mortality, emigration of younger age cohorts, impoverishment, and environmental degradation.

9 Grigoriy Ivanovich Petrovsky (1878-1958) was a prominent local pre-revolutionary political agitator, exile, and subsequent political figure in the city. His family name was combined with that of the Dniepr River to produce the current city name of Dnipropetrovsk.
enlightened and capable in the country; private enterprise is encouraged and supported, thus diversifying the economy and providing some hedge in conditions of economic turbulence.

Historically, the city has been an important source of leadership for the former Soviet Union and for post-Soviet Ukraine. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, former Ukrainian Prime Minister Valery Pustovoitenko, and former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma all spent significant portions of their careers in important leadership positions in the city. Yulia Tymoshenko, a past Prime Minister of Ukraine imprisoned under the former Yanukhovych regime, is a native of the city.

![Panoramic view of the city as seen from the tower of the National Mining University. Three stepped towers of the Menorah Center are visible at right. (The towers appear as beige in color.) The city rises on both sides of the Dnipr River. As is true in most Dnipr River cities, the more developed side is on the west bank (which appears in the foreground of the above photo.) Photo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dnipropetrovsk_Panorama.jpg. Retrieved July 19, 2013.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dnipropetrovsk_Panorama.jpg)

**Jews** have lived in the region of Ekaterinoslav, part of the old Pale of Settlement, since the late eighteenth century. By 1897, the Jewish population of Ekaterinoslav had reached 41,240, more than one-third of the population of the entire city at that time. Pogroms occurred in 1881, 1882, 1905, and 1918; the 1905 attacks were the most devastating, killing 97 and wounding more than 100 people. Prior to the consolidation of Soviet authority in the 1920’s, the Jewish community was highly organized, maintaining a diverse network of Jewish religious, educational, and cultural institutions. It was an important center of both Zionism and the Chabad movement. A small Karaite community had its own prayer house.

More than twenty years after the demise of the Soviet Union, Dnipropetrovsk is once again an important center of both Zionism and the Chabad movement. The State of Israel enjoys a robust image in the city, reflecting substantial emigration from Dnipropetrovsk to Israel, continuing bonds between local Jews and their family members and friends in Israel, the presence of many Israelis as teachers and other community professionals, a stream of capable *shlichim* (emissaries) of Israeli organizations, and the Zionist stance of Chief Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki. Regularly scheduled commercial air service connects Dnipropetrovsk and Ben Gurion airport in Israel. Estimates of the current **Jewish population** of Dnipropetrovsk range from 25,000 to 40,000; it is the second largest Jewish population center in Ukraine, surpassed only by Kyiv.
Dnipropetrovsk is the center of the Chabad movement in Ukraine. Honoring the historic presence of Chabad in the city that continued into the 1930’s, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson appointed Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki to the post of Chief Rabbi of Dnipropetrovsk in 1990. Rabbi Kaminezki is widely recognized as the most effective large-city community rabbi in all of the post-Soviet successor states.

1. Symbolic of the role of Chabad in the city is the Menorah Center, a Chabad Jewish cultural center that opened in October 2012. Designed to appear as seven-branch menorah (candelabrum associated with Jewish ritual), the Menorah Center comprises 538,000 square feet (approximately 50,000 square meters. Although the complex has been referred to as a Jewish community center - the largest Jewish community center in the world (крупнейший в мире), according to Chabad - it is a unique structure, bearing little resemblance to Jewish community centers in North or South America. It is, instead, an office complex, conference center, banquet hall, hotel, Jewish museum, and small shopping mall. It hosts a senior welfare center and soon will be home to a medical clinic serving seniors and children.10 It has no dedicated sports facilities or premises intended for ongoing children's activities. Parking space is very limited. Construction costs, said to be more than $60 million, were covered entirely by Ihor Kolomoisky and Hennady Bogolubov.

The Menorah Center overshadows the red-roofed Golden Rose Choral Synagogue in a busy area of Dnipropetrovsk.

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.

Although the structure appears to have seven separate towers, it is a single L-shaped building with an 18-story center and three progressively smaller sections branching out on two sides from the center. A long and wide ground-floor corridor extends through each 'wing' of the building, meeting where the two wings join. Multiple sets of small elevators are located along the corridor. Entries into small elevator vestibules, shops, the hotel, and other functional areas are separated by stone replicas of facades of former synagogues in the area. Shops include an upscale kosher restaurant, a more modest kosher coffee shop, a small kosher grocery store, Judaica items, florist, travel agency, and bank branch. A wide stairway leads to the Museum of Jewish Holocaust and History in Ukraine,11 and a passageway connects the Center with the synagogue.

10 See below.

11 See pages 31-33.
Another passageway leads directly to the conference space and banquet halls. Security is visible, but unobtrusive.

Entrance to the Menorah Center is gained most easily through street-side doors in each of the two end-towers, although doors in the end-tower at left are accessible only by ascending two flights of outdoor steps that would be difficult for mobility-impaired individuals to mount. Vehicular access is available at the rear of the structure.

The **Menorah Hotel** is a four-star facility accommodating 80 guests. Its elevators and door key system are programmed to be Shabbat-compliant. Because the hotel is connected to the synagogue through the Menorah Center, some religiously observant individuals and families take advantage of Shabbat package rates. A planned **hostel** in a different section of the Menorah Center failed to attract guests and has been converted into a 16-room two-star facility known as the **7-Days City Hotel**, featuring accommodations available at modest prices.

The **conference and banquet facilities** include two connecting **ballrooms** that together seat 1,500 people. A **tiered theater** with a professional sound system accommodates 320 individuals. Smaller conference rooms and informal meeting spaces exist throughout the complex.

Partial views of one of the banquet halls and the professional Sinai theater are seen above. Photos: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.

**Office and meeting space** in the Menorah Center is available to both commercial and community tenants according to a two-tier rent system. **Community groups** (such as the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the Hillel student group) pay a discounted rate for permanent offices as well as for occasional additional space that may be leased by the hour or day for special purposes, such as a conference or dinner. **Commercial tenants** paying a market rate include lawyers, an information technology company, and various shops.

According to Svetlana Yermakova, the professional manager of the Menorah Center, 90 percent of the complex was leased by March 2014 - and she anticipated that the remainder would be rented within the next several months. Commercial tenants occupy
53 percent of the space, the Museum of the Jewish Holocaust and History occupies 16 percent, Jewish organizations that receive a community discount account for ten percent, and offices of the Menorah Center itself occupy two percent. Additional commercial tenants who will pay full rent are being sought.

In response to a question, Ms. Yermakova stated that the complex employs 80 personnel fulltime, not including hotel staff or security. The security staff includes 36 individuals. The facility is monitored by 600 video cameras, mounted at various points inside and outside the building. The Menorah Center maintains excellent relations with all relevant police and external security forces, said Ms. Yermakova. No security issues have arisen since the building opened, she stated.

Asked if she had been surprised by any experiences in the building, Ms. Yermakova said that heating costs during the 2013-2014 winter had been 20 to 30 percent lower than anticipated, a circumstance that she attributed to technology in the structure that automatically regulates heating according to existing temperatures in each section of the complex separately.

Educated as an attorney, Svetlana Yermakova previously managed a 300-room hotel in Kyiv and a conference center substantially larger than the Menorah complex. She also had worked for Hennady Boholubov, who recommended her for the Menorah Center position. Initially, she said, she did not understand the concept of a Jewish community center, but she is now a great admirer of Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki who brings the Jewish population together through the Menorah Center and is a "special man" and a leader in every sphere, both inside and outside the Jewish community.

In response to a question, Ms. Yermakova stated that accounting is done separately for the hotels and for the remainder of the Menorah Center. The Menorah Center, she continued, broke even in September 2013 and began to show a profit in October. It continues to be profitable, although income doubtless would have been greater if the ongoing recession had not affected bookings of the conference center and banquet halls; organizations and individuals were understandably trying to reduce costs in this time of economic uncertainty and thus were limiting programs that used such facilities.

Evading a question about the breakeven occupancy rate at the main hotel, Ms. Yermakova said that the hotel was profitable before the current economic crisis when its monthly occupancy was 35 to 40 percent. Following the Russian occupation of Crimea in February, occupancy dipped to between ten and 20 percent. Advance reservations

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12 The Menorah Center offices are to be moved to the small office building immediately behind the synagogue so that Menorah Center space is available to full-rent tenants.
suggest that the April rate will be about 25 percent, she continued. Because its room rates are less expensive, City Hotel occupancy was higher, 50 to 60 percent, she said.

As of midsummer of 2014, individuals associated with Chabad in Dnipropetrovsk were claiming a Menorah Center monthly profit of close to $40,000 (not including the two hotels). The profit was to be returned to the local Chabad community to cover various expenses in education, welfare programs, and other areas. At the same time, it was known that Menorah Center management was asked to trim some employee salaries, reduce maintenance costs, delay payments to vendors, and undertake other cost-cutting measures.

Rabbi Shmuel and Mrs. Chana Kaminezki pose in a small well-stocked kosher market located on the ground floor near one of the entrances of the Menorah Center. The market includes kosher foodstuffs produced in Ukraine and imported from Israel. In addition to the grocery store, the Menorah Center also includes a Judaica store, a florist, and other shops.

Photo: the writer.

To date, the Menorah Center has proved to be an important focal point for many Jews in Dnipropetrovsk. Its clean and modern facilities accommodate a number of Jewish organizations as well as public and private events. Further, its commercial and communal space attracts the larger population. Nonetheless, doubts continue to be expressed about the financial viability of the enterprise,13 and concern is voiced about the wisdom of building such a massive and conspicuous symbol of Jewish wealth in a country where antisemitism is rarely far from the surface.

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13 Reports persist that Messrs. Boholubov and Kolomoisky have agreed to cover all deficits incurred during the first two years of Menorah Center operations, but they are said to have made no commitments beyond that time period.
Jewish Education and Culture

2. Chabad operates two early childhood centers in the city, Ilana and Beit Tsindlicht. The Ilana center, named in memory of a former participant who died as a young child, enrolls about 35 children between the ages of one and three in a daycare program. Beit Tsindlicht is a much larger endeavor, hosting 157 children between the ages of 2½ and six in a formal preschool program. The family of Victor Pinchuk, a native of Dnipropetrovsk who now lives in Kyiv, provided funding for Beit Tsindlikht, which is named in memory of Mr. Pinchuk’s maternal grandparents.

A plaque on the Beit Tsindlikht building memorializes Victor Pinchuk’s grandparents. Mr. Pinchuk is an oligarch with major interests in iron, steel, and communications. He is married to the daughter of Leonid Kuchma, a past President of Ukraine.

Photo: the writer.

Each of the two centers operates a daylong program, serving three full meals and a snack. The official monthly tuition at each is 2,000 hryvnia ($170+ in mid-2014) for children whose families are employed by Chabad. However, said Yudit Baram, the director of Beit Tsindlicht, the majority of families pay only an unofficial minimum of 50 hryvnia (about $43 in mid-2014). Only 15 families pay more than the minimum.

The 157 children at Beit Tsindlikht are placed in one of six sections based on age, language preference (Russian or Hebrew), and religious background. Many of the Chabad families are Israelis and prefer that Hebrew be the primary teaching language, said Ms. Baram; thus, all children from religiously-observant families are in Hebrew-speaking classes, and most local children, who usually are from less traditional families, are in groups that use Russian as the primary language.

Yudit Baram, left, and Elena Krasnova, at right, stand in front of a Chabad school calendar. Ms. Krasnova is principal of the local Chabad elementary school, School #144. (See below.) The calendar quotes R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson as saying, “We are unable to rest as long as any boy or girl is not receiving a proper [Jewish] education and upbringing.”

Photo: the writer.
About 90 percent of the local children are halachically Jewish, stated Ms. Baram. The remainder have some Jewish heritage and all of their families maintain a substantial connection to the broader Jewish community.

Each of the six groups of children includes between 23 and 27 youngsters, three certified teachers, and one or two assistant teachers. Beit Tsindlikht uses standard Ukrainian workbooks in the secular studies portion of its curriculum.

Children from religiously observant families pursue early math activity at Beit Tsindlikht with manipulatives. The school is highly regarded. (In the background are stacked small beds, required for naptime in all Ukrainian preschools.)

Photo: the writer.

Most of the teachers, said administrator Natalia Kozarinskaya are local women, many of whom are graduates of Beit Chana. Some are Israelis, who have completed training at Chabad teachers colleges in Israel.

The majority of youngsters continue on to School #144, the local Chabad day school, most local children enrolling in the regular day school and most children from religious families go into the yeshiva katana or the machon. (See below.) Ms. Kozarinskaya stated that some local non-observant families face a real dilemma in deciding whether to continue their children's education in a Chabad environment or to transfer to elite, private schools that are more prestigious. About two or three graduates of each Beit Tsindlikht class enroll in such private schools for elementary school. However, she noted, the culture of Beit Tsindlikht encourages continuation in the Chabad system.

3. School #144, which bears the formal name of Levi Yitzhak Schneerson Ohr Avner Jewish Day School, occupies a three-building campus that served as a boarding school during the Soviet period. In all, the premises currently accommodate 400 youngsters, of whom 285 attend grades one through 11 (the conventional Ukrainian system) in the main building. The enrollment has increased by 22 students over the previous year. The school now is directed by Elena Krasnova, a new principal expected

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to raise its academic standards from its current rather mediocre standing to a more elevated level competitive with the city's best schools.\footnote{For a discussion of the academic standing of School #144, see the writer's most recent previous report \textit{Observations on Jewish Community Life in Ukraine - Report of a Visit in April 2013}, pages 45-47.}

Most youngsters at School #144, Ms. Krasnova stated, come from Russian-speaking homes. However, she continued, the use of Ukrainian at home is increasing every year among school families. The school also enrolls "one or two" Israeli children at every grade level, most of whom are from emigré families who have returned to Ukraine. Although these youngsters spoke some Russian at home, they generally don't speak it very well, she said, and their skills in reading Russian are even more limited.

School #144 schedules \textbf{eight class periods every day}. Youngsters in grades one through five have four classes in Hebrew and two in Jewish tradition each week; students in grades six through 11 have three classes in Hebrew each week and two in Jewish tradition. Ms. Krasnova noted that the school uses the Tal Am/NETA Hebrew curriculum, which is geared more toward English-speaking students and is not entirely satisfactory for youngsters whose native language is Russian or Ukrainian. Further, she stated, the school cannot afford to purchase the textbooks that have been published for this program, so it must download the electronic version, which causes other problems. She also noted that Hebrew is the fourth language - after Russian, Ukrainian, and English - pursued by youngsters in school; three to four classes weekly in Hebrew is insufficient to master the language, but the crowded school curriculum does not permit the daily exposure that is desirable.

\textit{The main building of School #144 is seen at left. The girls' machon is behind this structure and the boys' yeshiva katana is to the left.}

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.

The school is equipped with two \textbf{ORT-equipped computer laboratories} and schedules four class periods per week in \textit{informatika} for all students. School #144 youngsters have done well in ORT interschool competitions, including some held in Israel. Robotics is among the most popular components of computer studies, Ms. Krasnova said. She described the overall quality of the ORT computer program as "excellent", and stated that cooperation between the school and ORT was at a high level. Ms. Krasnova served as principal of another Dnipropetrovsk school for 14 years. In response to a question, she said that the other school was better equipped with computers and additional modern technology, but it also had many problems.
Krasnova noted that city teachers of computer studies train at the School #144 ORT labs.¹⁶

In response to a question about *afterschool activities*, Ms. Krasnova said that the afterschool program was limited by budgetary constraints and bus transportation schedules. However, some students train for interschool competitions in *informatika* and mathematics during afterschool hours. Such supplemental training is absolutely essential for success in these contests. When weather permits, some pupils participate in outdoor sports in the school yard.

Ms. Krasnova observed that the school needs a modern *sports hall* that can be used for a full range of indoor sports, including both daily exercise and afterschool activities. The small gym in the yeshiva building is very inadequate. She also would like to develop the School 144’s *technology base*, beginning with the installation of more *smart boards*.

In a later discussion, an experienced teacher in the Chabad school system commended Ms. Krasnova for her professionalism, noting the she had much more school administration experience than her predecessors at the helm of School #144. Zelig Brez, Executive Director (Исполнительный директор) of the *Philanthropic Fund of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community* (Благотворительный фонд Днепропетровского еврейского общины), which supports Chabad interests in the city, stated that the school had begun a three-year evaluation process to measure progress in achieving community goals for improving academic achievement. Their goals were objective and measurable, he said; Ms. Krasnova’s appointment was one of several significant staff changes, he continued. Among additional measures, said Mr. Brez, the school day had been lengthened and the number of school holidays reduced. Attaining the desired level of academic excellence will take time, he observed.

4. The girls’ *machon*, which meets in a small building behind the main School #144 structure, currently enrolls 73 girls, said Polina Levin, an administrator and chemistry teacher. The 2013-2014 roster is a significant decrease from the 88 who were enrolled the previous academic year, she acknowledged, attributing the decline to the return to Israel of a number of Israeli Chabad families who had been working in the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad community. Of the 73 current pupils, 26 are from foreign Chabad families in which one or both parents work in local Chabad programs. The remaining 46 are local girls, some of whom reside in a Chabad dormitory for youngsters from unstable homes. (See below.)

In total, said Ms. Levin, the machon employs 40 *teachers*, including a psychologist and a number of specialists who work on a part-time basis. Twelve of these teachers, most of whom are Israelis, are instructors in religious subjects. Twenty-seven class hours each week are assigned to secular studies, and 17 to Jewish studies (including

¹⁶ The ORT curriculum in School #144 is under the general supervision of Natalya Medvedeva, who directs ORT programs in the city as a whole. For information about other ORT activity in Dnipropetrovsk, see pages 29-30.
Hebrew). The Jewish studies curriculum is expanded slightly in sixth grade when girls prepare for their Bat Mitzvahs, noted Ms. Levin. In response to a question, Ms. Levin acknowledged that machon pupils have no access to science laboratories, but they do watch teachers conduct modest experiments. Machon pupils are instructed in computer technology, and participate in exercise and dance classes in a small studio.

Following completion of the machon curriculum, all local girls enroll in local universities or other post-secondary programs. The Chabad girls attend various Chabad seminaries, usually in Israel.

5. The writer was unable to visit the yeshiva katana (small yeshiva or junior yeshiva) that is housed in a separate building on the School #144 campus. Its curriculum resembles that of a mesivta, in that it includes both secular and religious studies rather than focusing almost exclusively on Jewish subjects. Both city boys and boys from religious families attend the school through seventh grade. In eighth grade, boys from Chabad homes begin studies at a Chabad residential yeshiva katana, which opened in the 2013-2014 academic year. (See below.) The launch of the new institution led to cancellation of the existing eighth grade boys program as too few city boys remained for its continued operation. The long-term impact of the residential yeshiva katana on the School #144 yeshiva middle and upper grades was uncertain at the time of the writer's visit to Dnipropetrovsk.

6. A residential yeshiva katana opened at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school years, initially enrolling eight boys (later joined by a ninth boy) in the equivalent of eighth grade. The yeshiva will add one class in each of the next two years so that it eventually serves boys ages 13 through 15/16 years old in classes corresponding to eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. The program is located in a leased building, originally intended as a country home, in a small town between Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia.

The curriculum includes Chabad religious study exclusively, with no secular subjects. The primary constituency for the residential yeshiva is Chabad emissary families in Ukraine, but even in its first year the program attracted a Chabad youngster from England. Its location in the center of an area with deep roots in Chabad history is a major draw to some Chabad families.

Australian-born Rabbi Chaim Chazan was recruited by Rabbi Kaminezki, Rabbi Meir Stambler, and Rafael Rutman, a British-born Kyiv businessman, to head the residential yeshiva katana. Rabbi Chazan attended yeshiva in England and, prior to accepting the position in Ukraine, had taught in similar yeshivas in the United States.

Photo: the writer.
Rabbi Chaim Chazan, director of the yeshiva, stated that his vision for the residential yeshiva katana is an eventual enrollment of 60 boys, that is, 20 boys at each of three grade levels. He referred to a mission of inreach, providing support to Chabad emissaries working in Ukraine. These emissary families are his first responsibility, he continued; when space and experience permit, he will welcome boys of other backgrounds. Perhaps the yeshiva will become an important address for Jewish education throughout Europe.

When asked about the appeal of working with this particular age group, Rabbi Chazan responded that boys between the ages of 13 and 16 are receptive to new ideas and often experience significant gains in intellectual growth. They also mature in personal philosophy and conduct. By the time boys reach age 17, he said, it often is too late to instill responsibility and other positive behaviors. He would like to nurture boys to become steeped in Chabad values and practice. He derives enormous gratification from seeing boys change and mature before his very eyes.

His teaching methodology focuses on individual and small-group instruction. Boys who need special help receive it individually or in small groups from Rabbi Chazan and several associates, just as all boys are educated individually and in small groups. Thus, no youngster should feel humiliated because he is taken aside for "special" instruction; all boys are taught in this manner. Rabbi Chazan strives to be respectful of individual boys; he observed that discipline in Ukrainian schools was "severe" and "stifling".

All applicants to the yeshiva are screened for intellectual capacity, Hebrew-language skills, and maturity. For those who apply from abroad, Hebrew-language interviews are conducted by Skype. For Chabad boys residing in Ukraine, Rabbi Chazan and his associates interview and observe candidates at Chabad-operated winter camps for boys in Ukraine. Rabbi Chazan noted that most Ukrainian Chabad boys have superior Hebrew-language skills because many of their yeshiva day school teachers are Israelis.

The boys reside and learn in a suburban area in an oddly-designed two-story rental building originally intended as a small country inn accommodating only a few families at any time. Of fairly recent construction, building materials appear somewhat shoddy and flimsy. Capacity of the building is severely limited and may restrict natural growth of the yeshiva. It is planned that the residential yeshiva will move into the structure now used as a dormitory for Beit Chana when Beit Chana moves into its new premises, but several years will be required before all necessary renovations can be completed.

For now, boys enjoy recess periods in a poorly-maintained adjacent outdoor basketball court and a large not-quite-level backyard. They also are taken on excursions to a local indoor swimming pool and certain other recreational venues.

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17 Rabbi Chazan mentioned briefly a Chabad residential yeshiva for the same age group near Moscow that some Chabad rabbis refer to as a "boot camp". The rabbis who support Rabbi Chazan have insisted that a different atmosphere prevail in Dnipropetrovsk.

18 See page 28.
In discussions with several Chabad rabbis whose sons are enrolled in the yeshiva, the writer found enthusiasm about Rabbi Chazan and his teaching colleagues and with the style of learning embraced by the yeshiva. They observed that their sons were learning at appropriate levels, were pleased with the general atmosphere, and were maturing.

7. Under the sponsorship of Tzivos Hashem (Heb., The Army of G_d), a Chabad children’s organization, Rabbi Yossi Glick manages several children’s programs in the city. The best known of these are separate residential facilities for Jewish boys and girls from troubled home situations. Often referred to as “social orphans,” most of the youngsters are from single-parent homes in which the custodial parent is unable to provide adequate childcare due to substance addiction, impoverishment, or other problems. Some parents are imprisoned. A few youngsters were previously cared for by aging grandparents unable to cope with the needs of active, growing children.

Rabbi Yossi Glick, a native of Australia, manages several Chabad children’s programs in Dnipropetrovsk. He also is the business manager of the new residential yeshiva katana.

Photo: the writer (in May 2012).

The total number of youngsters residing in the homes has dropped from 40 boys and 28 girls some years ago to 14 in each during the 2013-2014 school year. The reduced census parallels a general Ukrainian Jewish demographic decline and follows a pattern observed in several Jewish children’s residential facilities in other Ukrainian cities. Each of the two Dnipropetrovsk facilities is supervised by young adult counselors, most of whom are only a few years older than their charges and none of whom has relevant education/social work/psychology background. Both homes are guarded by security personnel throughout the day and night.

Rabbi Glick readily acknowledged finance-related shortcomings in management of the homes. The program cannot afford to engage properly-trained staff; those who do serve usually leave after one or two years, thus depriving youngsters of supervision continuity. Further, the program lacks capacity to advise youngsters on post-high school opportunities and usually loses track of residents within a year of their departure from the homes upon graduation from high school at age 17.

Almost all of the residents attend the machon or day yeshiva. Recreational opportunities outside school are severely limited due to lack of funds. Visits to families usually are limited to occasional Sundays; Rabbi Glick has found that longer visits to dysfunctional homes cause psychological/emotional problems for the children that
persist upon their return. Further, Rabbi Glick said, such visits may be expensive for the residential programs because parents or other relatives sometimes steal the clothing or shoes that the child is wearing or bringing and then sell these items in a street bazaar. The residential program then must replace the missing apparel.

In general, said Rabbi Glick, financial constraints have forced Tzivos Hashem to curb its assistance programs to all impoverished Jewish children throughout the city, including those living with family members. For example, they no longer distribute food parcels to single-parent families or grandparent-led families.

8. Старший брат, старшая сестра (Older Brother, Older Sister) is an outgrowth of the Dnipropetrovsk Kehilla Project of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston.19 Adapted from Jewish Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Greater Boston, the Dnipropetrovsk program is completing its Bar Mitzvah year, funded entirely by an allocation from Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the Jewish federation in Boston.

Tanya Kaplunskaya, director of Older Brother, Older Sister, said that the project is well-known in the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish community; she even is approached by people on the street who recommend a particular child in need of an older companion. The current uncertain situation in eastern Ukraine, she continued, generates great stress, even among children; they fear for their own futures and welcome additional attention from a big sister or big brother.

Tanya Kaplunskaya, a psychologist by training, is a member of a family long involved in Dnipropetrovsk Jewish life.

In all, said Ms. Kaplunskaya, the current roster includes 70 pairs. Most of the older brothers and sisters join the program through the Hillel student organization, she stated, and the remainder connect through Jewish Agency young adult programs.20 Through contacts in the Jewish day school and elsewhere, she learns of children who would benefit from such a relationship. Her background in psychology enables her to evaluate both volunteer older siblings and candidate younger siblings and then make appropriate matches.

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19 See pages 62-63 for further information about the ties between Dnipropetrovsk and Boston.

20 For more information about Hillel in Dnipropetrovsk, see pages 23-24; for information about the Jewish Agency, see pages 57-59.
Aware that many students and other volunteers in Ukraine lack the resources to plan and carry out the two-person outings that characterize many JBB/BS relationships in the United States, the Dnipropetrovsk program offers a number of large events in which many pairs participate, such as excursions to ice skating arenas and amusement parks. Light refreshments are served at these gatherings, which generally take place once each month and at holidays. Her monthly budget, which covers all event-related expenses, is between $600 and $700. Ms. Kaplunskaya added that many pairs also go on walks and engage in other low-cost activities on their own.

Two little brothers have Down syndrome, said Ms. Kaplunskaya, and a third child is confined to a wheelchair. Although almost all participants, both younger and older siblings, have some Jewish roots, Ms. Kaplunskaya noted, not all are halakhically Jewish.

Ms. Kaplunskaya has led several seminars on child development and psychology for volunteer older siblings and for their parents. She would like to organize a Shabbaton for children, the children's parents, and the volunteer older siblings, but such an undertaking would be very expensive and she sees little likelihood of receiving funding for it. Few participants, she observed, would be able to pay their own expenses and, thus, substantial individual subsidies would be required.

9. A Special Needs Educational Resource Center, located in a wing of the Beit Chana Jewish Women's Pedagogical College, enrolls 60 Jewish children, adolescents, and a few young adults. Some of the children are autistic, said Director Tamara Olshanitskaya, and many others are intellectually impaired or have other disabilities. The number of youngsters with cerebral palsy actually is declining, Ms. Olshanitskaya said, due to better obstetrical care. A few clients have not been diagnosed precisely, Ms. Olshanitskaya continued, but it is clear that these youngsters are severely impaired and unable to attend conventional public schools.

Tamara Olshanitskaya, left has directed the Resource Center since its inception. She has spent considerable time in the United States, where her daughter and grandchildren now reside. Ms. Olshanitskaya said that her own friends in the United States worry about her during the current unrest in eastern Ukraine, but she hopes for the best and "жизнь продолжается" (life continues).

Photo: the writer.

Participants are assigned to one of four groups, depending on age, type of disability, and degree of impairment. Some children are prepared for entrance into

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21 See pages 27-28 for additional information about Beit Chana.
public school special education classes, but others are so seriously impaired that public schools are unable to accommodate them. Some private schools exist for disabled youngsters, Ms. Olshanitskaya said, but they generally are very expensive; further, the smaller size and more welcoming atmosphere of the Resource Center is much more comfortable for many families.

The Resource Center premises include **eight teaching/therapy spaces** in five classrooms of various sizes as well as one sports hall. Additionally, it has an outdoor play area with equipment designed for special needs youngsters. The **program** offers literacy skills, speech therapy, art and music therapy, physical education, and massage. A psychologist is on staff, and an **experienced pediatrician** provides basic medical care. The pediatrician, Ms. Olshanitskaya stated, is outstanding; he charges a reduced rate to the Resource Center, but will make house calls at night for his young patients and also intervenes with hospitals when necessary. Mothers trust him, Ms. Olshanitskaya continued, a sentiment that is often missing in Ukrainian medical care. The **Jewish Medical Center** also provides primary health care to Resource Center youngsters, a service that will expend when the JMC moves into its new premises.22

*In the above photo at left, youngsters participate in a music class, using tambourines and other basic instruments. Most of the adults in the photo are parents, grandparents, or volunteers. In the above photo at right, a boy receives individual tutoring in basic math and reading. Note his wheelchair, a plastic yard chair in a wheeled frame. Photos: the writer.*

**Families are referred to the Resource Center** by hospitals, clinics, and sanatoria specializing in care of disabled children, stated Ms. Olshanitskaya. Often, she continued, fathers abandon their families at the birth of such youngsters. The demands of special-needs children are such that the mother is unable to work outside the home, thus leaving the mother and child (as well as other family members) in poverty. State pensions provided to the handicapped do not cover even basic expenses, Ms. Olshanitskaya noted. Many of the mothers are severely depressed and worry constantly about the fate of their children if they (the mothers) become ill or die.

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22 See pages 44-45 for more information about the Jewish Medical Center.
Ms. Olshanitskaya arranges some social activities, as well as counseling, for parents and other caregivers. The Jewish Women's Microenterprise Loan Fund and Project Kesher also offer programs to Resource Center mothers.\(^\text{23}\)

The Resource Center cannot afford the social workers, psychologists, and special education teachers that it needs. It is very dependent upon volunteer helpers, among them retired teachers, each of whom comes to the Center several days each week to work with individual children. Parents and grandparents of client children also have responsibilities that sometimes extend beyond their own children.

Ms. Olshanitskaya also noted the centrality of a specially-equipped passenger van to the Resource Center. A gift of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the Jewish federation in Boston, the van is fitted with two lifts that bring wheelchair-bound youngsters into the van and then discharge them efficiently and comfortably. The van transports Resource Center youngsters and their parents between their homes and the Center. The Center could not operate without it, Ms. Olshanitskaya said.

Ms. Olshanitskaya also expressed gratitude for a new activity, an adaptation of the warm home program, initiated for senior adults by the Joint Distribution Committee and subsequently operated by Action for Post-Soviet Jewry.\(^\text{24}\) In the Resource Center warm home project, Ms. Olshanitskaya continued, three to five Resource Center youngsters in the same age group, along with their mothers and two to three RC professionals, meet in the home of one of the children. The children and parents know each other from the Center and are comfortable with each other, a key element of the undertaking, Ms. Olshanitskaya said. One professional leads the children in arts and crafts and other informal activities, while another meets with the mothers for adult-level informal Jewish education, psychological counseling, and art projects of their own. The Resource Center provides light refreshments (fruit and cookies) and the hostess mother provides tea.\(^\text{25}\) Gifts may be given to participants on their birthdays. Gatherings in children's homes, noted Ms. Olshanitskaya, enable Resource Center professionals to assess conditions in these homes, learn if children have their own space, etc.\(^\text{26}\)

The Resource Center will move to the new Beit Chana facility when that building becomes available. Although less space will be designated for the Resource Center than it currently uses, the more central local of the new premises should be beneficial, Ms. Olshanitskaya said.\(^\text{27}\)

\(^{23}\) See pages 46-47 and 35 about the Jewish Women's Microenterprise Loan Fund and Project Kesher respectively.

\(^{24}\) For information on the Action for Post-Soviet Jewry warm home program, see page 41.

\(^{25}\) If the mother cannot afford to provide tea, the Resource Center will provide it, said Ms. Olshanitskaya.

\(^{26}\) The Resource Center warm home program is funded by Dr. Judith Wolf of Boston and her family. The Wolf family has been a generous contributor to other aspects of the Resource Center as well.

\(^{27}\) See pages 28 for information about the new Beit Chana building.
10. Olga Tovkach, the executive director of the Hillel student organization since 2008, greeted the writer in the group's new premises in the Menorah Center. Hillel occupies three activity rooms, the largest of which accommodates approximately 100 people. A second activity room seats about 30 individuals. The third room is a computer facility with 12 workstations and a small conference room. Additionally, the Hillel suite includes several offices.

About 300 students and young adults participate in Hillel every month, a significant increase from the 100 to 200 who came to Hillel each month in 2012-2013, said Ms. Tovkach. The program includes weekly Hebrew classes (free to participants, paid for by the Israel Culture Center28), English classes (fee-based), Torah portion discussions, dance classes, and other activities. A group for young families usually draws about 30 people, Ms. Tovkach said; these individuals are interested in learning and practicing Judaism, but in a non-Orthodox manner. Hillel also organized a "Pesach university" that attracted about 40 people eager to learn about the holiday and the seder ritual. It held a second-night seder in a restaurant for Hillel members and young families.

Olga Tovkach has revived a long-substandard Hillel in Dnipropetrovsk since assuming the position of director in 2008.

Photo: the writer.

Dnipropetrovsk Hillel sent 80 young people on Taglit (birthright Israel) tours during the past year, 20 in winter and 60 in summer, said Ms. Tovkach. In April, Hillel organized a Shabbaton for 50 Dnipropetrovsk Taglit veterans, she continued. Hillel encourages Taglit returnees to enroll in the longer MASA program, Ms. Tovkach stated, often collaborating with the Israel Culture Center in helping Hillel members select the MASA program that is appropriate for them.

The usual Week of Good Deeds, somewhat subdued this year because of Russian-Ukrainian tension, was held at the end of February. No large events were scheduled, said Ms. Tovkach. The focus was on collaborative work with young people from another large ethnic group, Armenians, in events for children with disabilities and for children in institutional care. Hillel and Armenian students also created a Children's Health Festival, adapting various games to health themes. Additionally, the Hillel-Armenian group used the mechanism of traditionally-popular intellectual games to teach youngsters about traditions of various ethnic groups.

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28 See pages 61-62 for information about the Israel Culture Center.
The information technology program is new this year and is based on the IT program established by Odesa Hillel in 2013.\textsuperscript{29} The 12 workstations and necessary furnishings were purchased with funds contributed by the same Baltimore donor whose generosity enabled the founding of the Odesa project. Courses are offered in web design advanced computer languages, networking, and other IT skills; all are fee-based, although the charges are lower than in comparable commercial programs. Nonetheless, said Ms. Tovkach, even the discounted fees are a barrier to the enrollment of some potential students. In addition to the technology skills, the Hillel IT center offers placement assistance to its graduates, an unusual service in Ukraine. Ms. Tovkach noted that many IT vacancies exist in Dnipropetrovsk.\textsuperscript{30}

In addition to the advanced IT classes offered to students, the Hillel IT center teaches basic IT skills to elderly Jews participating in the JDC hesed program in the Menorah Center. The older learners commute by elevator to Hillel, where they are taught in one of two hesed classes by a volunteer teacher, said Ms. Tovkach. Ms. Tovkach commented that the major interest of the hesed students is mastering email so that they are able to communicate with family members who have moved abroad.

A local Hillel Board has been created, Ms. Tovkach stated, with 11 members, most of them past Hillel activists. Ranging in age from 26 to 35, they have each agreed to contribute $100 monthly to Dnipropetrovsk Hillel. Some also donate goods and services, such as office supplies or special-event premises to which they have access. Sometimes, Ms. Tovkach noted, Hillel students attend the monthly evening Board meetings to request funding for specific program ideas. In common with other organization directors, Ms. Tovkach observed that fundraising is very difficult in current conditions of political and economic instability.

\textsuperscript{29} For information about the Odesa Hillel IT program, see the writer’s most recent previous report Observations on Jewish Community Life in Ukraine - Report of a Visit in April 2013, page 11.

\textsuperscript{30} ORT also has opened an IT-education program in the Menorah Center. See pages 29-30. Whereas the Hillel program targets students, the ORT program is open to a broader age range.
11. Initiated as a means of enhancing the Jewish identification of halachically Jewish students and young adults, a program entitled **STARS** (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers) was launched in 2006. Funded by Eli Horin of Brazil and oligarch Lev Leviev, participants were awarded a stipend for attending gender-segregated classes in Jewish tradition and practice taught according to Orthodox philosophy. Certain coeducational events were held in connection with Jewish holidays, thus enabling halachically Jewish young men and women to meet and, hopefully, later marry and raise Jewish families.

Early reports indicated strong success, but **several problems** emerged within a short time and now are acknowledged by most of those involved in operating the program. First, it quickly became obvious that the interest of many participants focused more on pocketing the stipends than on absorbing Jewish tradition. As soon as stipends were distributed, students disappeared. Many graduates of the program declined any further involvement with Chabad. Second, class syllabi were prepared to appeal to high-achieving university students, but a large number of enrollees were low-achieving young adults in vocational training programs, low-paying jobs, or unemployed. Some participants had psychological or emotional issues and were disruptive in class. Third, many of the more capable students were aggravated by the others and refused to join with them in studies or socializing. Fourth, given the high rate of intermarriage in Ukraine - thought by many to be 80 percent or more - the pool of halachically Jewish young people is small and is diminishing with each passing year.

In response to these problems, Chabad in Dnipropetrovsk developed **new STARS versions** for halachically Jewish young people with above-average intellectual capacity and ambitious career plans. It created a special program for aspiring businessmen in which students meet regularly with successful business people. Yet another version attempts to engage young people from lower-class backgrounds. Several women's groups meet separately. Payment of stipends to all groups is conditioned on the satisfactory completion of examinations based on STARS course material.

**Iosif Masakovsky**, who directs the STARS program in Dnipropetrovsk, stated that STARS continues to search for different approaches that will appeal to different groups of young people. However, he continued, these efforts are seriously impeded by the ongoing financial crisis, which has led to a reduction in funds for instructor salaries, participant stipends, food, entertainment at events, travel, and other program components. He also would like to purchase additional furniture to complement the green chairs in STARS premises in the Menorah Center, but that is impossible now.

**Iosif Masakovsky, a former computer technology instructor, directs the STARS program in Dnipropetrovsk. He is largely self-taught in Judaism.**

Photo: the writer.
In partial acknowledgment that many Jewish young adults were decidedly cool to formal Jewish education programs, Chabad has created a youth club (молодежный клуб) called See the Light that attempts to reach young people through informal Jewish education. See the Light, he said, has many social activities and also tries to train Jewish young adults to be madrichim (leaders) for their peers and somewhat younger participants.

12. Elisha Pavlotsky manages the See the Light program, a Chabad venture designed for Jewish young adults. A Dnipropetrovsk native, he said that the program started there in 2012 and in Kyiv in 2013. So far, he said, 20 See the Light clubs exist in Ukraine, one in Russia (Rostov-on-Don), and one in Vienna. They are beginning to organize in New York, said Mr. Pavlotsky, and intend to unite all Russian-speaking halachically-Jewish youth throughout the world through See the Light clubs.

The clubs, which are managed by a part-time director in each city, focus on the performance of a single designated mitzvah (Heb., a commandment or moral duty) each month. The particular mitzvah is one designated by the last Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, as especially important. A financial prize is awarded for the best performance of this mitzvah. Additionally, See the Light sponsors social events at all appropriate Jewish holidays; although the events are primarily social in nature, some informal Jewish education also is on the agenda. See the Light also organizes informal three-day seminars with Jewish content for young adults, and plans to operate a two-week summer camp for adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16; See the Light activists are trained as madrichim (leaders/counselors) for this camp. Eventually, said Mr. Pavlotsky, they would like to establish See the Light clubs in both Chabad and public high schools in many different countries.

Elisha Pavlotsky has grand ambitions for a worldwide youth club movement uniting Russian-speaking halachically Jewish young people.

Photo: the writer.

Most programs operated by See the Light are free of charge to participants, even the overnight seminars, Mr. Pavlotsky said. Young people are attracted to these events by the distribution of free gifts, such as i-Pads, notebook computers, and other electronic goods.

In response to a question, Mr. Pavlotsky said that See the Light has a contact list of 600 Jewish young people in Dnipropetrovsk. However, he acknowledged, only about 20 of these individuals are active in the group. He noted that See the Light imposes no conditions on participants that they become religiously observant, although creators and
funders of See the Light hope that the informal education nature of the program will encourage young people to adopt a Jewish way of life. He remarked that three religious weddings had already taken place among activists.

In a later interview, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki stated that current financial stress has precluded the establishment of a stable financial base for the See the Light program. They actually use pushkas (contribution boxes) to collect funds for it, he said.31

13. The Beit Chana International Humanitarian-Pedagogical Institute was established as the Beit Chana Jewish Women's Pedagogical Institute in 1955 to prepare teachers and childcare workers for Chabad-sponsored preschools and elementary schools throughout the post-Soviet states. Initially, it recruited its all-female student enrollment mainly from smaller cities and towns, assuming that Jewish young women in such locales would be eager to escape their often stifling small town environments for associate degree-equivalent programs in a larger city. Beit Chana offered free tuition and free room and board in return for a commitment to teach in Chabad schools upon graduation. Over time, the institution was forced to confront the consequences of lower educational achievement of girls from such circumstances, as well as demographic developments that sharply reduced the number of Jewish young women in smaller towns, regardless of their capacity to complete post-secondary education programs. Further, notwithstanding their enthusiasm for relocation to a larger city, many young women were reluctant to commit to residence in an isolated gender-segregated dormitory with a religious lifestyle for the duration of their course of study. Additionally, many young women were not interest in pursuing pedagogical careers.

Beit Chana never reached its capacity enrollment of between 200 and 250 young women. It achieved its peak of 165 students some years ago, and its 2008-2009 enrollment plummeted to 70. Acknowledging that the institution was unlikely to survive without a "new vision," Beit Chana made several changes in its curriculum and operational procedures in recent years and intends to evolve further in the future. First, it earned accreditation to award full baccalaureate degrees, thus enhancing its appeal. It now confers associate degrees in pre-school and early elementary education as well as full bachelor's degrees in these subjects, practical psychology, and business management.32 Some subjects are taught in the form of intensive seminars led by visiting Israeli specialists. The baccalaureate programs in education include a component at Orot College in Israel. Employment in Chabad institutions is guaranteed to all graduates. Second, it scrapped its residential requirement, opening all programs to day/commuter female students from Dnipropetrovsk and environs.

31 See pages 26-27 for the remainder of the interview with Rabbi Kaminezki. See also pages 56-67 for an interview with Rabbi Moshe Weber in which he discusses a See the Light Pesach seminar.

32 Beit Chana intends to add undergraduate degrees in web design and foreign languages (Hebrew and English) in the near future.
Third, Beit Chana developed a graduate (master’s degree) program in education for current teachers; the curriculum includes local classes, distance-learning, and intensive seminar sessions. Fourth, the Institute soon will move to new premises in the center of the city close to the Golden Rose Choral Synagogue. An individual donor purchased a long-vacant building in a good location and is now reconstructing and expanding it to meet Beit Chana needs. Completion is expected in late 2015 or in 2016.

According to Marina Mukhina, rector of Beit Chana, 120 young women were enrolled during the 2013-2014 academic year in existing premises. Sixty-two were day students, and 58 were boarders. In addition to the Beit Chana students, the dormitory also accommodated 12 to 13 girls of Jewish background who were enrolled in local public high schools; these secondary school pupils were from unstable homes and needed the supervision and stability that the Beit Chana residence could provide.

Rabbi Meir Stambler, Executive Director of the Chabad Federation of Jewish Communities in Ukraine and an authority on Chabad education in the country, stated that negotiations with Touro College in New York regarding an affiliation between Touro College and Beit Chana currently are in an early stage. Rabbi Stambler perceives an arrangement in which Beit Chana graduates would receive Touro College degrees. However, he observed, Beit Chana must improve its academic standing in several key areas, including English, before Touro will consider such an agreement.

14. The International Hasidic Women’s Seminary, which enrolled its first class for the 2011-2012 academic year, did not operate in 2014-2015. The seminary is designed to provide a second-year education experience for Chabad high school graduates who have completed an intensive first-year religious studies course elsewhere. The second

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33 Beit Chana currently is located on the east bank of the Dnipr River, using a former municipal kindergarten building as its academic premises. Its dormitory premises also are on the east bank, in a somewhat remote area. Boarding students commute between the two facilities by special bus.

34 See page 54 for the remainder of the interview with Rabbi Stambler.
year class completes a study program in hassidut, education, other subjects, and volunteer work in the local Chabad community. The failure of the institution to operate in 2013-2014 is attributed to a management dispute that left the seminary without professional leadership.

According to Rabbi Meir Stambler (see above), an American woman has been engaged to direct the seminary, which is based at Beit Chana, in 2014-2015. Student recruitment is underway at Israeli seminaries enrolling English-speaking Chabad young women in intensive first-year study programs. Part of the appeal of the Dnipropetrovsk seminary to many Chabad young women and their families is its location in an area rich in Chabad history. Rabbi Stambler and his associates also believe that many Beit Chana girls from non-observant homes benefit from proximity to seminary girls.

15. Established in tsarist Russia in 1880 and later expelled during the Soviet period, World ORT returned to Russia and nearby countries as the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. It now administers or collaborates with other organizations in the operation of 17 Jewish day schools in the former Soviet states and also manages technology centers in 20 vocational institutes and colleges in these countries. As noted, ORT oversees the informatika program in School #144. It also operates a community computer technology center that is housed in the Menorah Center. The writer spoke with Natalya Medvedova, who directs ORT programs in Dnipropetrovsk.

*Natalya Medvedova, right, directs ORT programs in the Chabad day school and in the Menorah Center.*

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.

The Menorah Center ORT studio is housed in one room and includes 12 Dell workstations and one smartboard. It was opened in November 2013 and, at the time of the writer's visit in March, 2014, was still in a start-up stage. Ms. Medvedova stated that 54 individuals had completed courses in the facility since its opening; ORT does not monitor the ethnic background of its students, but Ms. Medvedova estimated that a minimum of 70 to 80 percent of students are Jewish. They advertise only within the Jewish community, she said. Perhaps some non-Jews who work in commercial concerns within the Menorah Center also had enrolled in ORT classes, she averred.

To date, Ms. Medvedova explained, ORT has focused on three groups of potential students. The first was middle-aged adults, particularly those over age 50, who need instruction in basic computer literacy. The second target group was younger people,

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35 The acronym ORT derives from the original Russian title Общество ресленного и сельствохозяйственного труда (Society for Trades and Agricultural Labor). The acronym has persisted for more than 100 years.
already computer literate, who were seeking professional courses in website development and related fields. A third group, to be initiated at the end of April, would focus on network administration. Courses in the latter two categories meet twice weekly for two-hour sessions over a period of five or six weeks. Fees are charged, but the cost to students is much lower than charged by commercial institutes. So far, said Ms. Medvedova, tuition assistance had been offered to two students.

Each class enrolls ten to 12 individuals. Basic computer literacy courses for elderly people, Ms. Medvedova continued, should enroll even fewer pupils. Almost all professional courses convene in the late afternoon or early evening so that people can upgrade their computer skills after work. Sunday classes will be offered in the near future to further accommodate working people.

Ms. Medvedova sees the primary market for ORT courses as the Menorah Center itself. Many people work in the building, either in businesses occupying leased commercial space or in communal organizations.

The business plan for the ORT computer center focuses on three skill sets, said Ms. Medvedova: system administration, web design, and infographics (graphics accompanied by text, widely used in instructional and science materials). Each individual completing appropriate courses will receive internationally valid certificates that will facilitate employment almost anywhere in the world.

Unlike the Hillel computer center, ORT does not offer placement services. However, said Ms. Medvedova, many students are unemployed or underemployed and have specific employment objectives. For those students who are uncertain about future careers, ORT will orient them toward specific IT fields with good employment prospects.

Natalya Medvedova (standing, wearing dress) works with adult students who had arrived early for a late afternoon class. She also helped one of the students who had brought an i-Pad tablet to class, seeking assistance in using several specific apps.

Photo: the writer.

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36 See page 24.
Tkumah - The All-Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies\textsuperscript{37} is the most comprehensive Holocaust research center in Ukraine. Under the leadership of Dr. Igor Schupak, its director, Tkumah opened its nearly 3,000 square meter (approximately 10,000 square feet) Museum of Jewish Memory and Holocaust in Ukraine in October 2012. The Museum is located within the Menorah Center, and the openings of the Menorah Center and the Museum occurred concurrently.

As its name suggests, the Museum is designed to present a comprehensive history of Jewish life on Ukrainian land. Exhibits about the Holocaust dominate the Museum, but ample space also is committed to an expansive history of Jewish life in Ukraine. Jewish ritual objects are displayed and explained. Where actual artifacts are unavailable, the displays are filled in part by custom paintings and multi-media presentations. The four large halls (with movable partitions) cover Jewish history, including shtetl life, pogroms, the Jewish intellectual and cultural role in Ukraine, the prominence of Ukrainian Jews in the Zionist movement and in modern Israel, the Holocaust in Ukraine (including righteous Ukrainians who saved Jews) and elsewhere, and post-Soviet Jewish life. The history of Jewish life in Dnipropetrovsk is covered in some detail. The museum undergoes a process of continuing renewal, said Dr. Schupak. Interactive displays are changed periodically, different artifacts are recovered and displayed, and entire new exhibits are opened. Traveling exhibits originating elsewhere are sought and displayed.

Managers of the Museum are very conscious that it is a Jewish museum on Ukrainian land. Its perspective is Ukrainian, said Dr. Schupak; it must be sensitive to Ukrainian history. However, Dr. Schupak continued, the museum has no "blank chapters." It covers the Khmelnytsky pogroms (in 1648), other pogroms in Ukrainian history, collectivization, the Holodomor\textsuperscript{38} and the Soviet terror. The role of Jews as both victims and perpetrators of certain Soviet crimes is acknowledged. The principal language in captions and other explanatory materials is Ukrainian.

\textit{Dr. Igor Schupak, a native of nearby Zaporizhzhia, earned a Ph.D. degree at a Canadian University. He was recruited by Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki to organize Holocaust research in the Dnipropetrovsk area and to develop Holocaust teaching materials and exhibits.}

\textit{Photo: the writer.}

\textsuperscript{37} Another commonly used title is Tkumah Ukrainian Institute for Holocaust Studies. (Tkumah is a Hebrew word, תקומה, which usually is translated as revival.)

\textsuperscript{38} The Holodomor (deriving from the word \textit{golod} or \textit{holod}, which means hunger) was a man-made famine occurring in 1932-1933 in Ukraine and several adjacent areas of Russia that is believed to have killed three to seven million people. Major causes of the tragedy were collectivization of agriculture and rapid industrialization.
Visitors to the Museum are overwhelmingly non-Jewish, Dr. Schupak stated. They include school groups from throughout the region, as well as youth groups, teachers, historians, and ordinary tourists.

As a research institute, Tkumah investigates Holocaust sites, pursues a comprehensive publications program (scholarly monographs, a research journal, collections of documents and memoirs), and attends and hosts conferences. It collaborates with relevant academic, museum, and archival institutions elsewhere in the post-Soviet states and in Israel, Europe, and North America. Its educational program includes seminars for teachers and students, publication of history textbooks, sponsorship of secondary school and university history clubs and conferences, and popular education for adults. The last-named includes "Sunday University," a successful program of history lectures open to the general public.

Dr. Schupak enumerated a number of Tkumah activities during the past year, some of which are related to the current political crisis. Many individuals in eastern Ukraine, said Dr. Schupak, fear an invasion by Russia or provocative behavior by Russians or Russian agents in eastern and/or southern Ukraine. In response, Dr. Schupak has been giving lectures in these regions on "constructive patriotism," that is, Ukrainian patriotism that steers clear of chauvinism and xenophobia. He encourages discussions on the more controversial periods of Ukrainian history. He promotes dialogue with institutions of other ethnic groups, including Ukrainian Catholic University (Lviv). They have organized seminars on tolerance throughout Ukraine, from Lviv and Rovno in the west to Luhansk in the east. Tkumah has been a key contributor to the work of a Ukrainian-Polish committee that prepares seminars for Ukrainian and Polish teachers of history. Tkumah continues its investigations of Holocaust sites and Holocaust-related documentation; new publications on these topics are produced every year.

A three-year collaboration with Yad Vashem in Israel has led to seminars for Ukrainian teachers on the Holocaust and World War II in the context of world history. Such seminars have been held in each of Ukraine’s 24 oblast centers and have spurred the development of multimedia teaching materials for Ukrainian schools.

In response to a question about financial support, Dr. Schupak said that the official Chabad Jewish community of Dnipropetrovsk (the Philanthropic Fund of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community <Благотворительный фонд Днепропетровского еврейского общества>) provides significant operational support, but that Tkumah always is seeking grants for specific projects and programs. The Institute for Holocaust studies has received funds from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (Berlin), several additional German organizations, Ukrainian Jewish Encounter (Canada), Yad Vashem,

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39 Tkumah research and education offices are located in premises adjacent to the museum.

40 Some of these materials remain unused because schools cannot afford to purchase them and/or municipal education bureaucracies are reluctant to approve the introduction of new curricula.
and other groups. The Museum itself is supported by Chabad in Dnipropetrovsk, Ihor Kolomoisky, the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe, and specific groups sponsoring particular exhibits.

Regarding contemporary antisemitism in Ukraine, Dr. Schupak stated that known antisemites participated in the Maidan demonstrations, but they did not exhibit antisemitic behavior during the protests. Equally, he said, although public opinion is strongly opposed to the current Russian government, it is not Russophobic in nature. This absence of bigotry and intolerance is evidence of a new direction for Ukraine, Dr. Schupak claimed. In contrast, Dr. Schupak continued, Russian fascists had attacked both Jews and Tatars in Crimea. Most of the fascists, he said, were Kuban Cossacks, who had been joined by ordinary Russian criminals.41

17. The Rosalind Gurwin Jewish Community Center of Dnipropetrovsk occupies one floor in a small office building attached to the Menorah Center.42 Liana Basina, its director, explained that the JCC, which is managed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, currently is in its fifteenth year of operation in the city and is organized in two functional roles: Jewish renewal and a Jewish family service.

Ms. Basina described the JCC Jewish renewal work as offering activities for Jews of all ages, both as individuals and as family units. It includes a small preschool, Mazal Tov, that focuses on at-risk children, attempting to prepare them for successful elementary school experiences. Beyachad (Together) is a four-hour Sunday school enrolling youngsters between the ages of five and 13. Divided into three groups according to age, Beyachad pupils participate in various activities, including Hebrew and English classes, under the direction of madrichim, teen-age leaders prepared by the JCC. The madrichim group includes 10 active leaders and another 20 in training, said Ms. Basina.

Liana Basina directs a busy Jewish community center program in very limited space.

Photo: the writer.

The JCC also offers music programs for all ages (including a children's klezmer group), drama groups for children and teens, an art studio that welcomes all age groups, chess lessons with a local grandmaster, and cooking classes for children. Through

41 Kuba is an area in the Caucasus region, northwest of Baku. However, some active Kuban Cossacks reside outside this area. Military formations of Kuban Cossacks have participated in recent Russia-instigated conflicts in former Russian imperial and Soviet territories.

42 The JCC moved into newer, more spacious premises in the Menorah Center in mid-summer.
celebration of various Jewish holidays, the JCC also engages in informal Jewish education. A recent Purim event drew 400 participants, Ms. Basina said.

Most of these activities require participation fees, Ms. Basina responded to a question. People value the program more when they pay for it, she observed. However, the JCC endeavors to accommodate poor families and will waive or adjust fees for certain programs when the program is appropriate for the participant and the need is real.

In addition to local operations, the JCC also organizes a 10- to 12-day family summer camp that sometimes draws as many as 300 people. Some activities are geared toward children, some toward parents, and some toward families. Some program components generate follow-up activity throughout the year so that families remain engaged in the Jewish community.

The JCC operates a children's summer camp, enrolling about 200 youngsters from the region for 18 to 20 days at a site in Zaporizhzhia. Currently in its third year, the summer camp charges a substantial fee to families and also has drawn financial support from the Genesis Philanthropy Group (Moscow) and World Jewish Relief (London).

In response to a question about the impact of the Russian takeover of Crimea and occupation of parts of eastern Ukraine, Ms. Basina said that people now are very nervous and generally pessimistic. Aliyah to Israel has increased markedly, she continued, drawing both stable and some at-risk families. Parents fear for the future of their children if they remain in Ukraine. The situation affects the JCC in several ways, Ms. Basina stated. First, during the period of massive street demonstrations in Kyiv, families kept their children at home and would not permit them to come to the JCC or go anywhere else; this sense of extraordinary protectiveness extended well beyond the few days in which small and contained demonstrations occurred in Dnipropetrovsk. Parents have relaxed somewhat since the protests in Kyiv have tapered down, but attendance at JCC activities has not recovered completely, she noted. Second, continued Ms. Basina, in common with many other Jewish organizations, the JCC leased a resort in Crimea for its family summer camp; she is assuming that Crimea is now inaccessible. Perhaps they will be able to find a suitable site near Odesa or somewhere in western Ukraine, but such decisions are made by people at higher levels and she does not know if the family camp will operate in 2014. It is very difficult to plan when the situation is so uncertain, said Ms. Basina, and she does not know what to say when parents ask questions.

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43 JCC children's summer camps in the post-Soviet states are somewhat controversial because they "compete" with Jewish Agency summer camps. The longer-established JAFI camps have been designated as recipients of North American Jewish communal funding.

44 See pages 39-40 for information about the JDC Jewish family service operation in Dnipropetrovsk.
18. **Project Kesher** is a Jewish women's organization that promotes Jewish identity-building, leadership development, women's health, and general non-partisan activism in affiliated groups throughout Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia. One of its leaders in Dnipropetrovsk is **Ella Sidorenko**, a longtime activist who stated that it has 65 members in the city.

The largest of **three sub-groups**, comprising approximately 25 women, meets at the Israel Cultural Center, said Ms. Sidorenko. It focuses on women's legal rights and economic issues, particularly home budgeting; some women also have enrolled in ORT computer courses. A second group, perhaps 20 women in all, concentrates on Jewish religious tradition, Ms. Sidorenko stated. The third group, numbering about 15 women, has the most difficult agenda of all, said Ms. Sidorenko. Comprised of mothers and some grandmothers of children at the Beit Chana Special Needs Educational Resource Center, this cluster of women is concerned with health and nutrition (for their children and for themselves), access to physicians, and Jewish tradition. Ms. Sidorenko observed that the demands of raising special needs children - often as single parents - frequently leaves these women physically and emotionally exhausted, financially wanting, and socially isolated. Project Kesher attempts to add some education, networking opportunities, companionship, and happiness to their lives.

*Ella Sidorenko, right, has been active in Project Kesher since its inception.*

Photo: the writer.

Additionally, Ms. Sidorenko continued, Project Kesher works with some younger women - and a few young couples - in economic and financial literacy, legal rights, and family issues. It cooperates with the **Jewish Women's Microenterprise Loan Fund** to help women start their own businesses.

The organization sponsors a **women's seder** that emphasizes the role of women in Jewish history. Project Kesher also is active in interethnic activities, meeting with other groups to learn about their traditions and discuss issues of common interest.

In response to a question, Ms. Sidorenko said that Project Kesher has **no formal office premises** in the city. All of its data is on her home computer, and they use meeting space made available to it by other Jewish organizations.

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45 See pages 61-62.

46 See pages 20-22.

47 See pages 46-47 for more information about the Jewish Women's Microenterprise Loan Fund.
Welfare

19. **Hesed Menachem**, a welfare center operated by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, moved into the sixth floor of the Menorah Center in February, 2014, after many years in a two-story former preschool building. The new premises are somewhat smaller than the old school structure, but the Menorah Center is new, does not require clients to climb stairs, and is in the center of Chabad-organized Jewish communal activity in the city.

Anatoly Pleskachevsky, director of the hesed, stated that some clients were apprehensive about moving to the much larger Menorah Center building, fearing the elevators and worried that they might be unable to navigate among other building users who were younger and moved more quickly and more nimbly. However, Mr. Pleskachevsky said, Menorah Center management has been superb in arranging schedules and assisting any hesed clients who require aid. Mr. Pleskachevsky added that it was good for elderly people to be in a large community building; the presence of other people and the occurrence of many activities add "life" to the perspective of individuals who often are isolated. Security, he noted, was much less complicated in the large Menorah Center, which had its own protective arrangements, than in an isolated building like the old preschool structure.

*Hesed director Anatoly Pleskachevsky is a 34-year veteran of the Soviet armed forces, having retired as a colonel after serving in the artillery corps in Afghanistan.*

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.

The hesed currently is serving **6,000 clients**, almost all of them elderly Jews, in the city and 45 points in the surrounding region, stated Mr. Pleskachevsky. The **client census continues to decline**, he observed, down from 7,000 in 2013.48 The reduction in clientele does not reflect a decline in need, he acknowledged, but a reduction in financial resources available to serve vulnerable Jewish elderly. Further, Mr. Pleskachevsky averred, the ratio of clients eligible to receive services provided by the **Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany** has declined to 40 percent of total clients, an enormous drop from the 85 percent who received Claims Conference funds when he began to work at the hesed 14 years ago.49 He observed that 18 clients died in March, an unusually large number; perhaps, he mused, they died due to the "situation" in eastern Ukraine, that is, they were frightened that hostilities further east would spread to Dnipropetrovsk and that they would be enveloped in another war (after World War II).

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48 The client census was 7,500 in 2012 and 8,000 in both 2011 and 2010.

49 Only those individuals who were victims of the Holocaust are eligible to receive Claims Conference funding. Obviously, many such individuals die each year. See also page 60.
Financial aid to needy clients now is transmitted through PrivatBank debit cards, which are recognized almost everywhere in the hesed service area, said Mr. Pleskachevsky. PrivatBank has cash terminals even in small towns, he stated. Outside Dnipropetrovsk, Mr. Pleskachevsky continued, Dniprodzerzhinsk is the largest hesed base in the area; approximately 400 clients live there. About 280 clients reside in Pavlograd and another fairly large group resides in Novomoskovsk. Other clients live in any of 42 other points, some of them small villages and remnants of Agrojoint farms established by the Joint Distribution Committee in 1924. Some of these very small villages lack dependable electricity, Mr. Pleskachevsky said; 14 people in such locales receive periodic food parcels and medicines because, obviously, bank terminals cannot function without electricity and/or there may be no accessible retail outlets in which to purchase supplies. Hesed Menachem manages a "hesed on wheels" that operates 20 different periodic routes to deliver medicines to specific clients and to conduct assessments of local situations.

The hesed also distributes health care apparatus and implements, such as wheelchairs, walkers, therapeutic mattresses, and other items that are too expensive for many clients to access through conventional retail outlets. Due to space limitations, this service is administered from a large utility closet on the same floor as the hesed that serves unofficially as warehouse space.

The hesed provides patronage or homecare services (cleaning, cooking, shopping) to about 800 homebound clients, stated Mr. Pleskachevsky. Approximately 200 homecare workers are employed in this endeavor. Mr. Pleskachevsky said that this homecare team is very stable; pay is low, but salaries are paid on time.

Asked about inflation, Mr. Pleskachevsky said that it is severe and that the hesed monitors the cost of living on a daily basis. It used to fix prices with suppliers at the beginning of the year, but now vendors are reluctant to set prices even on a monthly basis. The prices of specific medicines may increase two or three times every day, he stated, because most are imported and subject to heavy import taxes and other fees. The cost of locally grown vegetables and certain other foods are relatively stable, but any items transported over significant distances have increased markedly in cost because fuel prices have escalated sharply. Citing a specific economic burden for the hesed, Mr. Pleskachevsky mentioned the birthday parcels that traditionally are

50 The two principals of PrivatBank are Hennady Boholubov and Ihor Kolomoisky, both of whom are major donors to Jewish philanthropy. Mr. Kolomoisky also is governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast. PrivatBank generally is considered the most sophisticated bank in Ukraine. Customers also can pay utility bills through bank terminals and, Mr. Pleskachevsky observed, make tzdekakah contributions at these stations. PrivatBank offers a discount to hesed clients and has placed a bank terminal in the hesed for their use; the terminal is quite popular with clients, Mr. Pleskachevsky said.

51 Agro-Joint established agricultural colonies and industrial schools in Ukraine and Crimea with the active collaboration of Soviet authorities. However, the Soviet Union expelled foreign groups in 1938, causing many Agro-Joint institutions to collapse. Many displaced farmers moved to urban areas at that time, while a relatively small number remained on settlements or in nearby villages. A large proportion of former Agro-Joint workers were killed during the Holocaust.
presented to clients on their birthdays; these parcels usually include chocolates, oranges, and other gift items, but the cost of oranges has risen so much that this custom has become very burdensome financially for the hesed. Yet, clients still expect to receive oranges on their birthdays.

**Pensions** are being delivered on time so far, Mr. Pleskachevsky averred. However, he is not confident that this practice will continue. "Who knows about next month?" he asked rhetorically.

The hesed operates a **day center program** for its mobile elderly clients, dividing them into 22 groups of 30 people each according to the areas in which they reside. Participants engage in various social activities, celebrate holidays, arrange medical services in physicians' offices, and are served a midday dinner in a Menorah Center restaurant. They also may have their hair cut and receive other services.  

Special events are held in Menorah Center banquet halls and the Sinai Theater. Clients are transported between their homes and the Menorah Center by hesed vans. Groups usually attend the center three times during each two-month period, said Mr. Pleskachevsky. In addition to the large day center in Dnipropetrovsk, the hesed operates a smaller center serving 18 people in Dniprodzerzhinsk.

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52 As mentioned earlier, some hesed clients elect to learn computer skills in an information technology center operated by the Hillel student group. See page 24 in this report.
Veterans of World War II are honored in the hesed and elsewhere in the Jewish community. A major commemoration is held every year on Victory Day, which is marked in the post-Soviet states on May 9. The writer met briefly with retired Col. Solomon Flaks, age 87, who is the official "emissary" of Jewish World War II veterans in Dnipropetrovsk; Col. Flaks gives public lectures and appears on various television programs. He has been a hesed member for more than 20 years.

Col. (Ret.) Solomon Flaks is well-known in Dnipropetrovsk as a representative of World War II Jewish war veterans. In a conference room adjacent to the day center, he holds a volume of a post-Soviet book collection written to commemorate the wartime heroism of Jewish Red Army combatants; Soviet accounts usually ignored their achievements.

Photo: the writer.

20. The Joint Distribution Committee also sponsors a Jewish Family Service that focuses on the needs of at-risk children and families. According to director Natasha Gusak, the JFS has 1,531 child clients, each of whom is at risk due to poor parenting, impoverishment, and/or disabilities. A modest daycare program attempts to prepare a small number of targeted children between the ages of 18 months and three years for successful entry into regular preschools (kindergartens); classes on parenting are held for their mothers. Some at-risk school-age youngsters are invited to regular JCC activities and limited tutoring is available to those who need assistance with school work. Material support in the form of food parcels and medicines is provided to some impoverished families.

A related program is Mothers for a Better Future, which targets single parents in need of "psychological rehabilitation". Women are offered counseling, basic English and computer skills, workplace skills, and referrals to programs that might help them to become hairdressers, bookkeepers, or comparable specialists.

The Tikvah special needs program enrolls 130 children, some of whom also attend the Special Needs Educational Resource Center at Beit Chana. Tikvah program components focus on speech and animal therapy, crafts work, and occasional swimming lessons. Some youngsters also receive massages. Thirty-seven families of children in this group receive financial aid, said Ms. Gusak. Three bedridden youngsters receive certain services at home.

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53 See pages 20-22. The Resource Center program is more comprehensive and focuses more on education, whereas the Tikvah program is more social and recreational in character.
A major issue in dealing with special-needs youngsters in Ukraine, Ms. Gusak continued, is parental denial that a child requires assistance. Parents may repudiate a diagnosis that their youngster has an autism spectrum disorder, for example, and simply keep a child at home after he/she has been expelled from a conventional public school for behavioral reasons. They do not seek support, perhaps because they are reluctant to acknowledge that their child is different, they are unaware of support programs, special education services are poorly developed, and/or such services have poor reputations or are costly. Families come to Tikvah through physician referrals, said Ms. Gusak, but then Tikvah must deal with reluctant parents. In response to parental issues, JFS has formed a parent support group.54

Individuals in the photo at left are participating in Yadid (Heb., Friend), a group for adults with developmental disabilities. Yadid organizes occasional recreation and social programs, some of which are held in conjunction with Jewish holidays.

Photo: the writer.

21. Adopt-A-Bubbe/Adopt-A-Zayde is an independent assistance program created by Dr. Judith Patkin, the Executive Director of Action for Post-Soviet Jewry in Waltham, MA. The Dnipropetrovsk organization supports elderly Jews in Dnipropetrovsk itself and in 18 additional cities or large towns and numerous smaller towns in eastern, central, and southern Ukraine.55 However, the total number of towns served has declined as Jewish populations in these villages have diminished to the point where service calls are economically prohibitive. At any given time, said Yan and Tanya Sidelkovsky, who direct AAB operations in the Dnipropetrovsk region, approximately 800 to 850 individuals are on their client list, a reduction of approximately 200 since 2013 due to financial constraints. Some clients are rotated in and out of their service census periodically in order to serve more people, Mrs. Sidelkovsky stated.

54 The issue of parental denial of child disabilities is widespread throughout Ukraine.

See also pages 59-61 for an interview with Yoni Leifer, who directs all Joint Distribution Committee operations in the region.

55 The program also operates in several other regions of the former Soviet states. However, this report deals only with work that is directed from its Dnipropetrovsk office. In addition to assisting Jews, Adopt-A-Bubbe also reaches out to elderly Righteous Gentiles, i.e., those from families who helped Jews during the Holocaust.
Elderly clients who die are replaced by younger pensioners; the younger pensioners may have greater needs because they do not receive the government bonuses and other government benefits (such as discounts on use of utilities) given to veterans of World War II. The program also supports some working-age Jews who are chronically ill or handicapped, as well as some Jewish families with young children in which the parents are unemployed.

The major form of AAB service is the distribution of general food parcels to a long list of needy Jews. The organization also provides food, clothing, and medicine tailored to the specific requirements of particular clients, such as food and medications for diabetics. Further, it assists patients in hospitals who usually must bring their own linens and medicines, as well as food, for their hospitalization. AAB provides medicines and medical supplies (such as catheters, syringes, and surgical instruments) to several hospitals, both as general assistance and as an incentive for hospitals to admit and treat AAB clients who require hospitalization.

A signature social program of Adopt-a-Bubbe is the warm home day centers, which are held in the apartments of participants. Adopt-a-Bubbe currently operates two warm homes in Dnipropetrovsk (one on each side of the Dnipro River) and 10 others in its broader service region. Ten to 12 seniors attend each warm home every month, with some people rotating in or out each session so that more individuals are able to participate. With financial assistance from AAB, the hostess and other participants purchase food for a full hot meal; both the hostess and some guests prepare the dishes so that the hostess is not overwhelmed and more people feel valued. Sometimes a few individuals may bring wine or other treats on their own. In addition to consuming a hot, nutritious meal, participants celebrate birthdays and holidays, sing, dance, participate in discussions on Judaism and Jewish history, and take part in other activities. The opportunities for socializing and for intellectual exercise are just as important as the hot meal, said Mr. Sidelkovsky. Mr. Sidelkovsky acknowledged that the Joint Distribution Committee had initiated the warm home program and then abandoned it as a consequence of budgetary pressures, re-started it with only limited food service, then abandoned it again.

56 Mr. Sidelkovsky often leads these discussions. He has become educated in Jewish tradition and history through online courses and individual tutoring.
The Sidelkovskys are assisted by part-time local coordinators, many of whom are recent retirees, in most of the larger Jewish population centers in which AAB is active. The coordinators receive modest compensation for their work, a supplement to their low pensions. However, said the Sidelkovskys, many of the coordinators are now 65 to 75 years old themselves and need assistance from AAB.

In some cities, volunteer physicians are enlisted in AAB efforts. Consulting physicians in Boston also provide assistance. Additionally, certain medicines and medical implements are obtained in Boston and brought or shipped to Dnipropetrovsk.

In response to a question about current economic conditions, Mr. Sidelkovsky said that retirees are receiving pensions on time. The median pension (in March) was 1,000 hryvnia, which used to be the equivalent of about $130; however, continued Mr. Sidelkovsky, inflation has reduced its value to $100. On April 1, the cost of utilities is scheduled to increase 50 percent and the cost of medicines will increase 50 to 100 percent. General political and economic instability has led banks to cease lending money, Mr. Sidelkovsky stated, thus reducing investment and general economic growth.

The hesed, said Mr. Sidelkovsky, is now providing financial assistance through debit cards to its clients once every three months, rather than the monthly subsidies provided earlier. Further, whereas the hesed previously provided about 100 hryvnia (about $10 in March) monthly, it is now providing 160 hryvnia once every three months, a major decline in aid to clients just as they are being affected by serious inflation. Thus, continued Mr. Sidelkovsky, the twice-annual (at Rosh Hashanah and at Purim/Pesach) synagogue distribution of food parcels to Jewish elderly has assumed greater importance. Holocaust survivors, Mr. Sidelkovsky noted, are receiving about 300 hryvnia monthly through the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany.

Mr. and Mrs. Sidelkovsky noted that young and old alike are experiencing great tension about the current political situation with Russia. Uncertainty takes a terrible toll on one's psychological health, he said.57

22. The Beit Baruch Assisted Living Facility for elderly Jews opened in 2002, the first of only two dedicated residences for Jewish seniors in all of the post-Soviet states.58 Beit Baruch provides accommodations in single or double rooms with private bathrooms, meals, medical care, and social activities. The building is located in a relatively quiet outlying area on the site of a former preschool. The preschool was razed to the ground and then replaced by a clean, modern residential facility.

57 Mr. Sidelkovsky also is the local coordinator for Dnipropetrovsk programs sponsored by Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston. See pages 62-63.

58 The other is in Kyiv. See pages 110-112.
Although the official capacity of Beit Baruch is 94, American geriatric specialists recommend that the total number of residents not exceed 75 to 80. The current census is only 47 individuals, said director Mila Ruvinskaya, the low number reflecting both Chabad community concerns about financial support of additional patients and the need of an increasing number of residents with dementia for single rooms. Ms. Ruvinskaya stated that the patient roster included 24 men and 23 women; 17 people were bedridden, some in very serious condition. Sixteen individuals died in 2013, Ms. Ruvinskaya continued, and two people had moved to Israel to join family members who had made aliyah previously. Each individual who had departed had been replaced by a newcomer. All but one of the residents were from the Dnipropetrovsk area, Ms. Ruvinskaya said; the non-local person was from nearby Zaporizhzhya. In addition to the permanent residents, Beit Baruch also hosts temporary patients receiving therapy after hip replacement surgery.

Mila Ruvinskaya, who previously worked in a management capacity at the local hesed, is respected for her management skills and commitment to patients at Beit Baruch.

Photo: the writer.

The oldest patient at Beit Baruch is 99, said Ms. Ruvinskaya. The youngest, age 61, is a double amputee and widower. The man's son refuses to care for him. His mother, now 85, was a patient at Beit Baruch while recovering from hip surgery, but is unable to provide the home-based assistance that he needs.

Beit Baruch derives significant benefit from the Jewish Medical Center (see below), which remains located within the Beit Baruch building, stated Ms. Ruvinskaya. However, its impending move to the Menorah Center will cause problems for Beit Baruch patients. Many of them are too frail to travel into the center of the city for medical appointments, and many physicians are reluctant to travel to the outskirts of town to see Beit Baruch patients.

Although the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has appointed a new director for the region, the cooperative arrangements initiated by the previous director, Esther Katz, continue. JDC provides financial assistance to Beit Baruch for the hip replacement and rehabilitation program, Ms. Ruvinskaya stated. JDC also gives some medicines to Beit Baruch, she noted.

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59 Boston-area physicians, led by Dr. Lewis Lifsitz of Harvard Medical School and Hebrew Senior Life of Boston, visit Dnipropetrovsk regularly.

60 A portion of the facility had been closed off from the main section, thus saving heat and other costs. Later, it was reopened to accommodate Jews displaced from areas of Ukraine by Russian separatists.

61 See pages 59-61 for a report of an interview with the current JDC regional director, Yoni Leifer.
23. The **Jewish Medical Center** opened in February 2012 in ground floor premises at the Beit Baruch Assisted Living Facility. Although housed in its own wing of Beit Baruch, it is accessible from inside the residence without going outdoors. It also has its own separate outside entrance so that non-resident clients and staff may enter and leave without disturbing Beit Baruch. JMC fulfills a longtime goal of the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad community to provide high-quality medical services to the Jewish population at low cost. The clinic also is open to non-Jews and does not discriminate in the provision of care. Small fees are paid for all services.

The writer spoke with Dr. Elena Strakh, who had been director of the JMC for about six months at the time of the writer’s visit. Dr. Strakh explained that the medical center is open five days each week, Sunday through Thursday. Its professional staff includes **three fulltime adult-care physicians**, including Dr. Strakh, and a number of consulting physicians in various specialties who are onsite one or two days each week. The major group of specialists consists of 15 doctors with significant experience in one or another aspect of geriatric medicine.

*Dr. Elena Strakh manages the increasingly complex operations of the Jewish Medical Center in Dnipropetrovsk.*

Photo: the writer.

In addition to caring for patients at Beit Baruch, JMC is under contract to the Joint Distribution Committee to provide **medical services to Hesed Menachem clients**. Therefore, its client load is very large. The very successful **hip replacement program** operates under JMC supervision.

Since November, Dr. Strakh continued, JMC has employed **three pediatricians** who, for now, are focusing on youngsters enrolled in the Jewish day school and preschool, many of whom have chronic health problems. JMC provides pediatric care in general medicine, orthopedics, neurology, and ophthalmology.

JMC manages its own **medical laboratories**, which are clean, technically advanced, and free of corruption. (Physicians in general clinics in Ukraine often receive kickbacks from commercial laboratories for ordering non-essential tests; the laboratories, in turn, receive kickbacks from local pharmaceutical companies for skewing test results in favor of expensive medicines. From its inception, JMC has paid its staff generously to deter graft and has taken a very strong stance against corruption.)

In response to a question, Dr. Strakh said that the **average daily patient census** was ten to 15 outpatients, in addition to Beit Baruch residents. However, she stated, the census increases to as many as 25 people on days when certain specialists, such as
orthopedists, are onsite. Chabad provides transportation for patients between more central points in the city and the clinic.

Dr. Strakh observed that most clinic patients are very poor and are accustomed to being treated rudely by local service providers, including both professionals and bureaucrats at medical clinics and hospitals. They are surprised at the cleanliness of JMC and by the courteous manner in which they are treated.

The great distance of the clinic from the center of the city has been the central factor in the decision to move the clinic from its current location at Beit Baruch into premises that are being designed for it at the Menorah Center. The clinic will occupy a large space on the ground floor and a smaller area in the basement. The ground floor area will include four to five consulting/treatment rooms for adults and a pediatric section with three to four consulting/treatment rooms for children, along with a play room. Laboratories, x-ray and other diagnostic apparatus, and a physical therapy center will be in the basement; elevators will take patients, their families, and professionals between the two areas.

In a separate discussion with Zelig Brez, executive director of the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad community, Mr. Brez said that the JMC has earned a reputation of trust and respect throughout the city. However, its growth is dependent upon a more centralized location that is easily accessible to more Jewish people, particularly to the more vulnerable segments of the Jewish population. (Clearly, the new location of the medical center in the same building as the hesed will ease access for Jewish elderly.) A "meticulous" team of Boston specialists and volunteers has played a major role in designing the new Menorah medical space and securing furnishings and equipment for it, stated Mr. Brez. Local architects and designers lack understanding of basic sanitation requirements, the need for ramps (in place of stairs), and other issues, Mr. Brez declared; they have all learned a great deal in working with Americans according to American standards, he said.

The Boston plan also envisions using the new Jewish Medical Center as a base for training a new generation of competent physicians who will serve the entire population. The best young local physicians with five to ten years experience will be trained by recently retired Boston doctors, both personally and through teleconferencing, in a rigorous continuing education program that addresses medicine in a technical sense as well as in terms of medical ethics, said Mr. Brez.

24. Ahavat Israel was established in 2011 with a mission of bringing Jewish life to Jewish deaf and non-speaking individuals in Dnipropetrovsk. Having been approached by several individuals in this population group, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki authorized establishment of such organization and asked Rimma Margolina, manager of the women's mikveh, to supervise it on a volunteer basis.

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62 See pages 49-51 for the remainder of the interview with Mr. Brez.
Ms. Margolina stated that all severely hearing-impaired Jews in the city know each other because they attend one of two special public schools designated for individuals with this disability. She noted that the schools teach hearing-impaired individuals to use sign language and train males for factory jobs and women for work as seamstresses. About 40 hearing-impaired Jews have expressed interest in Jewish social gatherings, she said.

Initially, Ms. Margolina stated, the group met fairly regularly to celebrate Jewish holidays and just to socialize in several different locales. However, decreasing allocations from the Chabad Philanthropic Fund have forced serious cutbacks in programming. They cannot afford to pay a local sign-language interpreter, who will provide only a limited amount of free service. She is a young mother of three children who does not have time to work without compensation. Further, clients would like to schedule some events in places outside the Menorah Center, but Ahavat Israel lacks funds to rent different venues. Most participants, Ms. Margolina noted, work in low-paying jobs and cannot afford to pay substantive program fees. Transportation also is difficult for many of them.

Rimma Margolina, the "mikvah lady" in Dnipropetrovsk, also manages the Ahavat Israel group for hearing-impaired Jews. She expressed great frustration at being asked to direct the program without financial resources.

Photo: Chabad of Dnipropetrovsk.

A lack of funding, said Ms. Margolina, has reduced Ahavat Israel to two events, social gatherings at Purim and Chanukah, each year. Attendance has fallen from 30 people to 20 individuals. A few people with discretionary cash, Ms. Margolina said, travel to Kyiv to join with a similar group in the Brodsky synagogue there that has more activity and a sign language interpreter, but this option is not available to everyone.

25. The Jewish Women's Microenterprise Loan Fund, operating with support from Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston (the Jewish federation in Boston), aims to assist Jewish women in generating and/or expanding small businesses in Dnipropetrovsk. All loans are processed through PrivatBank, a large and highly-regarded bank controlled by two Dnipropetrovsk Jewish oligarchs, Hennady Boholubov and Ihor Kolomoisky.

A committee of PrivatBank officials and local Jewish community representatives evaluates loan applications. The average loan in recent years has been $3,500, the maximum was $5,000. In addition to the application itself, the loan committee also considers personal circumstances of the applicant, such as family income and number of dependents. More than 80 loans have been extended since inception of the project.
and almost all have been paid in full or are on schedule with repayment. Only two are
late, said the director, Natasha Rier; the committee does not yet consider these to be
defaults.

The Loan Fund currently is managing 20 active projects, Ms. Rier said, noting that its
capacity is about 25 outstanding loans. The current political and economic situation in
Ukraine has made both people and banks highly risk-averse. They have received
15 to 20 percent fewer applications than usual, stated Ms. Rier.

People still have good ideas, she continued, but they are afraid to act. Ms. Rier said
that many would-be applicants already are working two or even three jobs to make ends
meet; when they come to her, they are depressed (подавленные) and overwhelmed by the circumstances
of their daily lives. Some are well-educated, she acknowledged, but they just are unable to create suc-
cessful lives. She becomes a counselor, trying to help women focus on attainable goals.

Natasha Rier has directed the Jewish Women’s Microenterprise Loan Fund since its inceptions. The current uncertain
situation in Ukraine makes business development very diffi-
cult, she says.

Photo: the writer.

The Loan Fund arranges classes in basic business management and assists women in
writing business plans. It works with ORT to offer courses in computer skills, from basic
computer literacy to advanced applications. Ms. Rier also considers Project Kesher a
valued partner for its ORT/Keshernet program, which teaches Microsoft Office. The
women who enroll in business management and/or computer classes meet several
times each week and form a natural support group that helps them deal with their
psychological issues, Ms. Rier said.63

63 See the writer’s most recent previous report Observations on Jewish Community Life in Ukraine - Report of a Visit
in April 2013, page 74, for a description of some of the business projects supported by the Jewish Women’s Micro-
enterprise Loan Fund.
Synagogue-Administered Activity

26. Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki, a native of Kfar Chabad in Israel, is Chief Rabbi of Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipropetrovsk oblast. He was sent to the city, an important site in Chabad history, by Chabad Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson nearly 25 years ago and today is considered by many observers to be the most capable large-city rabbi in all of the post-Soviet states. He has built a complex communal infrastructure, including both social welfare and educational institutions as well as the grand Menorah Center. He enjoys excellent relations with international Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and ORT; he also encourages the unique and fruitful sister-city relationship between the Jewish communities of Dnipropetrovsk and Boston. In addition to connections with Jewish organizations, Rabbi Kaminezki is respected by local, oblast, and national government officials as well as diplomats and other foreigners who perceive him as a keen observer of local and national developments in Ukraine.64

Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki was born in Israel and completed rabbinic training in the United States. His advice is widely sought.

Photo: the writer (in 2013).

In speaking of Russian interference in Ukraine, Rabbi Kaminezki said that all Ukrainian Jewish oligarchs are patriotic Ukrainians and support the independence of Ukraine. Many are extending financial assistance to the Ukrainian government, a circumstance that is well-known among the general population and greatly appreciated. Support for Ukrainian sovereignty is solid among the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish population, Rabbi Kaminezki stated.

Rabbi Kaminezki continued that Jews should pray for peace and harmony and should eschew politics when speaking from a Jewish community platform. It must be accepted, he continued, that Jews in Ukraine support the government of Ukraine; Jews from Russia should not attempt to persuade them to do otherwise.65

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64 However, Rabbi Kaminezki is alleged by some as intolerant of non-Orthodox Judaism, having blocked the development of a Progressive/Reform Jewish presence in the city.

65 The reference was to Rabbi Berel Lazar, Chabad Chief Rabbi of Russia, who sought unsuccessfully to obtain signatures of Chabad rabbis in Ukraine to a letter of support for Russia in its breach of Ukrainian sovereignty. The action of Rabbi Lazar, who has long been derided as Chief Rabbi of the Kremlin, appears to have caused a major rupture between the Chabad movements of the two countries. Notwithstanding his comment about the need for
Rabbi Kaminezki spoke very positively of the new Israeli professionals representing the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency for Israel - Yoni Leifer and Natasha Nabitovsky and Max Lurie - in the region. They are all strong professionals, he said, and he looks forward to working with them.\(^6^6\)

In response to a question, Rabbi Kaminezki acknowledged that the **ongoing financial crisis** is having a major deleterious impact on the Chabad community in Dnipropetrovsk. A number of formerly generous donors have suffered serious business losses and, in response, have trimmed their contributions to the Philanthropic Fund. Additionally, individuals and organizations have cancelled events in the Menorah Center, thus reducing revenues expected from that facility. Sometimes, he continued, it is difficult to pay salaries on time.\(^6^7\)

With the exception of difficulties caused by the economic crisis, the **Menorah Center** is fulfilling the goals established for it, said Rabbi Kaminezki. It has become a true communal center; at any time on a weekday, he continued, between 1,500 and 1,700 people are in the building. In addition to the businesses and organizations that maintain offices and program areas in the building, a low-cost, but profitable, diner attracts 300 to 400 people daily for lunch or dinner, and a market-rate coffee shop attracts another clientele. An upscale kosher restaurant was due to open soon.\(^6^8\)

As soon as finances permit, the **small community center building** attached to the back of the synagogue will be renovated and turned over to certain community operations that do not generate revenue. These include executive offices of the Chabad community, Adopt-a-Bubbe, and the Jewish Women's Microenterprise Loan Fund, said Rabbi Kaminezki. Additionally, the management offices of the Menorah Center itself probably will be moved to the old building because the space that it currently occupies could be leased to commercial firms that pay market rent.

\(^27\) Vyecheslav “Slavik” or “Zelig” Brez is the Executive Director (Исполнительный директор) of the **Philanthropic Fund of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish Community (Благотворительный фонд Днепропетровского еврейского общины)**, which supports Chabad interests in the city.

\(^{6^6}\) Jewish leaders to avoid politics, Rabbi Kaminezki offered some defense of his Moscow colleague, saying that Rabbi Lazar must state his support of Russian actions because he needs the endorsement of the Kremlin.

\(^{6^7}\) Mr. Leifer represents JDC; see pages 59-61. Ms. Nabitovsky represents the Jewish Agency in the city of Dnipropetrovsk and her husband, Max Lurie, represents the Jewish Agency in the rest of eastern Ukraine; see pages 57-59.

\(^{6^8}\) See also the interview with Zelig Brez, executive director of the Chabad Philanthropic Fund, on pages 49-51.

\(^{6^8}\) Each of these cafés and restaurants is privately operated.
Mr. Brez stated that the Philanthropic Fund annual budget, which stood at about $5 million in better years, is $4.3 million in 2013-2014 and probably will be about $3.3 million in 2014-2015. (The budget excludes expenses for the Menorah Center, Beit Chana, the Jewish Medical Center, and certain other projects/programs that are financed separately.) The considerable decline reflects fewer contributions, contributions of lesser value, community politics, changes in the currency exchange rate that are unfavorable to Ukraine, and inflation that is largely a product of the confrontation with Russia.

Many Philanthropic Fund donors, continued Mr. Brez, have lost their businesses; as examples, he cited several local Jews who owned property in Crimea that has been commandeered by Russians without compensation. Others have lost trade partners in Russia or own businesses in Ukraine that are dependent upon a middle or even upper class clientele that exists in far fewer numbers than previously.

A major donor whose gift provided a substantial portion of the budget has ceased giving due to a business dispute with other major donors. The value of the Ukrainian currency (hryvnia) has plunged 35 percent in the last three months [as of early April 2014], thus making all imported goods much more expensive than earlier.

Asked about inflation, Mr. Brez responded that the cost of fuel (transportation and heating) has increased about 25 percent in the last year. Imported goods have increased 25 to 30 percent he said, and local food has increased 10 to 15 percent. He attributed the rise in food costs to increased fuel prices.

Above all, stated Mr. Brez, is the sense of uncertainty, which has almost paralyzed donors. People, even usually very confident and decisive successful businessmen, are risk-averse when uncertainty prevails in every dimension of life. The number of regular fairly substantive donors to the Philanthropic Fund, which was almost 90 several years ago, fell to 70 in 2012-2013 and probably will be about 50 this year. The Philanthropic Fund is too dependent on a small number of major donors, acknowledged Mr. Brez; when one declines to give because of conflicts with other donors or because of business setbacks, the community suffers enormously.

Zelig Brez is the executive director of the Chabad philanthropic fund and the general Chabad infrastructure in Dnipropetrovsk.

Photo: the writer.

In response, Mr. Brez said, the Chabad community has initiated major reductions in its programs, although it has taken care to preserve welfare measures for the most vulnerable population groups, i.e., elderly and small children. It has postponed indefinitely all but the most vital capital projects, including repairs, unless donors can be
found to sponsor them. It has suspended operation of its summer camps for local Jewish children, a move that saves about $200,000. It has reduced the number of Israeli teachers of Jewish subjects in its schools, saving more than $100,000 that had to be paid for transportation, higher salaries, rent allowances, insurance, and other costs; the engagement of more local Jews as Jewish-content teachers is possible only because the community had invested in their Jewish education at Beit Chana and in certain foreign institutions, Mr. Brez noted. Some executive salaries that previously were paid in United States currency are now paid in Ukrainian hryvnia, a significant financial burden to the recipients. Additional savings also have been implemented, stated Mr. Brez, and more will be in place in 2014-2015.

**Antisemitism**, although always present in Ukraine, has not increased as much as might be expected under the current difficult economic circumstances, said Mr. Brez in answer to a question. The right-wing individuals and groups from western Ukraine are more patriotic than nationalist, he stated. The real danger to Jews comes from the strongly Russian nationalist speech and actions of President Vladimir Putin of Russia, as well as from provocative writing of certain Russian journalists, averred Mr. Brez.

28. **Igor Romanov** is Director of the **regional office** of the **Union of Jewish Religious Communities** (Объединение юдейских религиозных общин), the Chabad religious organization in Ukraine. The Dnipropetrovsk region includes 16 communities in Dnipropetrovsk and Kirovohrad oblasts. The role of the regional office is to bring Jewish life to Jews in towns in the area that do not have rabbis. Only three cities of the 16 - Krivoi Rog, Kirovohrad, and Dniprodzerzhynsk⁶⁹ - have resident rabbis, Mr. Romanov noted.

*Igor Romanov represents Chabad in small Jewish population centers in Dnipropetrovsk and Kirovohrad oblasts. He also is the chief liaison officer between Chabad and political and judicial systems in Dnipropetrovsk itself and in the two oblasts. In his spare time, Mr. Romanov is a competitive badminton player."

Photo: the writer.

The regional office extends support to these Jewish population centers for **celebration of Jewish holidays**, Mr. Romanov stated. For example, about 2,000 people in these towns attended Purim celebrations, and 1,500 attended Pesach seders. For the seders, he said, his office provides matza, wine, juice and haggadot, as well as illustrated instructions on how to organize the seder table. Local communities are expected to

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⁶⁹ Mr. Romanov stated that the size of the Jewish population in Krivoi Rog is about 6,000. Each of the other two cities has about 4,000 Jews, he said. See page 76-80 for more information about Jewish life in Krivoi Rog.
purchase other food items. Chabad sends a young rabbi or yeshiva students to lead the seder.

For each of the last 10 years, Mr. Romanov continued, his office has distributed gift parcels of food to Jewish elderly and invalids twice yearly, at Rosh Hashanah and at Purim/Pesach. The parcels contain basic food staples, such as cooking oil, as well as canned vegetables, tins of fish, and other items. In current economic conditions, Mr. Romanov observed, the need for such food assistance has only increased. It seems that the number of elderly people without family support has grown, and the number of people with chronic health conditions that limit their ability to work also has multiplied. Although the quantity of food parcels distributed - 5,700 - sounds impressive, Mr. Romanov acknowledged, the number actually has been reduced by 100 from last year as Dnipropetrovsk Chabad attempts to deal with its financial crisis.

The regional office also organizes commemorative events for Jewish veterans of World War II and recently honored about 50 Jewish master athletes for their sports achievements. Involvement of Jewish young people in community endeavors requires more financial support than currently is available.

In his work with the local judicial system, Mr. Romanov refers individuals who need legal representation to local lawyers who are competent and eschew corruption. If people cannot afford to pay for legal assistance, Mr. Romanov usually can find attorneys who accept clients on a non-fee basis. An individual sponsor has enabled Chabad to initiate a program of visiting Jewish prisoners in punitive labor camps throughout Ukraine, stated Mr. Romanov. These individuals include people who emigrated to Israel, but failed to adjust there and returned to Ukraine. Chabad provided kits to 60 Jewish inmates for individual seders in labor camps (with juice instead of wine) and also supplies prisoners with certain personal items. However, Mr. Romanov said, a major problem occurs with Jewish former prisoners after their release. Their prison record often impedes their ability to find work, many lack marketable skills anyway, and many are aggressive, even dangerous. When they fail to find work, some come to the synagogue to demand/beg for financial support.

Another area of Mr. Romanov’s work is representing the Jewish community in various civic groups. Among these is Unity (Единство), a well-known and highly respected local organization that includes representatives of all Dnipropetrovsk ethnic groups. The work of these groups encourages ethnic harmony in the city, Mr. Romanov stated.

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70 Chabad requires that all young people participating in its community activities are halachically Jewish. However, some individuals who receive its food parcels and other welfare assistance are not halachically Jewish.

71 See the interview with Eliahu Pavlotsky, page 53.
29. **Eliahu Pavlotsky**, a local man, directs **Pidyon Shavuyim** (Heb., פדיון השבויים, lit. Redemption of the Captives), a Chabad organization in Ukraine that is tasked with visiting Jewish prisoners in Ukrainian prison and labor camps. Mr. Pavlotsky said that he has been leading the program for three years in Dnipropetrovsk oblast and for shorter periods in other regions.

Nine prison/labor colonies for men exist in Dnipropetrovsk oblast, along with one for women, said Mr. Pavlotsky. Four to six Jews are in each men's colony, he explained, and one halachically Jewish woman is in the women's prison camp. It is possible that these numbers are low, he added, because some Jews may be afraid to publicly identify as Jews and others may not even know that they are Jewish. He visits each camp once monthly, bringing Jewish books, tefillin, and Jewish holiday items. He also teaches Jewish inmates about their heritage. When permitted by camp administration, he brings material assistance, such as food, clothing, and medicine. His visits to prison camps/colonies in other regions are less frequent, but he did visit 90 colonies throughout Ukraine before or during Pesach. In general, stated Mr. Pavlotsky, prison camp administration is very positive about the work of Pidyon Shavuyim.

**Eliahu Pavlotsky** directs the Pidyon Shavuyim program that is sponsored by an individual from Dnipropetrovsk. Mr. Pavlotsky is the father of Elisha Pavlotsky (pages 26-27), who directs the See the Light program. Pavlotsky father and son are representative of a number of local families in which several people are employed by Chabad.

Photo: the writer.

In response to a question about his working relationship with **Rabbi Levi Raices** of Kharkiv, who does the same kind of work in that city, Mr. Pavlotsky said that he knows Rabbi Raices, but does not work with him. The writer did not ask him about collaboration with rabbis in other cities who also visit Jewish inmates in labor/prison colonies.

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72 Pidyon shavuyim is a religious responsibility in Judaism to secure the release of other Jews who are held by bandits or slavers or are otherwise unjustly imprisoned. The release of the prisoner is gained by a ransom paid by the Jewish community. Chabad is using the term loosely as there is no suggestion that Jews in Ukrainian prison camps are being held unjustly or that Chabad is attempting to secure their release before their camp term is completed. Oddly, Mr. Pavlotsky did not know the name of the group that he directs when asked by the writer at the beginning of their meeting; he may have known it in Russian translation, but did not mention the Russian name (although the language of the discussion was Russian) and had to leave the meeting briefly to call someone for the name.

73 See page 68 for an interview with Rabbi Raices.
30. Rabbi Mayer Stambler, an Israeli, is Executive Director of the Chabad Federation of Jewish Communities in Ukraine. Chabad now has rabbis in 32 cities in Ukraine, somewhat fewer than previously. Some representations have closed because the Jewish population in the locale has declined to a level that is too low to support a rabbi and the programs that he operates. Rabbi Stambler also acknowledges that some appointed rabbis simply do not fulfill their responsibilities and are forced to leave.

The general economic situation has been tough for all rabbis and for all Chabad institutions in the country. However, Rabbi Stambler said that Russian intervention in Ukraine has created sympathy and, he continued, he is hopeful that this sympathy will generate new support for Chabad work in the country.

Based in Dnipropetrovsk, Rabbi Meir Stambler is well-informed about Chabad operations throughout Ukraine. He has special expertise on Chabad educational institutions in the country.

Speaking of the Beit Chana International Humanitarian-Pedagogical Institute, Rabbi Stambler said that reconstruction of the donated building and the new structures on the same site has proved more complex and expensive than anticipated. Although it had been hoped that the new premises would be ready for use by the beginning of the 2015-2016 academic year, it now appears likely that the following academic year is a more realistic target date.

31. Oleg Rostovtsev is a media specialist whose primary client is the Chabad Jewish community structure in Dnipropetrovsk. He is responsible for the community website (http://djc.com.ua), a community newspaper (Shabbat Shalom), and a weekly television show, Alef. Each episode of Alef is shown twice weekly on a regional network and draws several hundred thousand viewers to its program of interviews with local Jews and visiting Jewish guests, information about Jewish holidays and Jewish current events, and news from Israel. Because of its large audience, it attracts significant advertising. Mr. Rostovtsev also produces various publications for the community, arranges and manages press conferences, and serves as a guide/contact person for visiting reporters and other media specialists.

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74 Chabad rabbis usually are subsidized by a central body for their first year or so when opening a new Chabad community. After this initial period, they are responsible for raising their own funds, approaching both local and international donors.

75 See pages 27-28.
In common with other people with whom the writer spoke, Mr. Rostovtsev expressed **full support for Ukraine** in its confrontation with Russia. Local people are very "proud" of the demonstrations on Maidan that forced Viktor Yanukhovich to flee the country, Mr. Rostovtsev said; they believe that they have created a "new country," one that bears few vestiges of the old Soviet Union. Continuing, Mr. Rostovtsev said that people in Ukraine want to be modern and sophisticated, whereas Russia appears to want to revive the USSR.

The writer asked Mr. Rostovtsev, a keen observer of **antisemitism**, if anti-Jewish bigotry had increased during the current turmoil. On the contrary, he responded, it is well-known that wealthy Jews, such as Ihor Kolomoisky, are providing financial support to the Ukrainian defense effort; their generosity brings additional respect to the Jewish people. Further, he added, Jews are very well integrated into Ukrainian - and, especially, Dnipropetrovsk, society. Dnipropetrovsk is host to many different ethnic groups and people get along together. However, continued Mr. Rostovtsev, some antisemitic sentiment has been injected into the current situation by Russian nationalists, including "political tourists" who have entered Ukraine ostensibly as tourists, but conduct themselves as agitators. Some have declared that Jews are allied with Banderists and intend to destroy Ukraine, stated Mr. Rostovtsev.

*Oleg Rostovtsev is a media relations specialist in the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish community.*

Photo: the writer (in 2013).

Although Mr. Rostovtsev remained hopeful that Ukraine would emerge from this episode in its history as an independent, modern state, he expressed concern about the future. The situation is very difficult (тяжело) even now, especially regarding the economic well-being of the country, and conditions are unlikely to improve. The previous president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukhovych, and his cronies "took our money" and little remains for basic needs.

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76 For additional reference to Russian "political tourists", see page 70.

77 The reference is to Stepan Bandera (1909-1959), a Ukrainian nationalist accused of working with Germany during World War II against the Soviet Union and in favor of an independent, non-Soviet Ukraine. He also is accused of collaborating with Nazi forces in the murder of Jews in Ukraine during the Holocaust. Bandera was assassinated by the Soviet KGB in Munich in 1959. Many contemporary Ukrainian Jews are aware of Bandera’s history and found Moscow’s clumsy attempts to create an alliance between Jews and a notorious antisemite worthy of contempt and derision. Sarcastic jokes and mocking t-shirts emerged among some Ukrainian Jews. The Russian propaganda was viewed as raw anti-Jewish bigotry and was understood as aimed against Dnipropetrovsk Jewish oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky for his support of Ukrainian military forces.
32. Rabbi Moshe Weber, an Israeli who previously focused on formal Jewish education, is now engaged in informal Jewish education and religious tourism. He organizes camps, seminars, and tours to places of hasidic interest.

Chabad, said Rabbi Weber, has long been concerned about the children of its emissaries in smaller Jewish population centers in which these youngsters have few peers. Therefore, it is a priority to arrange gatherings where such children can come together for informal education and socializing with others in an environment of common values. The need is especially acute, he continued, for children who are home schooled and/or study online because the local Chabad community is too small to support a day school and the children are too young to attend boarding schools. These youngsters are socially isolated and can benefit greatly from periodic social interaction with their Chabad contemporaries.

During the winter vacation period, said Rabbi Weber, he organized a winter camp for 92 Chabad boys from all over Ukraine that was held in Zhytomyr. Ten madrichim (leaders, mainly yeshiva students) staffed the camp, which operated for 10 days in December/January. Concurrently, Rabbi Weber stated, a camp enrolling 76 Chabad girls convened in Berdychiv. Fifteen counselors from the United States and Israel led activities at the girls’ camp, he said. Families were charged $200 for each child attending one of the camps, said Rabbi Weber, although the real cost per camper was close to $700. (He did not state the source of the subsidy.) Rabbi Weber expects to organize two-week camps, one for Chabad boys and one for Chabad girls, at a site in the Carpathian mountains during the summer months.78

Rabbi Moshe Weber, formerly involved in several different Chabad formal education ventures, is now engaged in Chabad tourism, including youth camps and seminars, as well as commercial tourism focusing on hasidic shrines.

Another camp-like project that Rabbi Weber organized was a nine-day Pesach seminar for students in the See the Light program.79 Convening in the old shteti town of Vyzhnytsia in the Carpathian Mountains near Chernivtsi, the seminar attracted 80 young men and women, most of whom were from Dnipropetrovsk, although some were from Kyiv, Poltava, Zhytomyr, and other places in Ukraine. (The capacity of the seminar was 120, said Rabbi Weber.) The program included lectures on Jewish tradition, training in

78 Each of these camps is intended for the children of Chabad emissaries and is operated separately from camps operated by Chabad for non-Chabad Jewish children.

79 See pages 26-27.
Jewish religious practice, social activities, and sports. Participants paid the equivalent of about $70 in seminar fees, an amount that can be submitted in installments over several months. The total cost of operating the camp was $50,000, Rabbi Weber said.

His major project in adult tourism, said Rabbi Weber, is utilizing the Menorah Center as a base for hasidic groups from Israel and North America who wish to explore the Ukraine-based heritage of their own movements. Not only Chabad, but also such groups as Vyzhnytser and Gur hasidim have important shrines and other points of interest in Ukraine. Followers of such movements come to Dnipropetrovsk in charter flights from Israel. They stay in the Menorah Center for four days of study and worship with their own rebbes, where they are assured of kosher food and suitable hotel accommodations, and then go to their shrines. Because Rabbi Weber assures that all of their needs are met, hasidim are now visiting Dnipropetrovsk and other Ukrainian venues as an alternative to Sfad in Israel, especially during the Shavuot holiday.

National and International Jewish Organizations

33. The Dnipropetrovsk office of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI, Sochnut) serves as headquarters for Jewish Agency operations in all of eastern Ukraine. The writer met with the immediate past director Ilana Shpak and the new current directors, Natasha Nabitovsky and Max Lurie just a few days after the latter two had arrived in Dnipropetrovsk from Israel. Ms. Shpak, who already had assumed responsibility in her new JAFI post in Kyiv, had returned to Dnipropetrovsk to assist Ms. Nabitovsky and Mr. Lurie, a married couple with several small children, in accommodating themselves to their new positions. Ms. Nabitovsky directs JAFI operations in Dnipropetrovsk and certain smaller Jewish population centers close to that city, whereas Mr. Lurie is a roving emissary whose primary responsibilities are the Kharkiv area to the north and the Donetsk/Luhansk area to the east.

Natasha Nabitovsky and Max Lurie, the couple at left, had arrived in Dnipropetrovsk from Israel just a few days before the writer met them in late March. Ilana Shpak, at right, who was the previous JAFI director in Dnipropetrovsk, had already moved on to Kyiv, but returned briefly to Dnipropetrovsk to orient the new emissaries to their positions in eastern Ukraine.

Photo: the writer.

80 See pages 116-120.
Jewish Agency premises are located in the Menorah Center and include a small multi-purpose room, several conference rooms, a computer room, and offices. When additional space is required for specific programs, JAFI rents Menorah Center facilities by the hour at the discount rate available to non-profit organizations.

**Jewish Agency goals** in its post-Soviet operations are to strengthen the Jewish identity of local Jews, bolster ties between local Jews and Israel, encourage aliyah (immigration) to Israel, and develop local Jewish leadership. The current situation in Ukraine has generated new interest in aliyah, both among those who have been active in the Jewish community for some years and among many people who have never participated in Jewish life previously. Indeed, aliyah figures in March 2014 from the Dnipropetrovsk region increased almost 467 percent over those from March 2013 and notable increases were reached in JAFI offices in Odesa, Kharkiv, and Kyiv as well.\(^\text{81}\)

Ms. Shpak expressed relief that, after moving its eastern Ukraine consulate from Dnipropetrovsk to Kharkiv one year previously,\(^\text{82}\) the Israeli government had attached a part-time consul to its Israel Culture Center in Dnipropetrovsk a few months ago. Although the part-time consul is based in Kyiv and is in Dnipropetrovsk only two weeks each month, his presence simplifies the aliyah process. Potential olim are able to check documents and receive Israeli entrance visas in Dnipropetrovsk instead of traveling to Kyiv, a journey that is costly and time-consuming.

The current political and economic crises in Ukraine have generated many new inquiries about aliyah to Israel, noted Ms. Shpak. Since the recent upheaval, she continued, many of those visiting JAFI offices have had no previous contact with any Jewish organization. They are very unsophisticated about Israel as a country. It is unlikely that all of them will make aliyah, she predicted, but they want to be prepared if they feel that they must leave Ukraine. At any rate, aliyah is a process, she stated; people need time to explore their own situations and absorption options in Israel, make decisions, and plan their futures.

The increase in aliyah, Ms. Shpak stated, has strained the system of immigrant absorption in Israel. Clearly, Israel needs new programs to absorb professionals, that is, programs that combine Hebrew language instruction with classes that teach new olim (those who have made aliyah) how to upgrade their professional skills and apply them in the Israeli economy. **Young people** who have had experience in Israel on Taglit (birthright Israel) and MASA (more extensive programs) know exactly what they want, she continued, demanding positions and housing only in the large cities; they will not settle for housing in nearby towns, even as "starter" accommodations. Israel simply cannot meet their demands.

\(^{81}\) Statistics from the Jewish Agency for Israel.

\(^{82}\) See pages 61-62, 75-76.
About 80 young people from the Dnipropetrovsk area participated in JAFI Taglit programs in 2013, along with others who joined Taglit through Hillel and other organizations. MASA attracted 60 young adults to Israel programs last year, Ms. Shpak said.

The JAFI Youth Club in Dnipropetrovsk engages approximately 120 students on a regular basis, and similar clubs in Krivoi Rog and Zaporizhzhya attract 50 and 40 students respectively. The Meod program (incubator projects combined with elements of the Stockholm-based Paideia curriculum) has three constituent groups of young adults in Dnipropetrovsk and one in Krivoi Rog, said Ms. Shpak. JAFI also remains in contact with Taglit alumni, sponsoring events and programs when financial resources permit.

Almost 200 youngsters from eastern Ukraine attended JAFI summer camps in 2013 and a modestly larger group is expected in 2014, Ms. Shpak stated. Another program focusing on children is secular Sunday schools that operate in Dnipropetrovsk and Krivoi Rog, each enrolling 20 youngsters.

34. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee maintains its eastern Ukraine regional headquarters in a Dnipropetrovsk office directed by Yoni Leifer, an Israeli who assumed the position in December after similar posts in Belarus and Kaliningrad. In Belarus, he was stationed in Minsk and had certain diplomatic responsibilities, he noted; in Dnipropetrovsk, this portfolio component is missing.

Yoni Leifer directs JAFI operations in a large area of eastern/southeastern Ukraine. His office is located in a small commercial building that is separate from the JDC hesed.

Photo: the writer.

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83  Dnipropetrovsk Hillel also enrolled 80 in Taglit in 2013. See page 23.

84  Along with encouraging the creation of new programs for the Jewish community through an incubator project, a major objective of Meod is the cultivation of leadership interests and skills among participants. The Jewish Agency has developed many of the young professional leaders in contemporary Ukrainian Jewish organizations through such programs as Meod and leadership development programs related to counselor positions in JAFI summer camps.

85  JAFI Taglit alumni also participate in programs with Hillel Taglit alumni in Dnipropetrovsk (and in other cities).

86  Kaliningrad is a Russian "exclave" located some 200 miles east of the Russian border between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea. Approximately one-half the size of Belgium, Kaliningrad was part of east Prussia and known as Königsberg prior to being given to the Soviet Union at the Potsdam Conference that divided Europe in 1945. The territory subsequently was renamed Kaliningrad in memory of Mikhail Kalinin, a Bolshevik revolutionary and nominal head of state of the Soviet Union from 1919 to 1946.
Referring to the relocation of Hesed Menachem from its former building to the Menorah Center in February 2014, Mr. Leifer said that he had been somewhat ambivalent about the move at first. He had feared that the "luxe" atmosphere of the Menorah Center would stain the image of the hesed and of JDC generally; perhaps, he continued, clients would feel uncomfortable in such upscale surroundings. Further, the space available to JDC was one-third smaller than that available in the older building.\(^{87}\) However, it is important that the hesed be in the "Kaminezki building" for the sake of maintaining community spirit, JDC decided. It turns out that clients are very happy being in the middle of a busy community structure, and proximity to other program areas - such as the Hillel computer center - has created many benefits for older clients, Mr. Leifer said. He observed that many hesed grandparents sometimes see their grandchildren in JCC or other activities. The Menorah Center staff was very helpful to the hesed and clients during the move-in period and remains attentive to the needs of these older adults. Although the space limitations of the new premises are real, Mr. Leifer stated, they have managed to find room for everything.\(^{88}\)

The JDC client caseload throughout the region - including Dnipropetrovsk, Krivoi Rog, Donetsk, Melitopol, and several other cities - includes 18,240 individuals, 3,000 of whom receive home health care. Homecare is very expensive; in fact, explained Mr. Leifer, it accounts for 85 percent of the budget. Of the 18,240 total clients, Mr. Leifer continued, 39 percent are considered Holocaust victims and, as such, receive services subsidized by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany.

With the passage of time, the number of Holocaust victims diminishes and the resources provided by the Claims Conference are reduced accordingly. Whereas the number of clients eligible for such assistance once exceeded 80 percent of all clients, said Mr. Leifer, the current ratio of 39 percent is expected to lessen further as more survivors die. The supplemental funding provided by the Claims Conference enables a much more generous package of services to constituents; for example, Nazi victims receive 25 hours of homecare each week compared with ten hours of homecare for individuals who were not affected by the Holocaust. Similarly, Nazi victims receive a monthly allowance of $25 for food purchases, where as non-victims receive one payment of $25 every three months.

In response to a question, Mr. Leifer said that state pensions are still being paid on time, but that inflation has eroded their value and the resulting loss of income has become very burdensome for many seniors. The average pension for hesed clients was 17,612 hryvnia in March, which now (end of March) is equivalent to about $161. A few months ago, the value of the average monthly pension was $220. As gas prices are due to increase on April 1, everything that is transported by road vehicles will rise in cost.

\(^{87}\) Technically, JDC could have elected to rent larger premises in the Menorah Center, but declined to do so for reasons of cost.

\(^{88}\) See pages 36-40 for a description of JDC hesed and family service operations in Dnipropetrovsk.
At some point, said Mr. Leifer, JDC would like to introduce a **fee for service system** that would require clients to pay at least a partial cost of certain services that they receive. Perhaps the fee structure would be graduated for seniors according to their ability to pay and, of course, such a system must be introduced gradually.

Apart from JDC welfare services, Mr. Leifer noted briefly a JDC Jewish community center program that soon would move from the old community building behind the synagogue to the Menorah Center, the JDC Tikvah program for people with disabilities that already is in the Menorah Center, and the Metsuda young leadership program that offers five seminars throughout the year, each one in a different part of Ukraine. JDC needs to engage more young professionals in leadership development programs, he stated. Nonetheless, when asked by the writer, Mr. Leifer said that JDC was not contemplating the granting of local management authority to local individuals. He observed that a hesed Board of Directors exists, consisting of ten to 12 individuals, but he did not define the responsibilities of this group.

35. One year after transferring its Consulate for eastern Ukraine to Kharkiv from Dnipropetrovsk, the Government of Israel re-opened the Dnipropetrovsk consulate and its attached Israel Cultural Center in office space within the Menorah Center. Among other responsibilities, the Consulate provides Israeli entry visas to new immigrants, a major convenience that eliminates the necessity of travel to consulates in Kyiv or Kharkiv for such documents. Although the official consul resides in Kyiv and is in Dnipropetrovsk only one week each month, local activist Jews and Jewish organizations seemed greatly relieved that an official representation of the State of Israel is once again present in their city.

The major function of the Israel Cultural Center, said an ICC professional, is to "bring Israel to all people, not just Jews, in the area." It is important that Ukrainians be exposed to Israel culture, education, and other fields, including medicine and technology. The ICC organizes "Israel Days" in local universities, offering presentations by Israeli specialists in computer science, other high tech fields, and even Hebrew literature. Local universities are eager for such events, said the professional, although current political tension generated by Russian activity in Ukraine has rendered some higher education institutions unable to plan ahead for them.

Additionally, continued the professional, the government of Israel sponsors events showcasing Israeli culture, including Israeli film festivals and tours of Israel musical and theater groups. They have sent Israeli chefs to local restaurants and other venues

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89 See pages 33-34 and 39-40 for information about the JDC Jewish community center program and the Tikvah program respectively.

90 For discussion of the reasons behind the transfer of the Consulate from Dnipropetrovsk to Kharkiv, see the writer’s most recent previous report Observations on Jewish Community Life in Ukraine - Report of a Visit in April 2013, page 100.
to demonstrate modern Israeli cooking and, thus, dispel beliefs that Jewish cooking must be heavy, dense, tasteless, and unhealthy.

Representing Nativ, an Israeli government entity outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that deals with Russian-speaking Jewry, the Israel Culture Center also offers its own ulpans and its own MASA programs. The ICC also created and manages a version of the Israeli Scout program, targeting youngsters whose families are uninvolved in any other Jewish endeavors. The Scout program enrolls 40 youngsters in Dnipropetrovsk and has additional groups in Krivoi Rog, Donetsk, and Melitopol. In August, said the ICC professional, Nativ would convene three four-day Scout camps in Ukraine, each enrolling 300 youngsters.

Responding to a question about aliyah, the ICC professional stated that young families seeking better opportunities for their children constitute a major portion of local Jews moving to Israel. Another significant group consists of middle-age adults joining their adolescent or young adult children who have already made aliyah in the Na'aleh, Selah, or other programs for these age groups. Some older people, said the professional, go to Israel for medical care, although some in this age cohort also join family members already there.

36. The sister-city relationship between the Boston and Dnipropetrovsk Jewish communities, various details of which are noted elsewhere in this section, was initiated in 1992 and today is the most comprehensive of any “kehilla” project connecting North American and post-Soviet Jewish population centers. It involves both Jewish and non-sectarian entities in each city, although most of the latter appear to have been promoted by Boston-area Jews. The relationship also includes some projects involving Haifa, Boston’s partner city in Israel.

The relationship is enabled by a number of different Jewish organizations in the Boston area, all of which are associated in some way with Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) of Greater Boston, the local Jewish federation, and the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), a CJP agency. As noted previously, Action for Post-Soviet Jewry, an independent organization, created and manages the Adopt-a-Bubbe program, and Jewish Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Greater Boston (a CJP agency) inspired and advises its Dnipropetrovsk counterpart, known as Older Brother, Older Sister. CJP, JCRC, and other Federation agencies related to Jewish education, employment services, and children's and elder care services all participate in this relationship.

91 Unlike JAFI, which charges a fee for its ulpans, the Nativ ulpans are free of charge; however, whereas JAFI ulpans include Jewish identity-building components, Nativ ulpans, fewer in number than their JAFI counterparts, do not. Nativ MASA programs are open to individuals with no prior Israel Culture Center association.

92 The writer, who was living and working in Cambridge at the time, was one of two individuals who initiated the project under the auspices of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston. The other founder, Dr. Judith Wolf, remains active in the partnership; her family has provided leadership and resources for the special needs program at Beit Chana.
Additionally, various Boston physicians and medical institutions have played critically important roles in enhancing women's health programs and pediatric care in Dnipropetrovsk.

Although some refer to the relationship as a “partnership,” almost all initiatives and funding originate in Boston. The major funding source is an allocation from CJP to JCRC; however, some programs - particularly Action for Post-Soviet Jewry - raise money separately. A Young Leadership group of CJP, in addition to CJP as a broader institution, also is involved. Unlike other relationships between North American Jewish federations and post-Soviet Jewish population centers, the Boston-Dnipropetrovsk relationship does not include collaborative projects with the Joint Distribution Committee (except for monthly teleconferences on special needs children), the Jewish Agency for Israel, or the Hillel student organization.

Yan Sidelkovsky, who manages the relationship in Dnipropetrovsk, stated that several planned delegations from Boston had cancelled trips scheduled for March and April, reflecting anxiety about their safety in Ukraine. However, the chairman of the Boston Dnipropetrovsk kehilla project and a JCRC staff member visited in June and discussions are moving forward about significant Boston involvement in the new premises of the Jewish Medical Center in the Menorah building. Boston is providing very valuable consulting services regarding facility design and will assist the JMC in acquiring necessary medical apparatus and technology. Additionally Boston physicians will organize continuing medical education for selected local doctors in an effort to upgrade local medical practice.

Shown at right is a section of the space in the Menorah Center in which the Jewish Medical Center will be located. Photo dates from June 2014.

Photo: Ann Levin, Boston Chairperson of the Dnipropetrovsk Kehilla Project.

Mr. Sidelkovsky continued that the new focus of Boston medical work is primary care, family medicine, and development of a Jewish community medical system. Previously, CJP had concentrated more on certain specialties, particularly women's health. The Boston effort also is directing more attention to special needs education, using the Special Needs Educational Resource Center as a base.

37. Responding to a request from the writer, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki arranged an appointment for her with Boris Filatov, Deputy Governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast. Mr.

93 See pages 44-45 about the Jewish Medical Center.

94 See pages 20-22.
Filatov reports directly to Ihor Kolomoisky, Governor and a major financial supporter of Ukrainian independence.

Mr. Filatov underlined that the situation vis-a-vis Russia is fundamentally different in Dnipropetrovsk from that in Kharkiv to the north or either Donetsk or Luhansk to the south. Unlike Kharkiv/Donetsk/Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk does not border on Russia; therefore, it is more difficult for Russia to infiltrate political agitators or harmful materiel into Dnipropetrovsk oblast. Further, he said, it is problematic for Russia to agitate in Dnipropetrovsk on a Russian nationalist platform because Dnipropetrovsk has long been tolerant of minority groups; historically, the oblast has been home to large Jewish, Armenian, and Azerbaizhani minorities so local people are accustomed to living among others of different backgrounds and do not respond well to suggestions that one group is superior to others.

Governor Kolomoisky has determined four priorities for the oblast, said Mr. Filatov. First, he said, is the primacy of continuing political dialog in an effort to reach consensus on major issues and to unify the population. Mr. Filatov will speak with representatives of any group that wishes to speak with him, even people who are mashugana (Yiddish [spelling varies]; crazy). Second, repression of people who were loyal to the Party of Regions (the party of Yanukhovych) will not be tolerated; these individuals were "hostages" to conditions beyond their control. Third, all action proceeds on the principles of complete territorial integrity of Ukraine and national authority of the central government in Kyiv. Fourth, guilty individuals, that is, those who committed violent acts against individuals or property will be pursued and punished.

Boris Filatov is Deputy Governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast and reports directly to the Governor, Jewish oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky. Mr. Filatov was very outspoken during the interview, which occurred on April 4. A large Ukrainian flag stands next to his desk.

In speaking with various interest groups, Mr. Filatov said, consensus has been reached on a number of different principles. All recognize that federalization and language primacy (Ukrainian or Russian) are explosive issues and, therefore, have agreed to postpone discussion on them until stability is restored to the country. All have agreed that military weapons and face masks will be removed from private persons. The different parties have agreed to abstain from insulting each other; specifically, they have agreed to abstain from mentioning Vladimir Lenin or Stepan Bandera in their speeches or on their websites; they have agreed to refrain from using symbols of extremist groups. They will not hold public demonstrations.
Documents stating these principles have been signed (in both Ukrainian and Russian) by all interest groups, said Mr. Filatov. In order to discourage opponents of the agreements from attacking the signers for their "softness," the names of the signers have not been publicized.

In addition to issues concerning Russia, Dnipropetrovsk oblast also is attempting to address certain basic domestic issues in the area. For example, said Mr. Filatov, it has established task forces on corruption, open business practices, and comparable matters. Everything now is "rotten," he stated.

When asked if the writer could discuss his views publicly, Mr. Filatov responded affirmatively. Truth will be helpful to Ukraine, he said. Truth is essential in all "civilized" societies, he continued. He observed that Russia is broadcasting anti-Ukrainian propaganda to Israel and Germany, countries in which many Russian-speakers reside. Mr. Filatov expressed disappointment that the government of Israel had declined to express public support for Ukraine in the current situation, but said that he understands Israeli caution about antagonizing Russia.

**Kharkiv**

Founded in 1653 at the confluence of the Udy, Lopan, and Kharkiv rivers, Kharkiv today is a city of 1.45 million people, the second largest municipality in Ukraine. Capital of Ukraine from 1921 to 1934, it remains a center of industry, culture, and higher education. Its industrial core is based on armaments and complex machinery, some of which has been sold in controversial arms deals to rogue states. Notwithstanding the relative sophistication of a portion of its economic base, however, the larger economy of Kharkiv and the surrounding area is floundering, a result of general Ukrainian economic conditions, poor governance, and a failure of local officials to embrace private business initiatives. Unemployment is high, and the general mood of Kharkiv residents appeared sour when the writer visited it in 2013 and both sour and nervous on her visit in March 2014.

The nervousness derives from its location approximately 30 miles (48 km.) from the Russian border. The city is the administrative center of Kharkiv oblast, which shares a border with Russia on its north and with the troubled Ukrainian oblasts of Luhansk and Donetsk on its east and south. (It also borders on Dnipropetrovsk, Poltava, and Sumy oblasts.) According to individuals with whom the writer spoke, Russian "visitors" arrived in the city in March, milling about and, when asked, claimed to be tourists or students. In a city hosting more than 25 institutions of higher education, the latter claim may have seemed logical to the newcomers from the North. However, it soon became obvious that the professed students had little interest in conventional academic life. Equally, the tourists seemed to eschew normal tourist pursuits.
A prominent professional in the Jewish community told the writer in late March that everything looks normal in the city on weekdays. In the evening, pro-Russian "young toughs" wearing facemasks and carrying "what looks like weapons" surge through the city in groups. They intimidate people and provoke incidents. On Friday nights, Saturdays, and Sundays, up to 11,000 people participate in pro-Russia demonstrations on Freedom Square. Threats and other "ugly" messages also are appearing on Facebook and other social media sites. The professional is certain that some pro-Russian agitators are paid with funds originating in Russia. Crime has increased in the city, continued the professional, because police are preoccupied with tracking Russian infiltrators and are unable to do normal police work.

On March 2, a Russian "tourist" from Moscow managed to replace the Ukrainian flag on the Kharkiv regional administration building with a Russian flag. Five days later, he was joined by pro-Russian comrades who occupied the entire structure and declared independence from Ukraine as the Kharkiv People's Republic. The building was recaptured the following day by Ukrainian forces, but pro-Russian agitators entered it in force again in mid-April, only to be expelled by Ukrainian troops a short time later. Violent confrontations, most of which appear to have been instigated by pro-Russians, occurred over several weeks.

The Jewish mayor of Kharkiv, Hennady Kernes, was shot in the back while cycling on April 28. Gravely wounded, he recovered in an Israeli hospital and returned to Kharkiv on June 16. Although his assailants have not been publicly identified, some observers believe that they were sympathetic to Russia and intended to murder the mayor and subsequently destabilize the city and region. Pro-Russian agitators remain active in Kharkiv, staging demonstrations and confrontations. Ukrainian unity partisans respond with counter-demonstrations. However, no Russian combat forces have entered the area.

38. The Jewish population of Kharkiv probably is between 15,000 and 30,000 according to the Israeli Law of Return, although the writer has heard both higher and lower estimates. Jews are prominent in almost every sphere of Kharkiv life, including government, business and industry, science and technology, education, and culture; most Jews openly identify as Jews and are friendly to Jewish organizations. However, as is the case in most post-Soviet large cities, only a small number of local Jews appear to find any existing Jewish institutions of interest to them. Participation in Jewish activity is low.

95 Freedom Square is a vast expanse in the center of Kharkiv. Until Ukrainian independence in 1991, it was known as Lenin Square and is still referred to as such by many local people. The square remains dominated by a huge statue of Vladimir Lenin. (The Lenin statue was toppled by pro-Kyiv protestors on September 28, 2014.)

96 Others asserted that some police are in hiding because they supported pro-Russian protestors (either genuinely or because they had been suborned) and fear retribution from defenders of Ukrainian sovereignty. One individual denied that crime had increased at all.
Jewish Education and Culture

39. Enrollment in the Chabad Jewish day school (School #170) in Kharkiv remains steady at approximately 300 pupils, said Grigory Shoichet, its longtime principal. However, he continued, he expects enrollment to decline significantly for the next (2014-2015) academic year. Many youngsters will emigrate to Israel, he said, some with their parents and some in high school programs, such as the Jewish Agency Na’aleh high school in Israel program. All of the violence in the city has generated great fear among kids and their parents; youngsters come to school by school bus, go home by school bus, and stay home throughout the weekends. They do not walk around their own neighborhoods. Kids talk about the Russia situation frequently. "No one wants Russia," he said. Russia is no less fascist than Ukraine, neither country likes Jews, stated Mr. Shoichet.

Mr. Shoichet expressed confidence that the school will survive and continue through the current crisis and beyond, even though its enrollment will decline. He is certain that teachers will remain, if only because they will be unable to find employment elsewhere. School #170 ranks 37th among the more than 240 schools in the city, he said, achieving particularly high exam results in high school mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. It also has done well in Jewish studies competitions with other Jewish day schools.

Grigory Shoichet, a veteran Jewish day school principal in the post-Soviet states, is well past normal retirement age. He presides over a school that enrolled 502 youngsters at its peak and now enrolls fewer than 300. Jewish demographic decline, difficult school transportation, and inadequate financial support explain the decreasing school census.

Photo: the writer (in 2013).

Mr. Shoichet confirmed that four small museums continue to exist in the school - on Jews in Ukraine, the Holocaust, history of hasidism, and Jewish women. Each museum occupies a classroom made vacant by declining enrollment.

The greatest need of the school now, said Mr. Shoichet, is additional funds (about $6,000) to enhance its security arrangements. It needs to purchase video cameras and upgrade its security personnel, especially on weekends. For now, it can afford to deploy only retired women as weekend guards; these older women are unable to respond to any attack that might occur. The most likely attackers, responded Mr. Shoichet to a question, are fascists, whom he described as local thugs who are paid by deposed former Ukraine President Viktor Yanukovich as provocateurs.
40. Rabbi Levi Raices, directs a yeshiva katana that enrolls 32 boys in grades five through 11. Although the yeshiva, which is located in an old synagogue, used to accommodate boys in dormitory rooms, all of the youngsters now live at home. Some of them, said Rabbi Raices, move into the dormitories for Shabbat and other holidays. Rabbi Raices stated that the presence of Russian infiltrators and actions of local street thugs connected to Russians have caused great anxiety in the city. Some parents keep their kids at home, including families with boys in the yeshiva. Their biggest worry, he continued, is that the boys will become caught up in street fighting. The situation in the city is the major topic of conversation for both boys and teachers during lunch, Rabbi Raices observed.

Although enrollment in the yeshiva is stable now, he expects it to decline for the next academic year (2014-2015), Rabbi Raices said. He knows that some boys are considering the Na'aleh high school in Israel program for next year. Both boys and their parents want the boys to leave Kharkiv and settle elsewhere.

Rabbi Levi Raices operates several Chabad programs in Kharkiv, including a yeshiva for schoolboys. He is a New York native.

41. The writer was unable to visit the machon for girls, which enrolled 40 girls in 2012-2013, and is located in classrooms within the choral synagogue.

42. A program called Akademia, which paid the tuition of Jewish girls and young women in local colleges and universities in return for their participation in intensive Jewish learning programs at the synagogue (and assistance in leading children's activities at the synagogue), no longer exists. The program, which had a residential facility for out-of-town students, was suspended due to its expense, stated Pearl Kolnak, its former director.

Instead, said Ms. Kolnak, Kharkiv Chabad has a developed an Intensive STARS (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers) program that meets eight hours weekly, instead of five hours that is the norm in regular STARS. The program currently has four participants, all young women who are enrolled in colleges or universities or who have graduated from these institutions very recently. Although the girls reside in their own homes, they move to a synagogue-owned apartment for Shabbat and must attend Shabbat services, in addition to attending some classes during the week. They plan and lead activities for children on Jewish holidays, and attend a leadership seminar in
Dnipropetrovsk. The synagogue pays their college/university tuition and also provides personal stipends. The primacy of the synagogue in Intensive STARS generates a close connection with the synagogue, said Ms. Kolnak. A clear priority of the program is to draw participants closer to religious life and a Jewish wedding.

Pearl Kolnak has managed intensive Jewish education programs for young women in Kharkiv for some years. The scope of these programs has diminished lately in response to financial pressure.

Photo: the writer (in 2013).

43. **Lycée Sha’alavim** is a struggling Jewish day school started in 1994 and then abandoned in 2009 by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (OU; New York). As a private school, the lycée receives very modest state funding, less than that allocated to public schools (such as School #170). It receives no financial support from the municipality. Further, a major component of OU support had been the assignment of three young adult modern Orthodox Jewish couples from Israel as Jewish studies teachers in the school; when the OU withdrew its support, the Israelis returned to Israel, leaving the lycée without any qualified teachers of Jewish subjects.

**Yevgeny Persky**, who has been principal of the school since its inception, has invested great energy in attempting to maintain it as a competitive institution. He changed its denominational affiliation to Masorti (Conservative), which is more accepting of non-halachic Jewish youngsters as pupils. **Enrollment** during the 2013-2014 academic year was 118 pupils in grades one through eleven, three fewer youngsters than in the previous year; only one-third of the youngsters are halachically Jewish, said Mr. Persky. Only a minority of school families pay tuition. A separate fee-based (approximately $250 monthly) preschool enrolls another 31 children, only eight of whom are Jewish.

Reflecting the minority Jewish enrollment in the preschool, no instruction in Judaism is offered to this age group. In grades one-11, youngsters study **Jewish subjects** (including Hebrew) 12 class periods each week. Most of the Jewish studies teachers are graduates of Sha’alavim when it was under Orthodox auspices; they have since completed university and have received additional training from the Schechter Institute, the Masorti educational institution in Jerusalem.

Mr. Persky spoke with pride of after school clubs in English, mathematics, and other subjects that can keep youngsters occupied until 10:00 p.m., a major boon to parents who work odd hours. The school also offers speech therapy and limited special education. Mr. Persky is seeking additional funds to expand the school into a special
needs and rehabilitation education center, offering programs for autistic and vision-impaired youngsters.

Sha'alavim is located in a remote part of the city in a building designed originally as a preschool. It needs major updating, Mr. Persky said. Some parents provide in-kind gifts and services, but the need for a major cash infusion is serious. A number of youngsters in the school come from families so impoverished that Sha'alavim must purchase clothing and shoes for them each year. The local hesed provides some fruit and medicines to the lycée, he acknowledged.

Yevgeny Persky is constantly searching for sponsors to help fund the Sha'alavim Jewish day school in Kharkiv. He should engage a fundraising coordinator, he acknowledged, but he lacks the funds to do so.

Photo: the writer (in 2013).

44. The Hillel student organization plays an important role in the lives of Jewish students in Kharkiv, a university city. According to Yulia Pototskaya, the longtime and respected Hillel director in Kharkiv, about 700 students participate in Hillel every year, representing almost every institution of higher education in the city. About 220 of these participate at least once monthly. Russian "political tourists" have created some danger in the streets after dark, said Ms. Pototskaya, so certain Hillel evening activities have been suspended. However, everything is quiet in the office, she stated.

Asked about the mood of students during the current turbulent times, Ms. Pototskaya responded that many are afraid of war. They are very anti-Russian, she said, perceiving Russia as the aggressor in the ongoing confrontation. Some Hillel students traveled to Kyiv to participate in the demonstrations on Maidan; one was wounded and is now recovering, stated Ms. Pototskaya. Several Kharkiv Hillel students actually moved to Kyiv to volunteer as cooks for the protestors or to raise money for Ukraine.

Yulia Pototskaya, the longtime Hillel director in Kharkiv, is very nervous about Russian actions and intentions in Ukraine.

Photo: the writer.

Ms. Pototskaya has met some of the Russian infiltrators who present themselves as students. However, she averred, they do not speak or act like students. It is clear to everyone that they are not ordinary university students.
Kharkiv Jewish young people, continued Ms. Pototskaya, are very apprehensive about the future, especially in Kharkiv, which is so close to the border with Russia. Many are "sitting on their suitcases," **seeking opportunities abroad.** There is great interest in the MASA internship in Israel program, she said. It is likely, she continued, that those who go abroad for studies or for an internship will remain abroad.

45. **Beit Dan** is a JDC-operated Jewish community center housed within a large JDC structure that opened in 2011. Yanna Mastrenko, Director of Beit Dan, stated that activities of the Center focus on transmission of Jewish culture and tradition. It aims to unify Kharkiv Jewish society, she continued, encompassing all age and interest groups. Beit Dan attracts about 5,000 participants each month, using both the new building and an older facility, said Ms. Mastrenko.

A fee-based **preschool** located in the older building and designed to attract middle-class families enrolls 56 children between the ages of two and five, Ms. Mastrenko stated.\(^97\) Beit Dan also operates a program known as Mazel Tov for at-risk children of preschool age; although families with children in Mazel Tov often are underprivileged, they also pay a fee. For **school-age children**, Beit Dan offers fee-based programs in various arts and in sports (although its facilities do not include a sports hall). These and other age-appropriate activities are available throughout most of the day during school vacation periods, said Ms. Mastrenko. **Adolescents** may participate in activities geared to their own age group, including volunteer projects (visiting elderly hesed clients in their homes, collecting gifts for children in orphanages, planning and operating holiday programs for orphanage children, etc.).

Yanna Mastrenko directs Beit Dan, a JDC-operated Jewish community center in Kharkiv.

Beit Dan also organizes **holiday celebrations** and **concerts** in its large multi-purpose room, which is equipped with a stage and advanced lighting and audio technology. Among its other **community activities** are "Days of Jewish Culture" in the city, various discussion clubs and study circles, and a **Знакомство** Club ("Acquaintance" Club, i.e, a Jewish dating service) "with good results," said Ms. Mastrenko. Beit Dan also has organized a two-day Shabbaton at a nearby resort and, in the past, has organized summer family camps in Crimea. Ms. Mastrenko said that the 2014 family camp had been scheduled for Crimea as well, but that Russian occupation of the territory probably renders those plans unrealistic. A decision about an alternate site would be made by

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\(^{97}\) JDC preschools typically resemble play groups, rather than early childhood educational centers.
JDC officials elsewhere, not in Kharkiv. In the meantime, "Мы ждем." (We are waiting [for a decision by others.])

Welfare

46. The JDC hesed in Kharkiv serves 9,000 clients, including 400 who live in smaller Jewish population centers outside Kharkiv itself, stated Boris Murashkovsky, longtime hesed director. The number of clients, he averred, continues to decline from year to year as JDC tightens requirements for assistance; further, no new clients are accepted in place of those who die. The majority of clients - 8,000 - are elderly, 65 percent of whom are eligible for Claims Conference benefits as Holocaust survivors. The additional benefits accorded Holocaust survivors generate great bitterness among those who escaped the Holocaust and thus are ineligible for these services; it is very difficult to explain this situation to non-recipient clients, Mr. Murashkovsky said. 1,800 clients received hesed home care, some for lengthy periods every day.

The hesed operates an extensive day care system, Mr. Murashkovsky explained. Four groups of 18 senior adults come to the hesed once each week in hesed vans. Between 40 and 45 disabled children also participate in hesed therapy in groups designed to meet the needs of youngsters with specific handicaps. Also, he said, a special grant from World Jewish Relief enables the hesed to provide programs for disabled Jewish young adults between the ages of 18 and 40; these clients are organized in three groups according to disability (mental, psychological, and physical) of six to eight people each. Each cohort comes to the hesed twice weekly for therapy, recreation, socialization, and Jewish culture.

*Boris Murashkovsky is one of the most experienced hesed directors in the post-Soviet states.*

Photo: the writer (in 2012).

In addition to structured day care for elderly clients, the hesed also offers ballroom dancing, a choir, a drama group, and other activities for elderly Jews who are mobile and can commute to the hesed on public transportation. These programs provide socializing opportunities for people who have become isolated after retirement.

Asked about the impact of inflation on hesed programs, Mr. Murashkovsky responded that the previous exchange rate was eight hryvnia to one U.S. dollar and now is 12

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98 World Jewish Relief is a British organization with an agenda similar to that of JDC. It maintains no infrastructure in the post-Soviet states, but provides services through JDC.
hryvnia to one U.S. dollar. The cost of utilities is set to increase 50 percent in May and the cost of most medicines already has increased 100 percent. Pensions, he said, are being paid on time, but they have not increased to match the rate of inflation. As director of the hesed, continued Mr. Murashkovsky, he is under pressure from employees to raise their salaries to accommodate inflation, but he lacks the resources to respond to these requests.

In addition to needing funds for salary adjustments, the hesed has great financial needs in other areas as well, Mr. Murashkovsky stated. In particular, he said, they require additional funding for home care, which is very expensive, and for transportation, that is, the vans that bring day care clients to the hesed and then return them to their homes.

Mr. Murashkovsky expressed gratitude for a special grant from World Jewish Relief (Britain), now in its second year, that finances the renovation and repair of up to 40 apartments for needy Jews annually. WJR funds permit the upgrading of heating and plumbing systems, as well as general renovations.99

Mr. Murashkovsky said that people in Kharkiv are under very serious stress stemming from the Russian presence in their city. Further, he stated, as residents of an area bordering on Russia, many Kharkiv citizens listen to Russian radio or watch Russian television, which are full of anti-Ukrainian "propaganda," such as, charges that Ukrainian leaders are fascists. Such inflammatory language, Mr. Murashkovsky stated, fills people with dread. Referring to the small Right Sektor political party, Mr. Murashkovsky averred that some fascists do exist in western Ukraine, but that such people do not reside in Kharkiv. Antisemitism is not a problem in Kharkiv, he said.

Synagogue-Related Programs

47. Rabbi Moshe Moskovitz, a native of Caracas, has served the Kharkiv Jewish population for more than 20 years. He is highly respected in the city and beyond. In addition to the education programs cited earlier in this report, the Chabad community under his direction in Kharkiv owns and operates its own summer camp for children and also maintains a significant food assistance program for Jewish elderly.

Tension in the city provoked by Russian actions against Ukraine is substantial, said Rabbi Moskovitz. Additionally, the crisis itself generates economic instability and fear of antisemitism. Local people, he continued, believe that the demonstrations in Maidan were good for Ukraine, but, just the same, they fear the potential for increased antisemitism from Bandera groups supporting the Maidan protests. Some individuals in eastern Ukraine, he continued, associate more closely with Russia and Russian culture

99 Some residents of large post-Soviet cities, including Kharkiv, live in Soviet-era cottage complexes with a communal bath house. In certain apartment buildings, multiple apartments share a single bathroom. The WJR grant provides for the installation of full bathrooms in such living units.
than with Ukraine and Ukrainian culture, but they do not want to live under Russian occupation. As chief rabbi of Kharkiv, said Rabbi Moskovitz, he must recognize that different people in the city have different opinions on the situation and, accordingly, it is best that he refrain from expressing strong opinions of his own. He must be "rabbi of all of the [local] Jews," he stated.

Rabbi Moshe Moskovitz and his wife Miriam are a major Jewish presence in Kharkiv.

Weekends in Kharkiv are tense, said Rabbi Moskovitz, because Russian "visitors" occupy the main square of the city on Friday nights, Saturdays, and Sundays. They deliberately engage in provocative behavior, disparaging Ukraine and glorifying Russia. However, Rabbi Moskovitz stated, Chabad successfully mounted a large Purim celebration in a public space, attracting 2,000 people. As a precaution, Chabad hired additional security personnel to protect people at the event, but nothing unpleasant happened.

Vladimir Putin's assertions that Russian actions in Ukraine save Ukrainian Jews from antisemitism are a "sour joke," commented Rabbi Moskovitz. The entire Jewish issue has been "blown out of proportion," Rabbi Moskovitz continued, both by those who allege that Jews planned and controlled the Maidan protests and by those who see antisemites lurking everywhere. Russia and its neighbors have long been "lands of conspiracy," he mused; people look for plots and schemes everywhere. Putin recognizes Jewish sensitivity to antisemitism and attempts to exploit it.

The economy, which was weak before the crisis with Russia erupted, has deteriorated further since the Russian intervention, stated Rabbi Moskovitz. Almost all of his major donors have suffered significant losses and, consequently, Chabad has lost about 50 percent of its local funding. He is worried about maintaining the day school, bus transportation to/from the school, the summer camp, and other key programs, Rabbi Moskovitz stated. Other than the Jewish Agency for Israel, which contributed $3,000 for institutional security, no foreigners have responded to the current crisis, declared Rabbi Moskovitz.

It is likely that current political/economic conditions in Kharkiv will generate increased aliyah, Rabbi Moskovitz said. In the long term, these departures will reduce enrollment
in the **Jewish day school**, he commented; however, in the short term, family plans to emigrate to Israel may lead to increased enrollment as parents may want their children to learn Hebrew before they move to the Jewish state. The **MASA** program in Israel is excellent for **young adults** who want to go to Israel, Rabbi Moskovitz said. MASA will expand and should expand, he continued, because it provides young people with great possibilities for building new lives in Israel.

48. Rabbi Levi Raices (see page 68) operates a **prison chaplaincy** program, visiting Jews incarcerated in local prisons, especially during Jewish holiday periods. However, stated Rabbi Raices, current conditions in the city sometimes limit access to prisons and, thus, the prison visitation program is now less robust than it had been in previous years.

**National and International Jewish Organizations**

49. The **Jewish Agency for Israel** maintains its eastern Ukraine head office in Dnipropetrovsk. One of the two Israel shlichim (emissaries) posted in that city visits Kharkiv every month, sometimes remaining in the city for almost a week.100 The writer was unable to visit a small JAFI office in Kharkiv, which is staffed by local coordinators who operate several Jewish identity and aliyah-related programs.

The Jewish Agency holds aliyah seminars and fairs in the city, recruits young people for Taglit and MASA, offers youth programs and Hebrew ulpan classes, and assists aliyah candidates in making arrangements for their move to Israel and enrollment in Israel absorption programs. This assistance sometimes entails sophisticated placement services for highly trained scientists from a Kharkiv academic or scientific institute.

50. The writer also was unable to visit the Kharkiv regional office of the **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee**.

51. The **Government of Israel** maintains a **Consulate** and **Israel Cultural Center** in Kharkiv. The Consulate serves three major functions: (a) it checks eligibility for aliyah to Israel and issues visas to qualified candidates; (b) it promotes aliyah through various programs; and (3) it represents the State of Israel in Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine and an important academic and technology center in the country. Kharkiv is considered by some to be an unofficial capital of eastern Ukraine and is host to a number of foreign consulates.

100 See pages 57-59.
The number of people inquiring about their eligibility for aliyah has increased significantly since the crisis with Russia began, said an official of the Consulate. Not all of those who are eligible for aliyah will go to Israel, said the official, but local conditions are such that people want to be certain of their eligibility and the processes involved in leaving Ukraine and resettling in Israel so that they can leave quickly if the need arises. In response to this increased interest in aliyah, the Cultural Center has boosted the number of Hebrew ulpan classes that it offers.

Among students and young people in general, continued the official, great interest is expressed in various higher education programs in Israel. However, some applicants overstate their experience and accomplishments, falling short of requirements for graduate degree programs that they wish to enter. The Consulate expends considerable energy in checking academic and other backgrounds.

In general, the official continued, people in Kharkiv feel insecure and some are leaving the city and country quietly. However, reluctance to emigrate also is evident, even among those who are apprehensive about remaining, because at least they have jobs here in Kharkiv, they have apartments, and they speak the local language. They are uncertain that they will ever find suitable employment or acceptable housing in another country. The likelihood of mastering another language often seems very slim.

**Krivoi Rog (Krivyy Rih, Krivyy Rig)**

Although the Ukrainian government strongly encourages the Ukrainianization of all Ukrainian place names, the Russian name of Krivoi Rog has continued to be more commonly used than is Krivyy Rih, the Ukrainian equivalent. The city was founded in the 17th century as a Cossack village, but expanded rapidly in the late 19th century following discovery and exploitation of high-grade iron ore deposits in the area. Krivoi Rog stretches some 130 kilometers (81 miles) in length, connecting numerous mining sites, some of them now inactive. Production of iron and steel, chemicals, and engineering equipment dominate its economic base. Krivoi Rog is located approximately 136 kilometers southwest of Dnipropetrovsk. Its general population in 2013 was estimated to be 656,500.

52. The Jewish population of the city is estimated by local Jews to be between 7,000 and 10,000. The extreme linear nature of Krivoi Rog has impeded development of a sense of community among local Jews.

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101 In order to receive an immigration visa, applicants must have at least one Jewish grandparent or be a first-degree relative of a Jewish person.

102 Unlike Jewish Agency ulpans, Israel Culture Center ulpans are free of charge. However, they do not include Jewish-identity building components, a key element of JAFI ulpans.
Jewish Education and Culture

53. The Ohr Avner Chabad day school enrolled 88 youngsters in 2012-2013, a number that endangered national funding as the Ukrainian government now mandates a minimum of 16 youngsters per class to secure state support at the elementary school level. Fearful of losing desperately needed funding, Chabad Rabbi Liron Edri opened enrollment to non-Jewish students for the 2013-2014 academic year. About one-third of the pupils have no Jewish lineage at all, he said. They are attracted to the school because it offers high-quality education and is housed in comfortable, modern premises, Rabbi Edri stated.

The day school campus consists of two large modern buildings and extensive outdoor playing fields. The main building is seen at right.

Photo: the writer (in 2008).

A second structure behind the first building includes a preschool enrolling 37 youngsters and a spacious modern sports hall. The design of both structures includes large empty spaces that remain dark much of the time in an effort to save money on electricity costs.

Rabbi Edri expressed concern about the future of the school. Demographic losses in the Jewish population are such that it may be forced to close within a relatively few years, he said. (See interview with Rabbi Edri below.)

54. A Museum of Jewish Culture and History of the Holocaust occupies one room on the second floor of the synagogue building. In a relatively small space, local historians have arranged an exhibit of Jewish artifacts and other descriptive materials explaining the history of Jews in the region and the fate of local Jews during the Holocaust. Trained docents guide visitors, including school groups, through the displays.

This section of the one-room museum provides information on the Holocaust in the Krivoi Rog area and generally. Other walls and display cases depict other aspects of local Jewish history and records and artifacts of local Jewish World War II veterans.

Photo: the writer.
Mikhail Marmer, a local man, has been a major contributor to the Museum. Grants also have been received from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany.

55. The Joint Distribution Committee maintains a small Jewish community center program within the building housing the local hesed or welfare center. (See below.) JCC activity focuses on ballet classes and a modest sports program. Other than a small Jewish library, the JCC includes little Jewish content.

Welfare

56. Hesed Chana shares a building with a JDC Jewish community center. Vyecheslav Botvinnik, director of JDC operations in the city, stated that the hesed serves 1,700 clients, almost all of them elderly, in Krivoi Rog and 39 smaller population centers in the periphery. In some of these smaller locales, only one or two Jews remain. About 180 of these clients receive homecare services; many of these housebound individuals are very isolated and lonely said Mr. Botvinnik. Their only visitors are the homecare workers.

Notwithstanding his severe mien, Vyecheskav Botvinnik is eager to explain JDC operations in Krivoi Rog and environs to visitors.

Photo: the writer.

Hesed Chana operates a day center for mobile seniors, scheduling each of six groups of 20 individuals for a full day of activities once every two weeks. Hesed vans visit 24 different places to pick up and drop off participants, Mr. Botvinnik said.

As is the case in other cities and towns, the number of Holocaust victims continues to decline and revenue from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany has diminished accordingly. Some years ago, Mr. Botvinnik stated, 70 percent of all hesed clients were Holocaust victims; now only 40 percent of clients share that history.

In addition to elderly clients, the hesed also attempts to assist disabled Jewish children through its Tikvah program, although it can offer only limited programs, such

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103 The dispersion of small numbers of Jews in villages is, in part, a legacy of Agro-Joint collective farms established in the area between the two World Wars and then broken up under Stalin. Many displaced Jewish farmers moved to cities after the farms collapsed, but some remained in rural areas.
as speech therapy, to about 20 special needs youngsters who live in the city. With assistance of World Jewish Relief, a British organization, it brings these youngsters to the hesed for periodic assistance. Additional Jewish children with disabilities reside in the periphery, Mr. Botvinnik stated, but it is too difficult and too costly to provide them with services other than occasional food parcels and some financial support for medical needs. Local governments, including the municipality of Krivoi Rog, are insensitive to the needs of disabled people, continued Mr. Botvinnik. Schools are inaccessible to children who use walkers or wheelchairs; stores and other buildings are not designed with access ramps.

The industrial base of Krivoi Rog contributes to a very unhealthy environment, Mr. Botvinnik stated. The quality of both air and water is poor, leading to chronic health conditions. Wealthy people, he continued, move away. The local steel industry is old-fashioned and many mills have closed. Mines have been depleted. The unemployment level is very high, and many individuals who are nominally employed work only part time.

When asked about inflation, Mr. Botvinnik responded that he had seen a local news item on the Internet that very morning that reported inflation in Krivoi Rog at 14 percent. However, he knew from his own professional and personal experience that the local inflation rate was much higher. For example, the hesed kitchen staff (who prepare meals for day center clients) tell him that the cost of food has risen 30 to 40 percent in the last few months.

People cannot afford to pay for cataract surgery or chemotherapy, said Mr. Botvinnik. Hospitals do not have certain basic medicines, he continued. Parents of school-age children cannot afford to feed their children and help their own elderly parents at the same time. Public schools demand "contributions" from parents for school repairs, and parents can no longer afford to give their children a monetary allowance. Seniors fear that the Ukrainian government, facing major economic difficulties, will enact pension "reforms" that will reduce pensions.

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104 Many, perhaps most, hospitals in Ukraine (and Russia) expect patients to provide their own medicines and surgical tools. They also are expected to bring their own linens and arrange for food service. Many heseds and rabbis help patients with these items; for example, some heseds maintain a supply of bed linens and will bring food to the hospital if a patient lacks family members to prepare meals. Adopt-a-Bubbe (pages 40-42) and some heseds also attempt to provide medicines, surgical instruments, and other supplies in the hope that this largesse will lead to more acceptable treatment for their clients.
Obviously, Mr. Botvinnik said, the **stress level** in the community is very high. Russian intervention has aggravated an already dire economic situation. Local Jews, Mr. Botvinnik continued, understand that JDC is unable to provide all of the support that they need, and they are very grateful for any assistance at all.

**Synagogue-Related Programs**

57. Rabbi Liron Edri, a Chabad rabbi from Israel, arrived in the city in 2001 to provide leadership for a Jewish population that lacked effective indigenous Jewish leaders. He has worked well with local government officials to obtain land for a synagogue and for a Jewish day school. He has secured funds for new buildings from individuals with Krivoi Rog roots who no longer live in the city.  

*Rabbi Liron Edri has worked with donors to build structures that now exceed the capacity of the shrinking Jewish community to maintain them. He worries about the future for Jews in a rust belt city with a declining economy.*

Photo: the writer.

The **synagogue**, which was completed in 2010, includes a prayer hall, classrooms, conference rooms, a kitchen and kosher dining facility, a Judaica store, a welfare service, and a small Jewish Agency office. The welfare office, which is separate from the JDC hesed, dispenses food parcels, clothing, and some cash payments to needy individuals. A Jewish war veterans group meets in the facility, and a Jewish history museum occupies a room on the second floor. (See pages 77-78.) The synagogue also displays the work of contemporary Jewish artists, some of whom have been able to attract purchasers through this exposure.

*The synagogue in Krivoi Rog is a striking building located on a major street close to the Chabad day school.*

Photo:  

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105 Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki of Dnipropetrovsk was instrumental in helping Rabbi Edri locate some of these donors.
As he has done in the past, Rabbi Edri expressed concern about the ability of the Jewish community in Krivoi Rog to sustain itself in a declining economy and an era of emigration. In ten years at the most, he predicted, possibly only five to seven years, **only three Jewish population centers in Ukraine will survive** as active Jewish communities: Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa. Jewish young adults, he observed, are not staying in smaller cities and towns; assimilation also is taking its toll.

Few local young Jews go on Taglit tours to Israel or participate in MASA Israel programs, Rabbi Edri said, simply because there are few local Jews in the relevant age groups. These programs work best when a significant local cohort participates and creates a momentum that motivates others, he stated, but Krivoi Rog lacks the Jewish population mass to create such a force.

**Kyiv**

Situated on both banks of the Dnipr River in the north central part of the country, the origins of Kyiv are lost in antiquity. The Ukrainian capital is, however, known as the “mother of all Russian cities,” long pre-dating cities in Russia itself. Kyivan Rus – the city and territories around it - is considered the forerunner of the modern Russian state. In 988, Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv designated Orthodox (Byzantine rite) Christianity as the state religion of Russia and established its seat in Kyiv. Kyivan Rus attained its greatest powers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when it was a trading center between the Baltic and Mediterranean seas. Sacked by Mongols in 1240, the lands of Kyivan Rus were successively under Tatar, Lithuanian, and Polish control from the fourteenth century and then annexed by Russia in 1686. The third largest city in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Kyiv was occupied and almost completely destroyed by German forces between September 1941 and November 1943.

Now the capital of independent Ukraine, Kyiv is the political hub of the country and an important center of Ukrainian commerce, industry, culture, and education. The city is known for its location on the Dnipr River, its historic buildings and monuments, and the Kreschatyk, the broad boulevard that is its main street. However, in April 2014, at the time of the writer's visit, the Kreschatyk remained closed to vehicular traffic; political protesters, as well as some homeless people, still maintained encampments from the earlier anti-Yanukhovich demonstrations. Barricades of old tires, some painted in Ukrainian blue and yellow, and protest detritus constituted an obstacle course for pedestrians. Large political placards, memorials to victims of police violence, and Ukrainian and European Union flags added to the color. A portable stage, its walls covered with political slogans, accommodated entertainers, especially on weekends when local demonstrators and spectators were joined by fellow protestors from out of town.
On adjacent streets, one found additional protest sites and a medical dispensary tent complex staffed by volunteer physicians and nurses. Somewhat defiantly, most nearby businesses and other institutions remained open, vehicular traffic diverted when necessary, but pedestrians going about their business as if in normal conditions.

At left, woman walks down the Kreschatyk, which is blocked to vehicular traffic, early on a weekday morning in April. The burned-out building is the former trade union building, which had been partly occupied by protesters as their headquarters, press center, security center, and kitchen; Kyiv police occupied other parts of the structure and are believed to have set the fire in an attempt to rout the protesters on the night of February 18-19. At right is a makeshift theater in the middle of the Kreschatyk; blue and yellow banners above and below the stage urge people to enlist in the new national guard. A banner on the side of the stage advertises an "open university of Maidan."

The general population of Kyiv includes somewhat more than 2.8 million permanent residents and unregistered migrants. Although the number of the latter has increased in recent months as people flee violence in the east, the city always has hosted seekers from less well developed parts of the country as well as foreigners who have overstayed visas and lack the means to move elsewhere.

Estimates of the size of the Jewish population of Kyiv range from 25,000 to 70,000. Unlike many other large Jewish population centers in the post-Soviet states, Kyiv lacks unambiguous Jewish leadership. The chief rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine, Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, frequently is absent from the city, and no other individual has emerged as a credible leader of Kyiv Jewry. The majority of Kyiv Jews remain aloof from organized Jewish activity.

Jewish Education

58. The Orach Chaim Jewish day school (School #299), operating under the auspices of Chief Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, is the oldest of five Jewish day schools in the city. The writer spoke with Khariton Gilgur, a native of Zhytomyr, and the longtime principal
of the school. Mr. Gilgur described the mood in the city as one of apprehension and bafflement. The police had only recently emerged from hiding, having been physically assaulted by ordinary citizens who were angered by police corruption and by collaboration with the hated former President Viktor Yanukovych. Many local officials had left their desks, Mr. Gilgur said, because no one knew who was in charge. However, stated Mr. Gilgur, someone with authority declared that garbage pick-up was no longer a free service provided by the municipality and, clearly, this is the case. The school now is charged for trash removal.

**School enrollment** now stands at 212, Mr. Gilgur said, apparently including children in a preschool program. All pupils are halachically Jewish, a policy that Mr. Gilgur believes is unnecessarily limiting and unrealistic in view of the heavy intermarriage rate among Kyiv Jewry. Another issue, he acknowledged, is that the small enrollment cannot justify maintenance of the four buildings for which it is responsible. One building houses a coeducational preschool, and a second accommodates a coeducational elementary program (grades 1-5) and an upper school for girls. The upper school for boys convenes in a third structure, and the fourth building stands empty.\(^{106}\) Most of these structures are unattractive older buildings in need of renovation

*Khariton Gilgur has led School #299 for many years. He fears for its future and also is apprehensive about the future for his own family in contemporary Ukraine.*

Photo: the writer.

The **Jewish studies curriculum** now includes eight classes weekly in Jewish tradition and Hebrew, having been reduced in recent years from a significantly heavier program. Parents opposed the emphasis on Jewish studies, preferring that the school focus on secular studies. Compensation of Jewish studies teachers, most of whom are from Israel, for an intensive Jewish curriculum also was an issue. In addition to formal Jewish studies, many pupils also participate in a Shabbaton every year, Mr. Gilgur said.

**Most graduates** of the high school continue their education in local universities and other institutions of higher education, responded Mr. Gilgur to a question. A few boys enroll in yeshivas, some for only a year or two, and some students enter various Israel programs.

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\(^{106}\) The four buildings may have been necessary when Rabbi Bleich operated a residential program for boys and girls from unstable homes and/or from distant small towns with deficient local schools. In the face of declining occupancy (due to the decline in Jewish population, especially in peripheral areas) and escalating costs, the dormitories were closed before the 2013-2014 school year and remaining children transferred to a large Jewish children's home in Odesa.
The Simcha-Chabad Jewish Academy was established in 1992 by Berel Karasik, then a Chabad-associated local leader in Kyiv. The two-building institution is located in the Dniprovskiy district of the city, on the east bank of the Dniper River. Simcha is affiliated with Tsirei Chabad (Young Chabad), an Israel-based faction of the Chabad movement. The school receives no financial assistance from Ohr Avner, the educational arm of the Chabad-controlled Federation of Jewish Communities. The writer spoke with Rabbi Mordechai Levenhartz, director of Tsirei Chabad programs in Ukraine.

Enrollment at Simcha reached a peak of 540 youngsters in 2007-2008, said Rabbi Levenhartz. **Current enrollment (2013-2014)** is about 300, including approximately 100 children in the Simcha preschool, he stated. However, he continued, he anticipates a substantial drop in the school census in 2014-2015 because families are fleeing the unrest and economic meltdown in Ukraine or, at least, are sending their children out of the country. He knows of eight Simcha families that already have completed arrangements to make aliya to Israel during the summer, he declared, and others have begun the aliya process. Additionally, some high school students will join the Na'aleh high school in Israel program, and some graduating 11th graders and recent graduates have applied for the Selah pre-college preparatory program in Israel. Israel is a magnet for Simcha families, continued Rabbi Levenhartz because many already have relatives there and Simcha has a long history of guiding youngsters into Na'aleh.

Despite a very difficult political and economic environment, Rabbi Mordechai Levenhartz manages a slight smile. He operates a Jewish day school and a welfare service in one of Kyiv's poorer neighborhoods.

**Everyone in Kyiv is nervous**, said Rabbi Levenhartz, because the future is so uncertain. People are afraid. The price of gasoline [for vehicles] has risen 35 percent in the last month, and the cost of all food products also has increased. Unemployment is growing; a friend who manages a travel company specializing in corporate travel fired 77 of his 78 employees recently, and other businesses either are dismissing large numbers of employees or are closing completely.

Regarding **fundraising for Simcha and his welfare service**, Rabbi Levenhartz, an accomplished fundraiser, referred to Kyiv as a "fundraising desert" (пустыня). It is impossible to raise money now, he said, even for forthcoming seders. He downsized the customary Purim celebration, he stated, and things have only deteriorated since then. Banks no longer lend money to them or, for that matter, to anyone else, he declared, echoing others. Further, Kyiv oligarch Vadym Rabynovych just withdrew financial aid for Simcha security arrangements last week - because he is in a dispute with another oligarch donor and will not contribute to any cause that is supported by his
adversaries. In response, Rabbi Levenhartz has had to reduce the level of security in and around his school buildings.\footnote{One of the two school buildings includes a functioning synagogue and a community dining hall.}

Notwithstanding all of these difficulties, Rabbi Levenhartz was able to provide Purim gift parcels for 200 elderly Jewish welfare clients, that is, individuals who are attempting to manage on fixed-income low pensions in circumstances of high inflation. He receives some in-kind assistance, he said, from a Jewish deputy on the city council who sometimes manages to find various supplies for Simcha. "Conditions have never been worse," he stated; perhaps things will improve after the next elections if real civil servants are voted into office, he declared.

60. The \textit{ORT school} was established in 2000 as a \textit{lyceum}, an elite school with a competitive admissions policy. In common with the Simcha school (see above), the ORT lyceum occupies two separate small buildings. It is located on the east, or less prosperous, side of the Dnipr River in a generally unattractive area of the city. The lyceum currently enrolls 341 youngsters in grades five through 11,\footnote{Schools with lyceum status are not permitted to enroll pupils below grade five.} an increase over previous years. Most children have some Jewish heritage, but not all are halachically Jewish.\footnote{ORT schools frequently enroll some non-Jewish youngsters, especially from families in the school neighborhood, for reasons of public/community relations.} Prospective students must complete entrance examinations, according to state law, at the beginning of June for entry the following September. He worries every year, said Principal Yuri Kinkov, about maintaining enrollment as the Jewish population in the city declines, but the school has a good reputation and families want their children to attend.

\textit{One of the two buildings of the ORT school is at right.}

Photo: the writer.

All pupils are from \textit{middle or lower class} families, said Mr. Kinkov. The city provides a lunch subsidy for 92 students from very poor families, for which he is very grateful, Mr. Kinkov declared. The school is unable to provide bus transportation for youngsters, and public transportation also is limited. Although he has attempted to obtain a better, single building for the school for some years, the prospect of doing so in the foreseeable future is very dim. All building transfers must be approved by local politicians, whose own tenure is brief due to current political instability. The situation is especially frustrating, Mr. Kinkov said, because he is aware of several better school buildings in
the same area that are only one-third occupied. These buildings have sports facilities and other program spaces that the current premises lack.

Youngsters at the ORT lyceum are scheduled for **four to six class periods in technology** subjects every week, depending on grade level, and **five weekly periods of Jewish studies**, which includes Hebrew language, Jewish tradition, and Jewish history. The main Jewish studies teacher, an Israeli, is excellent, Mr. Kinkov continued, but, unfortunately, Israeli government policy will force her to return to Israel during the summer because the Israel Ministry of Education limits teacher appointments abroad to three years.110

The ongoing **political and economic crisis** creates very tough problems for the school, said Mr. Kinkov. Most school families, he continued, support a strong, sovereign Ukraine and are opposed to Russian intervention; additionally, many have been adversely affected by the troubled Ukrainian economy. Mr. Kinkov estimated inflation at 50 percent, taking into account the declining value of the Ukrainian hryvnia vis-a-vis other currencies. Some parents, Mr. Kinkov stated, continue to support the school financially through the provision of office supplies, technology, and security, but he is concerned about their ability to maintain their largesse. He knows that some parents have lost their jobs and that others fear major economic disruptions in their lives. The situation for parents is terrible, terrifying (страшное).

*Yuri Kinkov, principal of the ORT lyceum in Kyiv, is concerned about the impact of the current political and economic situation in Ukraine on children in his school, their parents, teachers, and custodial staff.*

*Photo: the writer.*

Families talk about these issues at home, stated Mr. Kinkov, and their **children become worried about the future**, both for their families and for themselves individually. They bring these tensions to school, and the teachers try to speak with them calmly and be compassionate. At the same time, he continued, the teachers have their own problems. Some of the teachers, he continued, give their own funds to struggling pupil families or to the janitorial staff when they themselves are having problems making ends meet.111

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110 The Israel Ministry of Education pays the salaries and living expenses of some Israeli teachers of Jewish subjects in some Jewish day schools in the post-Soviet states within the framework of a program known as *Hephzibah*. However, the tenure of an individual teacher is limited to three years, after which s/he returns to Israel and is replaced by another Israeli teacher. Mr. Kinkov often complains about this rotation policy, which removes teachers after they become comfortable in the school and pupils become attached to them.

111 As he entered his office with the writer, Mr. Kinkov spotted a cleaning lady at work in the hallway and said that he finds it very difficult to face the janitors in the school. They earn so little, he said, that he doesn't understand how they survive. It is embarrassing to him that he is unable to do much about the situation.
Mr. Kinkov expressed **gratitude** to the Jewish Agency for Israel and to the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago for financial assistance to date. The funds supplied, he said, have enabled the lyceum to improve its security, a measure that is greatly appreciated by school parents and by district security officials. Fortunately, he continued, things have been very quiet in the area where the school is located, but it is best to be prepared for any eventuality. He had an **additional request**, he stated. He would appreciate special funds for supplemental payments to teachers, administrative staff, and custodians because inflation is eroding the value of their salaries; he would like to have about $70,000 to address this problem adequately, he said, but any amount will be helpful. The lyceum also needs money for school lunches and to help staff and pupils pay for transportation to and from school.

61. The **Perlina School** is an independent, private Jewish day school currently operating at close to capacity with 120 youngsters in preschool and grades one through seven. (Capacity is 124 pupils.) Perlina receives no government aid, but charges $600 monthly per pupil, said Rabbi Yonatan and Mrs. Ina Markovich, the Israeli couple who established and direct the school. The tuition fee is typical for good private schools in Kyiv, the Markoviches said, but only about one-third of Perlina pupils come from families who pay the full fee. Scholarships for the others are provided through fundraising. Unfortunately, said Mrs. Markovich, economic distress has forced some formerly tuition-paying families to request scholarship assistance; some of these families are embarrassed by, and even ashamed of, the situations in which they now find themselves. All pupils are at least partially Jewish, but not all are halachically Jewish, Mrs. Markovich stated.

*Perlina students presented an English-language puppet show with hand puppets from behind the blue curtain, reaching over it for the performance. They later received audience applause in front of the curtain.*

The major appeal of the school to parents, stated the Markoviches, is small classes (no more than 15 pupils in a class) and a **strong emphasis on acquisition of English-language skills**, as well as a rigorous overall general studies curriculum. Youngsters are scheduled for 10 classes of English weekly, all taught by native English speakers.\(^{112}\) Additionally, they have five weekly classes in Hebrew and three in Jewish tradition.

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\(^{112}\) Perlina uses an English-as-a-Second-Language program developed by Cambridge University. Its pupils take examinations developed for this course.
Pupils also participate in an abridged version of traditional morning prayers every day and a kabbalat Shabbat (welcoming the Sabbath) observance every Friday afternoon.

Perlina has long sought to expand its elementary school into a full 11-year school (along with a preschool), but lacks space in its current premises. The previous mayor had agreed to lease two currently unused preschool buildings to Perlina for such expansion, but Rabbi Markovich is uncertain whether the offer still stands under the new city administration. Further, substantial financial resources would be required for conversion of preschool buildings into a first-rate high school with science laboratories, a sports hall, and ordinary classrooms and other space suitable for teenagers. As it is, the city cut off heat and hot water to Perlina during part of the winter for non-payment of bills. (See below for information about another education program operated by Rabbi and Mrs. Markovich.)

62. The writer was unable to visit the Mitzvah school, a small school that probably enrolls fewer than 100 children in preschool and elementary grades. Mitzvah operates under the auspices of Chabad Rabbi Moshe Reuven Asman.

63. Rabbi Yonatan and Mrs. Ina Markovich, who operate the Perlina school, opened a school for autistic children in Kyiv in 2010. Known as Дитина з майбутнім (Ukr.; Children with a Future), the school is housed in a renovated two-story building previously used as a preschool. Enrollment at the school now stands at 32 youngsters between the ages of two and seven, which is full capacity for the current building. The teacher:pupil ratio is 1:1, not including speech therapists, psychologists, and other specialists. Due to the large number of educators and other skilled professionals required for schools of this type, the monthly tuition is $2,000, more than twice the cost of a good private school for normal youngsters. All families pay something, stated Mrs. Markovich, but the majority receives substantial support from a scholarship fund. However, she continued, available funds are insufficient to cover tuition for all pupils and, regrettably, five youngsters left the program when their families were unable to pay a reasonable share of its costs. A major problem, she continued, is that most families are single-parent families because the father simply walks out when faced with the reality of his child’s issues; thus, the family draws on only one income, and that only if the mother is able to work.

A teacher helps two autistic pupils with lunch. Mrs. Markovich said that the school is fortunate to have attracted two men to teaching positions in a field dominated by women. (It is likely that the Markovich school offers the best conditions in Kyiv for teachers of autistic children.) Note the teacher’s scarf in Ukrainian national colors.

Photo: the writer.
Notwithstanding the financial commitment required of all families, the school has a long waiting list. It has achieved a good reputation in its three years of operation, Mrs. Markovich said, even managing to prepare some youngsters for successful entry into regular, conventional schools. A related issue is the development of a continuing program for youngsters above the age seven who cannot attend regular schools. The process of establishing such a school is bureaucratically difficult, Mrs. Markovich stated, because no precedents for it exist. No Ukrainian curriculum has been prepared for this type of school, she continued, so curricula from other countries would have to be translated, studied, and adapted to Ukrainian reality. Further, she noted, few government ministries are functioning during the current political situation. Heads of ministries have simply left their posts and gone home. Confusion reigns among staff who still come to work and, clearly, no one has authority to make decisions.

Other problems include a lack of understanding in the broader community about autism and a conflict between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health about which ministry controls autism-related proposals and programs. Mrs. Markovich and some of the more articulate parents of autistic children have mobilized a group of volunteers who provide information to interested people in the Ministry of Health and to the interested public; they also lobby the Ministry of Education to establish special classes for autistic youngsters. However, the Ministry of Education provides no funding for the preparation of teachers equipped with skills to work with autistic children; a few pedagogical institutions offer such programs on their own initiative, but these programs receive no financial support from the state and usually are poorly organized and shallow in content. Mrs. Markovich and her associates have approached several foreign embassies and foundations for support in promoting public awareness of autism, but, technically, they represent no one but themselves. They have no formal organization, no office or telephones; a friend is providing modest office space and a part-time secretary, but they need a much more substantial infrastructure to achieve their goals.

Working with parents of autistic children is another area that requires a great deal of attention, Mrs. Markovich stated. Few pediatricians have been educated to recognize signs of autism in early childhood. Children are enrolled in regular preschools or schools, where they immediately are labeled as problem children and usually expelled. Frequently, parents deny that any real issues exist and blame the teacher or school principal for incompetence; they feel that they are being blamed as deficient parents and become belligerent, vigorously denying that they use drugs (when no one has accused them of using drugs). They are not "losers," they say, and their children are not losers either.

Such parents expect the Markovich school to "cure" their children since they are paying tuition. They decline to work with their children at home, refusing to follow instructions issued by the school to reinforce skills taught there. For example, the school succeeds in teaching a child how to tie his shoes and then informs the parents of this achievement; the parents are asked to follow up at home, encouraging the youngster to tie his shoes as he gets dressed. However, Mrs. Markovich stated, many parents continue to
to tie the child’s shoes for him, claiming that it is "easier" that way. Some parents say that the school should not tell them how to raise their children.

To address these problems of parental denial, frustration, and aggression, the school will begin a new program for parents in September 2014. First, said Mrs. Markovich, all parents will be required to sign a contract that states, among other things, that they will follow protocols of the school at home. Second, Mrs. Markovich continued, the school will organize some compulsory classes/gatherings for parents in which these feelings of denial, frustration, and aggression can be discussed and confronted in a productive manner. Obviously, such sessions can be used for counseling and socialization as well.

64. Iosif "Iosik" Akselrud is the Director of Hillel CASE, the section of the Hillel student organization that oversees Hillel operations in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia Azerbaidzhan, and Uzbekistan. He is less concerned with specific Hillel programs in Kyiv, he said, than with overall management issues. Known as an excellent fundraiser, Mr. Akselrud said that it is impossible to raise money in Ukraine this year. Political and economic instability simply deter people from contributing.

Approximately 55 percent of the Hillel CASE budget is provided by U.S.-based sources, principally Hillel International and the Schusterman Family Foundation, Mr. Akselrud stated. He is responsible for raising another $595,000 within the CASE area and spends about 80 percent of his time in pursuit of these funds. The Genesis Philanthropy Group of Moscow is a dependable major donor, Mr. Akselrud said, but he still must find $360,000 and doubts that he will be successful. Budget cuts will be necessary. The current inflation rate of about 30 percent just exacerbates an already difficult situation.

Iosif Akselrud oversees Hillel operations across a broad swath of former Soviet territory, from European territories through the Caucasus mountain area and into Central Asia.

Photo: Hillel.

Referring to the Maidan demonstrations, Mr. Akselrud said that many Hillel activists were active in the protests as "strong, proud Ukrainians." Of those who were unable to participate, many called Hillel with questions and/or just needed to talk with someone. Many Hillel students also met in an impromptu manner, gaining support in a turbulent time from being together in a comfortable Jewish setting. However, violence in the streets caused Hillel organizations in both Kyiv and Lviv to cancel their activities and close their offices for several days.

He has been in contact with the Crimean Hillel groups in both Simferopol and Sevastopol, stated Mr. Akselrud. Hillel members have come together for mutual support in these cities as well, he said. They do not want Crimea to be part of Russia. The
immediate reality of Russian control over Crimea, he continued, is that Hillel can no longer transfer funds to Crimean Hillel through conventional Ukrainian channels. Obviously, Hillel in Crimea is in particular need of financial assistance at this time, but the organization will have to create other means of transferring funds and reaching these groups in general.

Hillel had scheduled a **September 2014 Shabbaton** at a conference center outside Moscow in celebration of the 20th year of Hillel operation in the post-Soviet states, Mr. Akselrud related. Two-hundred people from all post-Soviet Hillels were expected, he said. However, the conference will not take place, he continued, because Ukrainian Hillel activists have declared en masse that they do not want to "celebrate" anything in Russia and, therefore, they will not attend such an event. Their Russian counterparts say that they understand. Perhaps, the celebration will be transferred to Israel, Mr. Akselrud speculated, but substantial fundraising will be necessary if this is the case.

Mr. Akselrud noted that a number of Hillel and other Jewish seminars/conferences had been scheduled for **Crimean resort areas**, but these will have to be re-scheduled for other venues. Reorganization will be very disruptive and probably costly as well.

Notwithstanding all of the current difficulties, Mr. Akselrud continued, it is important to remember Hillel's many achievements. One of these, stated Mr. Akselrud, is **Hillel University**, a four-stage leadership development program that is intended to generate Hillel directors, Jewish-studies educators, and madrichim (leaders) for various situations. Working closely with the Buncher Leadership Program of the Joint Distribution Committee, Hillel University prepares candidates through courses and seminars in management and Jewish studies. One aspect of practical training in this program is the management of JDC family camps by Hillel students.

A survey has recently been completed that points to another achievement of Hillel, said Mr. Akselrud. Hillel, he stated, claims credit for **243 Jewish weddings** that have occurred between couples who met through Hillel in Ukraine, Belarus, or Moldova over a recent five-year period.

The **CASE Hillel Board** that Mr. Akselrud created continues to meet and to raise money. The lead donor on the Board, a Hillel alumnus, contributes $12,000 annually, Mr. Akselrud said, but it will be many years before Hillel can cover its expenses from money raised solely in the post-Soviet states. Oligarch Vadym Rabynovych continues his significant support, Mr. Akselrud continued.

65. The **Ukrainian Union of Jewish Students**, which is affiliated with the **World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS)**, began to work in Ukraine in the 1990’s, but suspended its activities after several years. It has since renewed operations in Ukraine under the volunteer leadership of Victoria Godik, who is employed professionally as an instructor in engineering management at a local university. Officially, Ms. Godik is
Chairperson of UUJS, as well as a Vice President of the European Union of Jewish Students.

WUJS/UUJS aims to "provide a community for Jewish young adults and young professionals," Ms. Godik declared. About 300 young Jews participate in UUJS activities in Kyiv, she stated, led by a group of approximately ten activists. UUJS cooperates with WUJS groups in other countries, such as the Baltic states, in planning weekend seminars and other activities. However, Ms. Godik noted, it has been "very difficult to concentrate this year" due to the conflict with Russia and the troubled Ukrainian economy.

Almost all younger Jews in Ukraine support full Ukrainian sovereignty and are opposed to Russian intervention in Ukraine, Ms. Godik said. Some older Jews in Ukraine may be pro-Russian because they are nostalgic for the superpower Soviet Union and/or believe that their pensions would increase under Russian rule, but these older people are living in the past, she claimed. Both younger and middle-age Jews were out on Maidan in full force, stated Ms. Godik; Jews were among the leaders as volunteer medics and were prominent in the "I.T. tent" (information technology center). Jews also led "social initiatives," such as food preparation, on Maidan.

Victoria Godik is the volunteer leader of the Ukrainian Union of Jewish Students. She speaks fluent idiomatic English.

Some Russian Jews, acknowledged Ms. Godik, support Vladimir Putin. A group of Russian Jews from Ulyanovsk [a city of approximately 600,000, located on the middle stretch of the Volga River, 900 km/550 miles east of Moscow] even came to Crimea in support of Russian annexation of Crimea, she stated. She finds Russian Jewish support of Mr. Putin to be "embarrassing," she commented, but she "understands their situation," i.e., she believes that many Russian Jews have been coerced into making statements or undertaking certain actions favoring Russian annexation of all or parts of Ukraine.

Regarding the Jewish situation in Ukraine, foreigners often exaggerate the extent of antisemitism in the country. She realizes that the foreigners are trying to be helpful, but not all of them are as well-informed as they might be. Later, Ms. Godik said that, "Whatever happens regarding Maidan, Jews will be blamed."

Inflation, said Ms. Godik, is about 40 percent. Due to devaluation of the hryvnia, UUJS activists cannot afford to attend conferences abroad. On a local level, she stated, UUJS is unable to charge participants very much for events, which limits its ability to engage
the top-level speakers that its members want. She doubts that the organization will be able to continue its popular program of expeditions to places of Jewish interest, because would-be travelers may be unable to pay the costs of transportation, local accommodations, guides, etc.

Even more distressing, Ms. Godik continued, the pensions of elderly people do not "stretch" to cover basic needs; they cannot purchase the medicines essential to their well-being. On a personal level, she acknowledged, she fears that the university at which she is employed will be unable to pay her salary.

UUJS eagerly embraces partnerships with other organizations, said Ms. Godik; they have worked with the Brodsky synagogue (Rabbi Asman), Rabbi Bleich, the Embassy of Israel, and the Jewish Agency - and will work with any of these groups again. Obviously, they also work with UJS in Israel and WUJS in Europe. As productive as these relationships have been, Ms. Godik continued, UUJS also is seeking new initiatives that they can pursue on their own.

66. Rabbi Motti Neuwirth, who is associated with Chief Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich and the Grand Choral Synagogue on Schekavitskaya street in the Podil area of Kyiv, directs a program for young adults between the ages of 25 and 35. Known as Morasha (Heb., heritage, legacy), the program attracts 90 unique young people every week, 35-40 of whom attend on any given day. Morasha convenes in a small, but clean and well-furnished center in the basement of one of the synagogue buildings.

The current crisis in Ukraine, said Rabbi Neuwirth, has encouraged people from Morasha to emigrate to Israel. Five young couples have already gone, and two more will leave for Israel soon. Their departures are a loss for his community, he continued, but the leadership gaps that they leave create new opportunities for others to step forward. He is strongly in favor of aliyah and is pleased to "lose" participants in his Ukraine programs when they go to Israel.

Rabbi Motti Neuwirth supervises a range of programs intended to draw young adults to Judaism and Jewish practice. Originally, he focused on day school graduates, but now aims at a much broader segment of the Jewish community.

A signature program of Morasha, said Rabbi Neuwirth, is a 20-session class called Unlock Your Judaism. He described it as a text-based, analytical course inspired by the popular paperback Judaism for Dummies (Hungry Minds, 2001). Unlock Your Judaism is followed by Upgrade Your Judaism, which students pursue in chevruta (Heb., learning with a partner). Both of these courses are scheduled for evenings between 7:00 and 10:00 p.m., so that people may participate after work. Morasha also offers
STARS Intensive, a more comprehensive version of the original STARS (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers) course. Participants move into apartments owned by the synagogue and participate in synagogue- and apartment-based learning and worship for 40 hours every week while maintaining outside employment. Two of the four couples enrolled in this program recently emigrated to Israel, Rabbi Neuwirth said, and six men continue. Morasha no longer teaches any regular STARS classes, stated Rabbi Neuwirth.

Morasha also manages a Shabbat Host program in which 20 host families in Kyiv invite interested Jews to a traditional Shabbat meal at their homes. Using a database, a coordinator matches hosts families and guests, attempting to assemble groups of people who are compatible. Independent of local rabbis, the Shabbat Host program also operates in Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, and Donetsk, albeit on a smaller scale than in Kyiv.

Asked to comment on the impact of Maidan and of the current conflict with Russia, Rabbi Neuwirth said that Morasha participants were among the demonstrators on Maidan. Many Jews were there, he observed. Due to increased tension and crime on the streets in January and February, Rabbi Neuwirth continued, attendance at Morasha classes and other activities dropped considerably during that period; in response, Morasha posted its lectures on YouTube. Rabbi Bleich’s synagogue community, he added, is sufficiently concerned about future instability that they have developed an evacuation plan, designating buses owned by the day school that will take community members to a Karlin-Stolin community in Pinsk, a nearby city in Belarus. They also have stored enough food to feed a large number of people at their summer camp for two months.

67. Midrasha Tzionit was established in Kyiv in 2001 as a center for Jewish Zionist education under the auspices of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Over time, as economic pressure on the Jewish Agency has grown, its interest in the Midrasha has decreased. Funders now include the Genesis Philanthropy Group of Moscow, the Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund, the L.A. Pincus Fund for Jewish Education in the Diaspora (within the Jewish Agency), and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, in addition to the Jewish Agency itself.

The Midrasha is located within the former Galitzky Synagogue, a structure built in 1909-1910 and confiscated by the Soviet Union in 1930 for use as a workers’ dining hall. In 2001, after the factory supporting the dining hall declined under free market conditions, the building was returned to the local Jewish community. Rabbi Mikhail Rosenfeld, a native of Leningrad who emigrated to Israel as a child with his family, directs the Midrasha, describing it as a Jewish program center attempting to attract a multi-generational audience. Its core programs include: Shabbat services, which attract about 40 people every week; young adult learning; two music groups for children; youth groups, which also attract some participants from Moldova and Belarus, who come for Shabbatons; and theater productions, which include a mix of professional and volunteer
actors. One of the featured theater programs is a dramatized Purimspiel that is presented at the Midrasha, the hesed, and several day schools. Youth groups, said Rabbi Rosenberg, focus on building attachments to Israel and to Judaism, as well as training leaders.

The Midrasha holds two seders, one in the Midrasha and one in a private home. It also sponsors summer and winter camps for teenagers and university students, but Rabbi Rosenfeld was uncertain that the summer camp would operate in 2014 because it had been scheduled for a site in Crimea, which probably is inaccessible to Ukrainians now.

Midrasha Tzionit collaborates with the Jewish Agency in hosting programs about aliyah to Israel, especially now because many local Jews are leaving Ukraine or at least are thinking about leaving, said Rabbi Rosenfeld. Posters about Israel and Israeli flags are prominently displayed throughout the building. The Midrasha will hold its own Israel Independence Day celebration.

Rabbi Rosenfeld observed that attendance at Midrasha Tzionit events had dropped considerably during the last several months because people are worried about political instability and their own safety on the streets. In general, he continued, tension is ever present and strong.
68. **Limmud**, the popular Jewish learning program first established in Britain, has operated in Ukraine for five years, said **Irina Knopova**, who volunteers as a transportation and logistics manager for Limmud in Ukraine. Peralistic by design, a Limmud conference operates on a residential conference model, offering lectures and discussions on Jewish topics, debates, workshops, music, and dance. Multiple sessions are held simultaneously, giving participants an opportunity to select topics of interest to them. A festive Shabbat celebration, with various worship and non-religious cultural options, always is on the schedule, as are activities for children and families.

The chief administrator of Limmud Ukraine is the only compensated employee; she also is responsible for Limmud in Belarus and Moldova, said Ms. Knopova. The President, **Yosif Akselrud**, is a volunteer. Volunteer committees on programs, organization, public relations, and other subjects make their own decisions. Feedback on all aspects of Limmud conferences is solicited and used in planning subsequent conferences.

Russian-language Limmud conferences now are held in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Israel, the United States, Canada, and Australia, although the number of such gatherings varies from country to country. Russian-speaking Jews from one country often attend Limmud in other countries. Although Limmud is subsidized by outside foundations and organizations, all participants pay a portion of their expenses, said Ms. Knopova. Volunteers receive discounts, she noted.

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69. Due to illnesses of several of its residents, the writer was unable to visit **Moishe House**, a program in which young adults prepare various Jewish activities engaging other Jewish young adults.

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113 Mr. Akselrud also is the regional director of Hillel. See pages 90-91.
The writer met with Marina Lysak and Masha Pushkova at the Sholom Aleichem House in downtown Kyiv where the two young women maintain an office within a small multi-purpose room. The well-known Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem had lived in another building on the same site, said Ms. Lysak and Ms. Pushkova. That building was in bad condition and was torn down some years ago, the two women continued, and the current two-story building was constructed in the same place. The government maintains it as a small museum, with a gallery showing the work of Jewish artists on the first floor and a Sholom Aleichem museum and the multi-purpose room on the second floor.

JAFARI, the urban Jewish safari (scavenger hunt) that the two women operated, has collapsed, they said. Access to many areas of downtown Kyiv now is limited by the continuing closure of the Kreschatyk (main boulevard in Kyiv) and adjacent areas, and few people retain the economic well-being that would permit them to drive their cars around the city on scavenger hunts. Further, increased city crime might endanger certain aspects of this activity. Teaching Hebrew and planning special events has become their "Plan B," they said. They teach Hebrew classes in the Morasha program of Rabbi Bleich’s synagogue and also tutor private clients. They design and supervise special programs for the Jewish Agency, they stated.

Masha Pushkova, right, has broad work experience in Jewish education and culture. Marina Lysak, who earned an MBA at a British university and previously worked as an investment adviser, now is unemployed and attempting to work in the Jewish community. Both women work only part-time.

They both were heavily involved in the Maidan protests, they said, and they organized the airlift of wounded protesters to Israel following the shootings on February 18-20. They were on the square when shooting began. The police, who were closely allied with Yanukhovych, blocked the movement of medicines and medics to those who were wounded; in fact, the women stated, the police actually shot some people who attempted to assist the wounded. Demonstrators raised money on the square to purchase medications and medical equipment; after buying out local medical supply stores, they organized convoys to drive to outlying areas in search of the required materials. Along with others, Ms. Lysak and Ms. Pushkova realized that the injuries of the victims were too serious to be treated properly in Ukraine; complicating the physical wounds was the fact that many of the wounded had lost their personal documents in the struggle on Maidan, so it was difficult to identify them.

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114 See pages 93-94.
It so happened, said the two women, that some Czech physicians were visiting Kyiv at the time of the Maidan protests; they volunteered to take some of the wounded back to Prague for treatment, but the Czech government balked at issuing entry visas, apparently believing that assistance to injured Ukrainians would antagonize the Russians.

Although no attempt had been made to formally organize a group of Jewish quick responders, related the two women, most people working in that capacity on Maidan were activists in Jewish community organizations. Therefore, it seemed natural to contact Israeli health officials for assistance to seriously wounded protestors. Israeli officials were not helpful, the two women continued, perhaps because the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs was on strike at that time. Consequently, Ms. Lysak and Ms. Pushkova contacted different Israeli hospitals directly, using Facebook as a communications tool. Finally, several hospitals agreed to accept several wounded protestors each, as long as payment was secured in advance. The two women quickly raised $500,000 from both Ukrainians and foreigners to charter a German plane and cover initial medical costs of the wounded in Israeli hospitals; 10 seriously wounded protestors were airlifted to Israel, five of whom had returned to Ukraine by mid-April.115

Ms. Lysak and Ms. Pushkova continue to work with wounded Maidan victims and with Ukrainian soldiers wounded in battle with the Russians, sending some to other countries for therapy. Obviously, they need to raise money for this purpose and work with partners in foreign lands.

The sudden need for emergency medical services, sophisticated surgery, and complex long-term therapeutic care has underlined the glaring inadequacies of the Ukrainian medical system, said the two women. No rehabilitation institution worthy of the name exists anywhere in the country, the two women continued. Further, medical professionals seemed absolutely unaware of the condition of post-traumatic stress disorder, now afflicting many who were on Maidan. Ms. Lysak and Ms. Pushkova, well-educated and fluent in English, had never heard of it until a foreign associate suggested that the two women themselves might be victims of PTSD. With their English-language skills, Ms. Lysak and Ms. Pushkova used the Internet for self-education, but that option is not available to everyone in the country and probably is insufficiently professional for medical and social service specialists.

When asked about their own futures now that their JAFARI business had ended and Ms. Lysak no longer worked in the investment field, Ms. Lysak and Ms. Pushkova said that they were now living "another life." Each acknowledged strong feelings of stress. They continue to volunteer with the wounded and families of the wounded, to organize volunteer groups to do similar work, to teach Hebrew, and to work with the Jewish Agency whenever such opportunities occur. They would like to help Ukraine as a country, but are not certain what they can do. From their own experiences, they understand that Ukraine needs a much stronger and much more sophisticated medical

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115 A support group for the Maidan victims then in Israel quickly developed in Israel, with about 115 volunteers visiting the Ukrainians in Israeli hospitals, providing them with clothing and helping them in other ways.
system and a much stronger and much better organized military force, but they themselves lack qualifications in these fields. They also noted that the government of Ukraine has no financial resources with which to implement necessary reforms and improve services.

71. **PresenTense** is a Jewish organization currently working in the United States, Israel, and certain Russian-speaking countries. Its goal is to encourage and develop an entrepreneurial approach to Jewish leadership and community development. It offers training in necessary skills and provides a support network. It is backed by several Jewish foundations, North American Jewish federations, and certain large Jewish organizations, including the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency for Israel. In Ukraine, it is housed within the Jewish Agency and coordinated with the JAFI incubator program (Hamama).

The writer met with Ihor Kozlovsky, Director of PresenTense in Ukraine, and several other individuals connected with the organization. Mr. Kozlovsky and his colleagues declared that one of their key programs is **Face-to-Face**, which brings local Jewish young adults together with different successful Jews - perhaps a businessman, rabbi, professor, and physician - to discuss their perspectives on current issues. Another forum enables younger entrepreneurs to interact with older, more established business people.

*Ihor Kozlovsky directed PresenTense in Kyiv at the time of the writer's visit in April. However, he expected to emigrate to Israel shortly after her visit.*

Photo: the writer.

From these and other experiences, organizers hope to develop a "social entrepreneurship community" that will enhance Jewish life in a "socially responsible" manner. PresenTense has invited **program/project proposals** from Jews in Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Odesa; implementation funding will be sought from outside sources for those projects that are judged to have the greatest potential for success. When asked for examples of proposals received to date, Mr. Kozlovsky listed the following, noting that all required implementation within the Jewish community: an open space for Jewish young adults in which creative and performing arts could be explored, along with research into local Jewish history, music, and dance; a history of Jewish heroism in World War II; a hamburger restaurant that would feature Jewish and Israeli variations of this food; a project on Israeli music; a technology bridge between Israel and Kharkiv; compilation of case studies on the conduct of business according to Torah; and replication of Israeli emergency medical services in Kyiv, initially just within the Jewish population of Kyiv and then extended to the broader population.
A committee drawn from the PresenTense 13-member local board will evaluate the proposals and select the awardees. The awardees must sign a contract to attend a five-session seminar that will address business skills, budget development, public relations, website development, and public speaking. They also must meet with a PresenTense Board member, who will be a mentor, at least once monthly. Professional coaching also will be required.

Notwithstanding the detailed attention given to this plan, it had not foreseen the possibility that some of its principal personnel and targeted entrepreneurs soon would find its content irrelevant to their needs. Mr. Kozlovsky stated early in the writer's meeting with him, "Of course, aliyah is at the top of everyone's priorities." He then mentioned that "most" PresenTense Board members no longer live in Ukraine and that some applicants also are emigrating to Israel. Finally, in response to the writer's question, he acknowledged that his own aliyah plans are in a very advanced stage and that he would be on his way to Israel in the near future.

Synagogue-Related Programs

72. Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, a native of Brooklyn and a Karlin-Stolin hasid, is the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine. He arrived in the country in 1989 and presides over the Great Choral Synagogue in the Podil district of Kyiv, an area of significant Jewish population prior to World War II. In the more than 20 years that he has served in Kyiv, Rabbi Bleich has developed a number of Jewish community institutions, including the Orach Chaim day school, homes for Jewish children from unstable families, a Jewish summer camp, an assisted living residential center for elderly Jews, a matza factory, the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, and the Kyiv Jewish Religious Community. However, as described elsewhere in this report, a number of these programs are now jeopardized due to economic stress, Jewish demographic decline, and a lack of receptivity among local Jews to hasidic Judaism.

Rabbi Bleich's native American English and familiarity with American culture have facilitated easy access to American representations in the Ukrainian capital. He also represents Ukrainian Jewry in several international Jewish organizations. He remains

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116 According to Mr. Kozlovsky, 70 percent of the Board members are successful Jewish young businessmen and 30 percent are Jewish community leaders.

117 The Great Choral Synagogue on Schekavitskaya street in the Podil district of Kyiv should not be confused with the Main Choral Synagogue in the same city. The latter, better known as the Brodsky synagogue, is larger and more centrally located. Built with funds contributed by Lazar Brodsky of the wealthy sugar industry family at about the same time as the Schekavitskaya street synagogue, the Brodsky synagogue was confiscated by Soviet authorities in 1926 and converted into a workers’ club. It later became a variety theater and a children’s puppet theater. After substantial international pressure, the Brodsky synagogue was returned to the Jewish community in the 1990’s and restored. Rabbi Moshe Reuven Asman, an independent Chabad rabbi, presides over the Brodsky synagogue.
respected among Ukrainian officials. Yet he is increasingly an outsider, absent from the country for weeks at a time while attending to family matters, fundraising, and participating in international Jewish events. Further, he is a Karlin-Stolin hasid in a country in which Jewish religious life is dominated by Chabad. Rabbi Bleich was out of the country during the writer’s visit to Kyiv in April 2014; in his absence, she spoke with Yevgeny Ziskind, the long time administrator of the synagogue.

*Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich was photographed at a Ukrainian conference in Illinois in March 2014.*


In a discussion of the current political-economic crisis in Ukraine, Mr. Ziskind stated that he is "very afraid" about the economic well-being of Ukraine and the synagogue complex. Prices have increased substantially already, he said, and the cost of heating will increase 100 percent in the near future. Further, a major source of income for the synagogue, that is, the sale of matza from the synagogue's own bakery, has decreased substantially in recent years. Purchasers are reducing their orders due to the economic crisis. For example, the Joint Distribution Committee purchased 155 tons of matza in 2013 and is buying only 125 tons this year. Chabad, another large institutional customer, also cut its order. Additionally, in order to establish a baking schedule, the orders were submitted in January according to January prices; to reflect inflationary pressures since then, the prices should be higher now, but the contracts are firm and cannot be changed.

The hotel that is part of the synagogue complex was "almost empty" in January and February, said Mr. Ziskind. March was somewhat better, in large part because the Jewish Agency held several seminars in it. The previous operators of the ground floor dairy café in the hotel walked out without fulfilling all of the conditions of their lease. A new operator has installed a grill and intends to open a "more serious" kosher meat restaurant in the space, but doubts exist about the viability of such a venture in the current economic situation. Many conventional restaurants have closed. "No one can make money in this environment," said Mr. Ziskind.

*Yevgeny Ziskind is contemplating a troubled economic future for the Schekavitskaya street synagogue.*

Photo: the writer.
When queried about **local fundraising**, Mr. Ziskind admonished the writer, "Don't ask." Continuing to speak about **finances**, Mr. Ziskind said that many supporters are experiencing financial crises themselves. The uncertainty about the situation is devastating; no one knows what to do, people are just waiting for "something" to happen. Rabbi Bleich is trying to raise money abroad; in a time of serious inflation here [in Ukraine], the U.S. dollar stretches much further.

In response to a question about **antisemitism**, Mr. Ziskind said that four attacks against Jewish individuals or Jewish property occurred in Kyiv in December/January, leading to "panic" among Kyiv Jews. These and subsequent antisemitic actions now are seen as "provocations," instigated by people aligned with former President Yanukhovych or Russian President Putin, both of whom want to "prove" that rightwing political parties in Ukraine are assaulting ethnic minorities. The provocateurs want to impugn Ukraine and "justify" Russian intervention. The attackers probably were common thugs paid off by people associated with then President Viktor Yanukhovych. Now [early April], Mr. Ziskind said, it is assumed that President Putin of Russia is behind antisemitic actions in Ukraine. A police response to these attacks is unlikely because the police force "disintegrated" after Maidan; the police were associated with Yanukhovych and, therefore, vilified by protestors. In response, many police went into hiding. The remaining police force is severely undermanned and coordination between police districts is almost non-existent.

73. The writer was unable to speak with **Rabbi Moshe Asman**, who presides over the famed **Brodsky Synagogue** (the Main Choral Synagogue), because he was in Israel during the time of the writer's visit to Kyiv.

74. **Rabbi Yonatan Markovich** operates a three-story synagogue with a total area of 4000 square meters (13,123 square feet) that is part of a larger multi-use building near the central bus station. However, he and his wife Ina probably are better known for the two schools that they operate in Kyiv, a private Jewish day school and a separate school for autistic children.118

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118 See pages 87-90.

Rabbi Yonatan and Mrs. Ina Markovich are natives of the Soviet Union, each of them having emigrated to Israel as children with their parents. Rabbi Markovich is a graduate of the Technion in Haifa and served 14 years as a computer specialist in the Israel Defense Forces. Mrs. Markovich graduated from an Israeli teachers’ college.

Photo: the writer.
Speaking of the **general economic situation**, Rabbi Markovich said that **inflation** is very serious. Prices are rising every day. Businesses of all types are suffering. Even food markets are losing money, notwithstanding the reality that people must eat. Restaurants and clubs are closing. A well-known hotel fired 102 people in a single day, continued Rabbi Markovich. Foreign trade has plummeted.

**Protests on the Maidan** drew a wide range of participants, including boys from a small yeshiva that he supervises, Rabbi Markovich said. The yeshiva boys even lit a large menorah and sang Chanukah songs on the Kreschatik, continued Rabbi and Mrs. Markovich, and many onlookers approved of the ceremony with cries of "Молодец!" (*Well done!*). They have seen **no evidence of Ukrainian antisemitism**; Russian agents have tried to foment antisemitism and have planted false charges of antisemitism; however, upon investigation, Rabbi Markovich stated, Russian agents were unmasked, certain purported antisemitic incidents never happened, or incidents occurred for other reasons. Don't cry wolf when no wolf exists, he warned. **Russian propaganda** is massive, he said.

However, Rabbi Markovich continued, **fear was widespread** throughout the city on February 20-21, the peak of the Maidan crisis, when shooting occurred. Police closed the Metro so that people would find travel difficult; gas stations also closed, both to deter driving and to prevent people from obtaining gasoline that could be used for incendiary devices.

Many **police** "ran away" from their positions or took sick leave during this period, leading to increased crime in the city, Rabbi Markovich stated. Robberies and vandalism increased. The police had taken the side of Yanukhovych, explained Rabbi Markovich, and had abused their authority. They feared the wrath of ordinary people who, after Yanukhovych’s departure, felt empowered to take revenge.

75. Re-energized by the acquisition of more spacious premises in Kyiv in September 2013, the **Masorti (Conservative) movement** continues to grow in Ukraine. The program is led by Rabbi Reuven Stamov, a native of Crimea, and his wife Lena, who was born in Rovno, a city well-known in Jewish history, in western Ukraine. The Stamovs met and married in Jerusalem while Rabbi Stamov was studying for the rabbinate at the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary. Mrs. Stamov has a strong background in education. Both natives of Ukraine, Rabbi Reuven and Lena Stamov have three young daughters.

Photo: the writer.
The new Masorti quarters remain very modest in comparison to the Great Choral Synagogue of Rabbi Bleich, located nearby in the Podil area of the city, and even with the new space of the Progressive movement (see below), also located in Podil. Nonetheless, the new premises, acquired in September 2013, are a major improvement over the previous space.

As was the case with the older Masorti site, the new property is in a basement, easily accessible from the street. The quarters include three large rooms, all of which can be used for multiple purposes, but each of which has a specific designation as well: a synagogue, a room for children and teenagers, and a classroom. The premises also include a kosher kitchen and a lavatory. Much of the necessary renovation was done by Masorti community members, some of whom have specific skills and others who just wanted to help. Although few people are financially comfortable, individuals contributed their own money for supplies. Masorti is a real community, said Mrs. Stamov; people feel at home with the Stamovs and each other, they have taken ownership of community, she continued. When the Stamovs went to Israel on vacation, several people asked for keys to the property and came in on their own to do work on the premises. The center is наша гордость (our pride), she said.

One room, shown at left, has been designated for children and teenagers in the Kyiv Masorti center.

On an average Friday evening, the Stamovs said, about 45 people come for Shabbat services and a dinner that follows. Ten women from the community cook and organize the meal. A smaller group gathers on Saturday; the Shabbat observance includes lessons for adults both before and after havdala (the end of Shabbat). The number of Friday evening attendees dropped to about 25 people during the worst period of the Maidan revolution, they acknowledged. About 80 people participated in Rosh Hashanah services, creating conditions that were somewhat crowded.

The Center offers three ulpan classes, which are operated independently of the Jewish Agency, the Israel Culture Center, or any other group. On Fridays, Mrs. Stamov leads a weekly Torah portion class for children just before Shabbat services begin, and Masorti operates a day-long Sunday school for children and teenagers, featuring lessons in Jewish tradition, Hebrew, English, and Jewish music. Once monthly, with the help of the Jewish Agency, the Sunday school becomes a family day that includes programs for adults and families.

A public hall was rented for a Purim celebration, attracting approximately 100 people. Two Pesach seders held in the Center drew 100 people in all. Additionally, said Mrs. Stamov, Masorti organized a family program for the last day of Pesach.
Continuing a tradition of several years, the Masorti community organized a Chanukah Shabbaton of 3½ days in Berdychiv, a storied Jewish town southwest of Kyiv. Thirty-five members of Kyiv Masorti, all of whom paid at least a portion of their expenses, joined members of the small Berdychiv Masorti community in celebration, learning and practice of Jewish tradition, and relaxation.

The conduct of children's programs at the Center has been greatly enhanced by a volunteer who has moved to Kyiv from Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, the Stamovs said. This woman had been a teacher in the Chabad school there and has brought valuable experience to Masorti. A student group, which consists mainly of Camp Ramah veterans, is planning a Shabbaton.

The Stamovs feel buoyed by increased financial support from international Masorti fundraising efforts. Additionally, someone in their local community pays the cost of utilities in the Center, and another local donor provides office supplies. Nonetheless, funding remains very tight for Camp Ramah Yachad, the Masorti summer camp, and other programming.

Responding to a query about the Masorti program in Odesa, the Stamovs said that it has grown in the last year. The effort is being led by Leonid Kantor, a trained Masorti professional, who has been joined by Volodya Vachsman, a new local leader who has obtained premises for the group. Possession of physical space has enabled them to operate more programs than when they were moving from one rental café to another for their activities.119

76. Rabbi Aleksandr Dukhovny has led the Progressive/Reform movement in Kyiv and Ukraine for 15 years. Within the past year, his congregation (known as Hatikvah) and the headquarters of the Progressive/Reform movement in Ukraine have moved into permanent, attractively designed and furnished program and office space in a renovated office building in Podil.120 The premises include a prayer hall seating 120 people, several large program rooms, a small youth center, a kosher kitchen, and offices.121 The complex is served by two modern elevators.

The new premises, said Rabbi Dukhovny, have been "revolutionary" in that they have attracted many new people to the congregation. Between 30 and 50 people attend Saturday morning Shabbat services, after which a potluck lunch is served. The Shabbat lunch, the rabbi observed, has become a "major event." A "Sunday school"


120 The Masorti movement and Rabbi Bleich's Main Choral Synagogue (Karlin-Stolin) are within easy walking distance of each other, and Rabbi Stamov and Rabbi Bleich enjoy cordial relations. The Progressive/Reform premises, although also in Podil, are located at some distance from Masorti and from the Main Choral Synagogue, and Rabbi Dukhovny's relationship with Rabbis Stamov and Bleich are strained.

121 Another feature is a mikveh for performing Progressive conversions. The mikveh is a shower stall.
for children is held at the same time as Shabbat services on Saturday, thus educating children at the same time that adults worship in the prayer hall. These concurrent programs, followed by the potluck lunch, make Shabbat a real family experience.

In response to a question, Rabbi Dukhovny said that Shabbat programs have been cancelled several times in fear of Russian-instigated antisemitic provocations. Congregants, he continued, are united in their support of a sovereign Ukraine, and many members were among the demonstrators on Maidan.

Congregants pay dues on a scale reflecting their financial capacity. No one is turned away, and the congregation provides some assistance to those in need. Several individuals who are financially comfortable, stated Rabbi Dukhovny, have sponsored specific programs at the congregation.

Rabbi Aleksandr Dukhovny, a native of Kyiv who trained for the rabbinate at the Leo Baeck Rabbinic Training Seminary in London, is seen at left in a 2013 photo. At right is the new prayer hall or sanctuary of Hatikvah Congregation in Kyiv. A modern depiction of the Tree of Life encloses the congregational Torahs. The premises of the congregation are so attractive and comfortable, said Rabbi Dukhovny, that both the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee have held events there. The building is well-served by public transportation. Photos: the writer.

In addition to weekly worship services and the related Sunday school, Hatikvah operates several other programs. A Netzer youth group is overseeing the Bar/Bat Mitzvah of 13 youngsters this year; he had hoped for a larger number of teens in this program, said Rabbi Dukhovny, but the tense political situation has deterred many families from permitting the participation of their children in necessary preparatory study. Netzer offers leadership training to somewhat older teens, and holds special sessions twice weekly for young people 17 and older who want to be camp counselors. Kyiv youngsters will be among about 400 kids from all over the former Soviet Union who attend summer camp in the post-Soviet states, declared Rabbi Dukhovny.

Among the most productive Jewish educational and community-building programs is a Shabbaton, Rabbi Dukhovny stated. Hatikvah is organizing such a
Shabbaton for the end of May, he continued. He expects about 20 families to attend, most of whom have children enrolled in the Hatikvah Sunday school or in one of the two public preschools associated with the Progressive movement in Kyiv.\footnote{The two preschools are open to all children regardless of religious identification. Parents must sign forms indicating their acceptance of a small amount of Jewish programming in the curriculum.}

Asked about the fate of three Progressive synagogue buildings in Crimea now that the peninsula had been occupied by Russia, Rabbi Dukhovny said that the three congregations - in Simferopol, Kerch, and Yevpatoria - now were without a rabbi as Rabbi Mikhail Kapustin had been forced to flee Crimea and subsequently accepted a position serving a Progressive congregation in Bratislava. Based in Simferopol, Rabbi Kapustin had traveled to the other congregations as well and had built up a strong Progressive presence in Crimea. However, he strongly condemned the Russian occupation and posted his views online. In response, his synagogue was vandalized and he was threatened with violence against his person. Fearing an attack, he left.

Rabbi Dukhovny had spoken by telephone with remaining lay leaders in Crimea and found that some of them welcomed the Russian takeover, believing that their economic circumstances would improve when Crimea was absorbed by Russia. Rabbi Dukhovny admonished them that they would find themselves in a "golden cage" when Russian control was consolidated, but the most prominent leaders clearly favored Russian rule. The Progressive Judaism office in Kyiv sent the Crimean congregations matza for Pesach as well as new Russian-language hagadot, as they had planned to do before the Russian action, Rabbi Dukhovny said; the matza was accepted by Russian customs agents at the Crimean border and made available to local Jews because it was food, Rabbi Dukhovny said, but the hagadot were returned to the Kyiv office.

\textit{The bilingual hagada at right was published by the World Union for Progressive Judaism in 2007. It includes commentary and illustrations. Russian customs officials would not permit its entry into Russian-occupied Crimea.}

\textit{Hagadah: World Union for Progressive Judaism.}

In all, said Rabbi Dukhovny, 47 Progressive Jewish congregations were formally registered in Ukraine; however, he continued \textit{only 16 of them were active}, among them the three in Crimea. Without rabbinic leadership, the future of these three groups was in doubt. The Odessa congregation soon would grow stronger as a new Russian-speaking rabbi soon to be ordained at the Leo Baeck seminary in London was expected to assume its pulpit during the summer.\footnote{See the writer’s \textit{Observations on Jewish Community Life in Ukraine - Report of a Visit in April 2013}, pages 27-28, about the Progressive congregation in Odesa.}
Several Progressive congregations in western Ukraine are strong, said Rabbi Dukhovny, notwithstanding the absence of a Progressive rabbi in the area. He singled out Lutsk as particularly noteworthy; it controls an old four-story synagogue building that is the de facto Jewish center in town. This structure houses the JDC hesed and a small Orthodox group, in addition to the Progressive congregation. The Progressive congregation in Cherkasy, south of Kyiv on the Dnipr River, also does very well, Rabbi Dukhovny noted.

Welfare

77. Hesed Azriel, operated by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, is the primary provider of welfare services to Jews in Kyiv and the surrounding region. In the absence of executive staff, the writer met with Irina Yemets, deputy director of the hesed, and Natalya Nagornaya, who is responsible for program development in services for children, family, and the elderly. Several other hesed professionals also participated in the discussion.

The meeting occurred in a conference room of a non-descript building into which the hesed had moved two months earlier. The previous building, a problem-prone structure atop a small hill in an area with poor public transportation, was undergoing significant reconstruction that required the transfer of hesed services to temporary premises. Hesed staff had been told, they said, that the old building would be ready for occupation by the end of 2014, but none of them believed that this timetable would be honored. When asked about the nature of the reconstruction, no one present was aware of specific plans. Some speculative discussion ensued, with questions centering around possible changes in the entrance and lobby, installation of an elevator, improvements to the third floor (a badly executed addition to the original two-story building), and widening of the corridors. None of those present had been consulted in planning the reconstruction. Several individuals expressed doubt that the old hesed could be transformed into an effective building; others said that given the reality of its location in an area ill-served by public transportation, it was not worth the cost of modernization.

Although no one seemed confident about the future, hesed staff said that almost all services to clients were being maintained for now in the temporary building, which is in the same district as the old structure. The hesed currently serves 10,680 clients, 5,200 of whom are eligible for services provided by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany. As is true elsewhere in Ukraine, the number of Claims Conference clients is diminishing annually as Holocaust survivors die. About 1,500 clients (of the total 10,680) reside in Kyiv oblast (region), outside of the city itself. Approximately 4,200 clients receive smart cards that enable them to purchase

124 For information about the JDC administrative center in Kyiv, see page 121.

125 The building had been planned as a preschool; hallways and other space had been designed to accommodate the needs of small children.
groceries and medicines at a discount in certain supermarkets and pharmacies. Another 220 people use JDC-issued debit cards, a practice that will replace the smart cards as local financial institutions develop appropriate technology infrastructures.

**Patronage services** (home health care) are extended to 1,191 recipients of Claims Conference benefits and 338 non-recipients. At least 500 more people need home health care, said staff, but they are ineligible for Claims Conference funding and JDC lacks resources to provide such care to these individuals.

Twenty-two people receive meals-on-wheels through the hesed. Additional Jewish elderly need this service, said hesed staff, but funding is not available to expand its availability.

In addition to these regular benefits, JDC has secured certain one-time special grants from various sources for distribution as a "13th month" allowance in this time of extreme economic stress in Ukraine. Hesed staff also has received a one-time 20 percent salary supplement.

The senior adult day program continues at the temporary hesed, serving 326 clients who come in groups of 25 once or twice monthly. The number of client visits depends on many factors, one of which is the ability of the hesed to secure volunteer assistants to help in management of the program. Clients are picked up at their homes in the morning and returned in the late afternoon by special vans; while at the hesed, they engage in various social activities, make appointments for medical care, receive hairdressing services, and consume one or more hot meals. Holidays are celebrated, and occasional excursions are offered to museums, botanic gardens, and similar attractions. The hesed also offers various club activities to senior adults.

Members of a hesed choir perform before a day center audience in the temporary hesed premises. Refreshments await all after the performance.

Photo: the writer.

In addition to helping Jewish elderly, JDC also assists approximately 1,000 at-risk Jewish families, stated JDC staff. About 400 of these families receive occasional food parcels, medicines, and/or winter relief (warm clothing, blankets, etc.). Children from about 600 families participate in JDC Jewish holiday celebrations and/or attend Sunday school programs. A Pesach festival is to be held in April at a site outside Kyiv for families receiving JDC services. One staff member said that a new priority for JDC in working with at-risk families should be the development of programs for mothers in
these families; most of these women are single parents, she said. They are under enormous stress, even in normal times, and many feel abandoned and lonely.

In response to a question, JDC staff said that the organization does not operate any programs for special-needs children in Kyiv. However, said one professional, JDC in Lviv operates a residential camp for 40 families with special-needs children.

This year, JDC created flash mobs in the streets of Kyiv, handing out Purim goodie baskets to passers-by, all of whom seemed very happy to receive these unexpected gifts from strangers.

JDC organizes a Jewish family camp during the summer months, aiming to attract middle-class families into Jewish life. All families must pay a significant portion of the total cost. However, operation of the camp in 2014 is uncertain because it had been scheduled for a resort area in Crimea that now probably is inaccessible to Ukrainians following its occupation by Russia.

78. As noted previously, Rabbi Moshe Asman of the Main Choral Synagogue (Brodsky) and Rabbi Mordechai Levenhartz of the Simcha school and synagogue operate their own welfare programs, reaching additional hundreds of needy Jews. Rabbi Levenhartz coordinates his welfare work with Hesed Azriel.

79. Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine, sponsors a Home for Assisted Living that is located in a pleasant residential area close to public transportation. Originally planned as six-story conventional apartment building, Rabbi Bleich reconfigured it to accommodate 85 Jewish elderly in one- or two-bedroom apartments, each with its own bathroom and kitchen facilities. It was expected that residents would pay for their new apartments with proceeds from the sale of their old apartments; the proceeds were deposited in a trust that was expected to yield a return sufficient to support operation of the building. In addition to residential apartments, the facility includes a kitchen and small dining hall, a synagogue/multi-purpose room, other program rooms, a suite of medical offices, and several staff rooms.

The number of residents in the Home never reached even half of its capacity. Other organizations, principally JDC, blocked grants from foundations and other institutions that had been approached about start-up funding, assistance for Holocaust survivors, or other forms of support. Locally-generated income never reached its goal because social conditions forced Rabbi Bleich to accept several residents who were homeless, that is, who had no property to sell and thus no proceeds to transfer to the Home. In

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126 The Joint Distribution Committee never offered a cogent explanation for its obstructing actions, but the assumption is that it feared loss of its monopoly over major welfare ventures in the post-Soviet states and associated fundraising privilege. JDC also blocked applications for funds from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany by the Beit Baruch Assisted Living Facility in Dnipropetrovsk and by an independent Jewish Community Center in Kyiv.
recent years, the general economic condition in Ukraine has further damaged the capacity of the Home to operate according to original plans.

In response, the number of residents was reduced to 28 people, who now occupy apartments on the second and third floors. Part of the first floor and the upper three floors were converted into office space, the rent from which now pays the cost of maintaining Jewish elderly on the second and third floors. A separate entrance was developed and a new elevator installed so that the commercial tenants and residents are separated from each other.

Viktor Popovich, the manager of the facility, stated that all commercial space is occupied and that rental income from this space covers almost all expenses incurred by the Home. However, he acknowledged, the declining value of the Ukrainian hryvnia and Ukraine's galloping inflation are taking a toll. He estimated that food prices have increased 20 percent and that the cost of utilities has risen much more. Further, he said, the Kyiv municipality is now charging fees for certain services, such as garbage collection, that it previously provided at no cost.

The 28 residents range in age from 67 to 97. Four are bedridden, stated Mr. Popovich; their condition required that the Home purchase new, special beds for them. Two health professionals, including a nurse, are on duty around the clock, and physicians visit according to a regular schedule. In response to a question, Mr. Popovich said that applicants learn about the home from the "Jewish telegraph" (word of mouth), synagogues, the hesed, and Jewish newspapers.

The facility also accommodates a day center used by up to 50 Jewish elderly every day. The costs of the day center are covered jointly by...
JDC, income from the office rentals in the building, and a subsidy from Rabbi Bleich's office.

Asked about the role of JDC in the Home, Mr. Popovich responded that the hesed sometimes provides adult diapers for residents who need them. Otherwise, it is not involved and it doesn't "bother" (мешает) them.

Mr. Popovich expressed concern about the political and economic situation in Ukraine. Ukraine may be a sovereign state, he said, but, in reality, the future of Ukraine depends upon Vladimir Putin of Russia. Born in 1972 and a former officer in the Ukrainian armed forces, Mr. Popovich recently received a reserves notice from the new Ukrainian National Guard. Showing the writer his military identification card, Mr. Popovich said that he keeps fit and is ready to resume national service if called.

Ukrainian Jewish Organizations

80. The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine, better known as the Ukrainian Vaad, is chaired by Iosif Zissels, a longtime Jewish community observer and leader in Ukraine. Although strapped for funds in the current economic environment, the Vaad works in four main areas: Jewish property preservation and restoration, as well as archival research; interethnic tolerance; representation of Ukrainian Jewry in various international forums; and operation of Jewish community programs in small Jewish population centers, focusing on summer camps for adolescents.127 The Vaad has sponsored heritage expeditions to places of Jewish interest in Ukraine, and Mr. Zissels himself is regarded as well-informed and a capable analyst of Ukrainian Jewry.

Iosif Zissels is a veteran professional in the Ukrainian Jewish community. He is a native of Chernivtsi.

Photo: the writer (in 2013).

When the writer asked Mr. Zissels how things were going (Как дела?) as an opening question, he responded (in Russian), "The most important thing is that we are alive, we are well." The biggest problem, he continued, was the situation in Donetsk and Luhansk, where Russian separatists have created major difficulties. The separatists, he continued, are supported and controlled by Russia; no support exists for them in Ukraine. Everyone in Ukraine is very nervous about Russian intentions, the Jewish

127 See the writer's Observations on Jewish Community Life in Ukraine March 21-April 8, 2011, pages 114-115, for a description of the Ukrainian Vaad.
population more so than others, Mr. Zissels stated. Instability is never good for the Jews, he observed.

The Jewish population of Ukraine, stated Mr. Zissels, is united in its support for Ukrainian sovereignty and opposition to Russian intervention in Ukraine. Fortunately, no Jews were particularly close to former President Viktor Yanukovych, so there is no stain of collaboration attached to local Jews. Jewish support for the "Maidan revolution" is well-known; Ukrainians are aware that three Jewish protesters were among those killed on Maidan.

However, he lamented, although Jews may be united in support of a free and independent Ukraine, the Ukrainian Jewish population in general is disorganized with no strong leaders. Everyone does what he wants. Neither of the "strong" rabbis in Kyiv can lead anyone else.128

Vyecheslav Likachev129 the Vaad-associated specialist on antisemitism now is in Israel, said Mr. Zissels. Nonetheless, Mr. Zissels continues to monitor anti-Jewish bigotry in Ukraine closely. He has excellent contacts in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Culture, he stated. From their records and his own contacts, he is confident in saying that no increase in antisemitism has occurred in Ukraine. It is true, he noted, that several small Ukrainian political parties have fascist components, but these views have found no support among the general Ukrainian population. Russia exploits these small expressions of anti-Jewish bigotry for its own use.

The situation in Russia itself is very serious, stated Mr. Zissels. Democratic practice is declining and political repression is increasing. Antisemitism is more serious there than in Ukraine. The dissident movement in Russia is growing, Mr. Zissels observed, and many Jews play prominent roles in it.

81. United Jewish Community of Ukraine was established as the All-Ukraine Jewish Congress in 1997 by controversial Ukrainian Jewish oligarch Vadym Rabynovych.130 Its current name was adopted in 1999. In 2008, Ihor Kolomoisky of PrivatBank formally succeeded Mr. Rabynovych as UJCU leader; however, Mr. Kolomoisky appears to have abandoned the organization, perhaps because he is consumed by the Ukrainian-Russian confrontation.

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128 The reference was to Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, nominal Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine, and to Rabbi Moshe Asman of the Main Choral Synagogue (Brodsky shul).

129 See the writer’s Observations on Jewish Community Life in Ukraine - Report of a Visit in April 2013, pages 135-137 for an interview with Mr. Likachev.

130 Mr. Rabynovych is persona non grata in several Western countries.
Iosif Akselrud, who is executive director of Hillel, also is the executive director of UJCU. Mr. Akselrud stated that the UJCU now "barely exists." Mr. Kolomoisky ceased contributing to the organization in 2014, apparently mobilizing his ample resources in support of the Ukrainian armed forces and other organizations/institutions defending Ukrainian sovereignty. Without the financial contribution of Mr. Kolomoisky, said Mr. Akselrud, UJCU literally has no budget. It no longer supports the 31 Jewish community Sunday schools to which it had made major contributions in previous years.

Ihor Kolomoisky, the nominal president and principal benefactor of UJCU, no longer contributes to the organization or is active in it. His major concern now is defending Ukrainian sovereignty.

Photo: 
Https://www.google.com/search?q=igor+kolomoisky&rlz=1T4GGRP.

UJCU continues to publish a periodic Jewish newspaper and to monitor antisemitism in various communities through telephone calls and use of Skype. He has seen no increase in antisemitism during the current crisis, said Mr. Akselrud.

82. The Ukrainian Jewish Committee was established by Oleksandr Feldman, a wealthy businessman from Kharkiv and a member of the Ukrainian Rada (parliament), in 2008. Mr. Feldman, who previously was associated with the Jewish Fund of Ukraine, modeled the new organization on the American Jewish Committee, he said. The writer met with Eduard Dolinsky, the director-general of the organization.

Oleksandr Feldman, (left) a wealthy Kharkiv businessman, is a member of the Rada and a major philanthropist to both Jewish and general causes in Kharkiv. He sometimes wears a kipa (Jewish head covering) in the Rada, and is pictured here on a trip to Israel. Eduard Dolinsky (right), the general director of the Ukrainian Jewish Congress, is from Lutsk in western Ukraine and remains in contact with that area.

Photos: Mr. Feldman, Ukrainian Jewish Committee; Mr. Dolinsky, the writer.

131 See pages 90-91 for information about Hillel and Mr. Akselrud.
M. Dolinsky told the writer that the Ukrainian Jewish Committee has four major priorities at the current time (April 2014):
1. Support of Israel;
2. Development of a Museum of Ukrainian Jewish History in Kyiv;
3. Resolution of certain Holocaust issues with Romania;
4. Development of Ukrainian Jewish self-sufficiency, including establishment of a "unified voice" to speak on behalf of Ukrainian Jews and a limit to tenure of lay leaders.

Both Mr. Dolinsky and Mr. Feldman have expressed impatience with Israel for its refusal to support Ukraine in its current conflict with Russia; at the same time, they say that they understand Israel’s need to maintain good relations with Russia for multiple reasons, including protection of Jews in Russia, continuation of the right of Jews in Russia to emigrate to Israel, Israel-Russia trade relations, and some discipline in the export of Russian weapons to Arab states. Mr. Feldman visits Israel often and speaks with Israeli officials frequently.

The discussion with Mr. Dolinsky did not go into detail about a Kyiv-based Ukrainian Jewish History Museum, but such a project has been discussed in Kyiv for some years and has assumed new importance since the opening of a Ukrainian Jewish history museum within the Menorah Center in Dnipropetrovsk. Many Kyiv Jews believe that the primary such museum should be in Kyiv, the nation’s capital. In addition to location and cost factors, a potential complicating factor in the development of a Kyiv Ukrainian Jewish History Museum is the contention of different Jewish interest groups over its control.

Regarding Romania, Romanian forces massacred Jews in Odesa, Mykolaiv, and in Transnistria during the Holocaust. Romania has never properly acknowledged its role in these atrocities.

A growing concern among Ukrainian Jews is continuing foreign - Israeli and diaspora Jewry - control over Ukrainian Jewish affairs. "After more than 20 years [of Ukrainian independence]," said Mr. Dolinsky, Ukrainian Jews "are ready to do much on our own." The future cannot continue along the same pattern as now exists, he averred. Certainly, indigenous management of Jewish community life would be much more cost-efficient than bringing in Israelis who must be compensated for housing, insurance, transportation between Israel and Ukraine, and other expenses. Many capable managers have emerged among Ukrainian Jews, Mr. Dolinsky stated, and the principle and practice of accountability now are well understood among younger Ukrainian Jews who speak English and have participated in exchanges with foreign counterparts. Furthermore, he said, professionals and many people in business have adopted Western standards in their work. Mr. Dolinsky suggested that a dialogue be established among Ukrainian Jews, American Jews, and Israelis about the transference of Jewish communal programming to Ukrainian Jews. "This is the time to do it," he concluded.
Commenting on the current situation in Ukraine, Mr. Dolinsky stated that Ukrainian Jews face two primary problems. First, he said, is the Russian intervention in Ukraine, which affects Ukrainian Jews no less than it affects everyone else in Ukraine. The facts of this intervention are well-known and it is unnecessary to re-state them. The second issue, he declared, is the economic crisis. Ukrainian currency has dropped in value by 50 percent in the last three weeks. (His own compensation has declined 60 percent in value, he added.) Wide-ranging governmental reforms are required to address the dysfunctional Ukraine economy, he said, and implementation of such reforms will exact further hardship on Ukrainians for several years until the economy is turned around. This interim period, he continued, will be very difficult for already vulnerable population groups, i.e., children and the elderly, and also may cause further hardship to the strapped education and public health systems. He hopes that American and other Jews will be generous in their response, extending additional aid to Ukrainian Jews even as Ukrainian Jews assume control over their own welfare needs. Relations with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee must be reviewed.

Regarding antisemitism in Ukraine, Mr. Dolinsky stated that much of the "popular" or street antisemitism in the country is a provocation, instigated by the Russians or by people associated with former President Viktor Yanukhovych. They all want to disparage post-Yanukhovych Ukraine so they construct antisemitic incidents. However, Mr. Dolinsky said, some individuals within the small Svoboda (Freedom) party have made antisemitic remarks and have not apologized for these comments. Perhaps Svoboda may cause problems in the future, he said. Right Sektor, the other small rightwing political party, is openly opposed to antisemitism and fights it when it occurs. It is possible, he continued, that Right Sektor is just being pragmatic for the time being and will become antisemitic in the future; only time will tell, he said. No major political party in Ukraine is antisemitic, he stated.

International Jewish Organizations

83. The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI, Sochnut) is a Jerusalem-based organization that works to build Jewish identity and enhance ties between diaspora Jews and Israel. JAFI offers a number of programs designed to encourage aliyah (immigration to Israel) of local Jews and their family members. The writer met with Ilana Shpak, who directs JAFI operations in Ukraine,132 and Ellina Zadavitsky, who is in charge of JAFI education projects in the Kyiv region, which includes Kyiv itself, western and central Ukraine, and Moldova. Both women were born in the Soviet Union and emigrated to Israel some years ago.

Ms. Zadavitsky stated that JAFI follows four strategies in building Jewish identity and encouraging aliyah: Jewish camping, Israel experiences, grassroots activity and leadership development, and aliyah encouragement and absorption in Israel. Informal

132 See pages 57-59 for additional information about Ms. Shpak.
Jewish education is a key component in all of these programs and formal education is pursued in the teaching of Hebrew.

**JAFI-sponsored Jewish residential camps** enrolled 220 youngsters in the region in 2013, said Ms. Zadavitsky. Recognizing that intensive Jewish experiences are critical in building Jewish identity, summer camps are a keystone of JAFI programming. However, the Jewish Agency is aware that residential camps have little appeal to some families and has searched for alternative programs that would provide Jewish youngsters with an alternative intensive Jewish experience. Accordingly, the Agency unveiled a *pilot day camp program* in 2014, accommodating 135 youngsters in four-day camps during school spring vacation periods in Kyiv and Cherkasy; co-sponsors in the two cities were the Progressive movement and Chabad respectively. Before the end of 2014, additional day camps will be held in Kyiv and Vinnysia, again with partner organizations. All participating children attend either public schools in their respective cities or the ORT school in Kyiv. For the youngsters from public schools, Ms. Zadavitsky observed, the day camp provided their first exposure to Jewish culture.

*Another form of partnership is matza-baking in the JAFI courtyard. In this photo, representatives of Chabad bake matza and distribute it to JDC hessed clients who have been brought to JAFI for the occasion.*

Photo: the writer.

**Israel experience** programs include both Taglit (birthright Israel, a 10-day trip with peers) and MASA (a more intensive Israel experience that includes study, internships, and/or volunteer opportunities over a period of five to 12 months; participants stay in apartments and purchase/provide most of their own food). Eighty-four young adults from the Kyiv region went on JAFI Taglit trips in 2013, said Ms. Zadavitsky, and 110 are expected in 2014. Increasingly popular, she said, are Taglit trips specializing in a particular professional field, thus enabling participants to explore employment opportunities prior to making a decision about aliyah. MASA programs attracted 89 young adults in 2013, and 100 are expected in 2014. Some MASA participants remain in Israel as new immigrants after completing their program. (See interviews below.)

**Grassroots and leadership development programs** focus on young adults who are veterans of other JAFI programs, such as summer camps, Taglit, and MASA. Campers are trained to be *madrichim* (camp counselors, youth leaders) and 35 Taglit veterans

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133 JAFI is not the only provider of Taglit tours in Ukraine. The Hillel student organization often enrolls more participants than JAFI. Several other groups also offer Taglit programs to Ukrainian Jewish young people; however, these programs usually are considerably smaller.
meet twice monthly for continuing informal education and additional Jewish activities. Some young adults have pursued JAFI-supported incubator projects and others are engaged in the PresenTense program described earlier (pages 99-100).

Outlining JAFI programs for children, Ms. Zadavitsky drew attention to Tsror, which enrolls 36 youngsters between the ages of eight and eleven, and a Bar/Bat Mitzvah program that enrolls 34 pre-teens in a two-year Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparatory program. Each of these programs has a formal enrollment cap of 30, but JAFI felt compelled to admit additional youngsters whose families had applied for entrance. Both Tsror and Bar-Bat Mitzvah meet on 30 Sundays during the school year and then feed into special JAFI summer camp sessions. Each program offers parallel courses for parents. (See interviews below.)

Attempting to fill a gap for teenagers, the Jewish Agency initiated a new program in 2014 called Kyiv Interaction. Kyiv Interaction enrolls 30 Jewish teens between the ages of 13 and 17 in a program that features visits to Jewish heritage sites and, so far, participant creation of an interactive website about Kyiv Jewish history. In Cherkasy and Vinnytsia, JAFI sponsors local Jewish youth clubs that enroll 115-120 young people in total. In both cities, said Ms. Zadavitsky, JAFI employs very gifted local madrichim who have been trained in JAFI summer camps and leadership development programs.

The Jewish Agency currently operates 31 Hebrew-language ulpans in the region and anticipates opening additional classes as interest in emigration to Israel grows. Participants must pay a monthly fee of $25; courses last five months and include Jewish identity-building components. Ten of these ulpans are self-financing, i.e., participant fees cover all costs. JAFI also operates eight Sunday schools - in Kyiv (in partnership with the Progressive movement), Bila Tserkva (Belaya Tserkov), Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Khmel'nytski, and several additional locales. Most of these schools are day-long programs for children up to 13 years of age; some include parallel curricula for parents.

Aliyah brought 405 Ukrainians to Israel in 2013, said Ms. Shpak, and 153 more will have gone by the end of April 2014. She is sure that aliyah will continue to grow because many more people are seeking information about the aliyah process and resettlement in Israel. Also, she noted, the number of applicants for the Na'aleh high school in Israel program and the Selah college preparatory course has risen substantially. In addition to the students themselves, parents frequently join their children in Israel at a later time.

Following are reports of group interviews that JAFI arranged for the writer:

The writer met with a group of about 20 youngsters in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah program and their parents. At the time (early April), the B/BM candidates said that they were

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134 Financial support for Tsror and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah program is provided by the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago and a private donor. Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation occurs under the guidance of Rabbi Aleksandr Dukhovny (Progressive) and Rabbi Reuven Stamov (Masorti).
learning about the forthcoming holiday of Pesach; they had made matza with Chabad
and soon would hold a mock seder. In May, they and their parents would participate in
a B/BM Shabbaton outside Kyiv and also would participate in Israel Independence Day
programs. Parents of the kids said: the youngsters like the program, the madrichim
treat the children with respect, both the youngsters and their parents learn about Jewish
tradition and Jewish history, and both the youngsters and their parents make new
friends in the program and expand their social circles. All of the children were enrolled
in public schools, although one had attended a Jewish day school for a few years and
dropped out because the day school day was too long. The kids like the B/BM program
because they have friends there and they are
able to use the JAFI computer lab.\footnote{Formal and informal computer instruction is a scheduled component of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah program.} Six of
the eight youngsters said that they would like
to join the Na'aleh high school program in
Israel when they reach the age of 15. Many
participating families have relatives in Israel.

A somewhat boisterous group of Bar/Bat Mitzvah
candidates and their parents and other relatives
met with the writer in a very crowded room in the
JAFI building. More than half of the youngsters
appear to speak excellent English.

Photo: the writer.

The writer also met with two \textit{madrichim} of youth groups. One works part-time for the
Jewish Agency in Vinnytsia. A graduate student of Kyiv Jewish history and a teaching
assistant in a Vinnytsia university, he leads Jewish adolescents on Jewish history tours
and assigns real research projects in local history to Jewish teens. Members of his
youth group also volunteer in the maintenance of old Jewish community buildings and
have created a brochure and interactive website about Kyiv Jewish history. The second
madrich trains Jewish young people to be tour guides of Jewish history in Kyiv,
Vinnytsia, and Cherkassy.

Twelve recent veterans of Taglit (birthright Israel) and/or MASA spoke with the writer
in another conference. (Most appeared to be students or recent graduates.) Only one
had attended a Jewish day school (in Lviv, her hometown). Of the Taglit veterans who
had not yet participated in MASA, some are considering the various MASA options;
several programs look attractive to them and it is likely that they will go. Most said that
they were thinking more seriously about aliyah since their Israel experiences. Maidan
and the subsequent uncertainty were not major factors in their decision-making; nearly
all of them said that they had been thinking about aliyah for a long time. Asked about
their parents' views of aliyah, some said that their parents think that life in Israel is too
dangerous. Others responded that they don't expect their parents to join them in Israel
because they are too old or because one parent is not Jewish. About one-half of the
young people said that they have relatives in Israel; some said that the presence of

family members is an important inducement, others stated that they are not close to their Israeli family members and are unlikely to spend much time with them.

The writer also spoke with four family units that would make aliya to Israel in the very near future. A couple with a toddler son was scheduled to leave Kyiv in less than two weeks; they would join relatives in Lod. A couple with eight-year old daughter would go to Israel in a program featuring direct absorption in a large city; the parents, both of whom are accountants, lost their jobs when their employer went out of business. They are going to Israel for the future of their daughter, they said, and one set of grandparents will join them later. A couple with two children, ages 3 and 5, were leaving the next week. They have been thinking about aliya for five years, they stated, and have enrolled in the First Home in the Homeland absorption program. (This absorption program is on a kibbutz and is considered ideal for families with young children.) A single mother is going on aliya with her eight-year old daughter; a manicurist by trade, she and her child also will join the First Home in the Homeland program.

Concluding the writer’s visit to the Jewish Agency, Elena Shpak made several comments. The Maidan protests and associated violence impaired JAFI work for some time, she said. JAFI cancelled some Chanukah and Purim events due to violence on the streets. The office itself was closed for three days because conditions seemed too dangerous for employees to come to work. Families are very concerned about potential violence and are leery about sending their children far away from home and/or near Ukrainian borders. Thus, she continued, although the Jewish Agency had planned to hold its summer camps at a site near the Carpathian Mountains (close to borders with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova), they have had to find a site closer to Kyiv.136

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Elena Shpak previously directed JAFI operations in eastern Ukraine, but was transferred to Kyiv when the earlier Kyiv emissary proved unsuited for the position.

Photo: the writer.

Although aliya has increased in response to the situation, it remains an aliya of choice, not an aliya of rescue. Jews are weighing their options, taking various factors into consideration before making a decision to go to Israel. Once they decide to go, they examine the various absorption programs very carefully. Some middle-age Jews who believe that they have job security in Ukraine send their teen-age or young adult children to Israel and join them later. Many Jews believe they are fortunate to have Israel as an option. Non-Jews have far fewer alternatives - and some have even asked JAFI if emigration to Israel is a possibility for them.

136 Some fear that an ongoing territorial issue between Moldova and the pro-Russian breakaway de facto state of Transnistria might lead to a Russian incursion into Moldova and southwestern Ukraine.
Obviously, the Jewish Agency welcomes aliyah to Israel. However, sometimes aliyah takes a toll on its own staff. The five leading madrichim in Kharkiv, who staffed all JAFI youth programs in the city, all made aliyah last year, leaving JAFI in Kharkiv with no experienced youth leaders.

84. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was functioning without a director for its Kyiv and central/western Ukraine operations during the writer’s April visit to the Ukrainian capital. The previous director departed, at his own request, and returned to Israel in late 2013, and a new director had not yet been appointed. Notwithstanding the absence of a director, the writer visited the new JDC head office, located in a Podil office building. (The space had been leased by the outgoing director prior to his departure.) Access to the office is gained through a small vestibule several steps up from street level and then a climb up a steep stairway of some 20-25 steps. No elevator exists. The office itself is light and airy, with a partially open corridor stretching through a long rectangular space of multiple work areas. The premises are multi-level, up three stairs in one place, then down three stairs in another, perhaps followed by a level expanse of four to six meters before an elevation of two steps followed by a descent of two steps three meters later. It is difficult to imagine how any individual with mobility issues could enter this office, much less work in it.

Commentary

85. The protest movement on Maidan square in central Kyiv, which began in November of 2013, launched a revolutionary phase in Ukraine that has not yet concluded. The tens of thousands of people who gathered from one day to the next demanded, and continue to demand, a civil society in Ukraine. Their dreams for the Ukrainian future include individual rights, a free press, free assembly and voluntary organization, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance, and a market economy. Many Ukrainians articulated a vision of Ukraine as a mid-size European country, sharing the values, culture, and sophistication of western nation-states. As neighboring Russia expressed discomfort with the direction of protest in Kyiv (and several other Ukrainian cities), the sense of Ukrainian sovereignty and solidarity grew. Russian annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine only fortified the mood of Ukrainian estrangement from Russia. Although it is unlikely that Vladimir Putin intended to strengthen Ukrainian national unity, his actions have done just that.

86. Every Jewish person in Ukraine with whom the writer spoke identified strongly with a new Ukraine. Many of them now describe themselves as Ukrainian Jews, rather than Jews who live in Ukraine. (As stated earlier, the identification issue stems from the era of Soviet internal passports or identity cards in which holders were required to disclose
their nationality. An individual of Jewish ethnicity was considered Jewish by nationality and was not permitted to identify his/her nationality as Ukrainian, Russian, etc.) The current sense of Ukrainian Jewish identity is strong even among those whose primary language is Russian. However, the bond with Ukraine does not mean that all Ukrainian Jews will remain in Ukraine.

87. Antisemitism exists in Ukraine, antisemitism always has existed in Ukraine, and antisemitism always will exist in Ukraine, one Kyiv professional told the writer. However, without exception, the many Jews with whom the writer spoke blamed Russia for instigating recent antisemitic episodes that gained international publicity; the Russians, they said, are trying to disparage Ukraine with charges of fascism and antisemitism. Jews and many other Ukrainians acknowledge the presence of antisemitic elements in several minority political parties and in several quasi-independent Ukrainian military units fighting Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, but believe that these manifestations of anti-Jewish bigotry are not serious, can be contained, and can be eliminated in the future.

88. The economy of Ukraine is in dire condition. Inflation is high, 30 to 50 percent in some spheres, eroding the value of salaries and pensions. The value of the Ukrainian hryvnia has declined severely against western currency, thus raising the cost of imports, including vital medicines. As businesses close or downsize, unemployment grows. Budgets require adjustments almost as soon as they are written. Organizations that collect user fees find that many would-be participants require even greater subsidies or are unable to participate in programs. Philanthropy has collapsed. Most individuals with whom the writer spoke recognize that the road to economic well-being will be long and difficult, dependent upon commercial and industrial development, an end to corruption, implementation of a just legal system, and termination of Russian intervention.

89. To date, hasidic Judaism has been the public face of Judaism within Ukraine (and neighboring countries). Most hasidic rabbis are respected, but most Jewish population centers cry out for additional Jewish program options. Young adult Jews seem reasonably well served by Hillel, Jewish Agency leadership development activities, Moishe House, and Limmud. The Progressive and Conservative movements are growing in certain cities, even as hasidic rabbis attempt to constrain them in others and international financial support remains limited.

90. A non-rabbinic indigenous professional leadership class is developing among hesed directors and departmental managers, directors-general for several rabbis, directors-general for a few oligarch-led Jewish organizations, and directors of Hillel student organizations. Managers of Jewish Agency representations and summer
camps also are exercising professional responsibilities. Project Kesher has trained many women who have proved competent in communal leadership. Perhaps most promising for the future of Ukrainian Jewry and for the Jewish world in general is the emergence of younger leaders from Jewish Agency leadership programs and projects, Hillel, Moishe House, and Limmud. One also might look to the protests on Maidan, where young Ukrainian Jews assumed disproportionate responsibility for assisting the wounded and organizing medical care abroad.

The continuing nurturing of indigenous Jewish professional leadership is essential to the future of Ukrainian Jewry in order to strengthen local Jewish identification with Jewish organizations and to reduce dependency on imported Israeli staff. Also, employment of the latter is increasingly difficult to sustain for reasons of expense and a diminishing pool of appropriate candidates who wish to reside in Ukraine.

91. Development of responsible indigenous lay leadership is much more problematic, in part because the concept of lay leadership is little understood and can be advanced only with a certain level of insincerity and even duplicity as long as foreigners in distant countries continue to control Jewish communal policy and programs in Ukraine. Equally, oligarch leaders prefer to operate their organizations as one-man shows without sharing leadership, including fundraising obligations, with others.

92. Notwithstanding these and other barriers - such as a host of fundraising issues - Ukrainian Jews engaged in Jewish communal activity express strong sentiment for independence from JDC and Chabad. The notion that they are being patronized by foreign Jewish organizations is widespread among communally-involved Jews.

93. Emigration to Israel has increased significantly during the current political/economic crisis in Ukraine. Driven by uncertainty about the future in a seemingly unstable country, mobile young adults and young families are among the most likely Jews to depart. They are leaving behind an older population that will require support from a diminishing pool of younger, active adults.

Betsy Gidwitz
Chicago, Illinois
October 20, 2014

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs and translations are by the writer. Modified Ukrainian orthography generally is favored over Russian orthography.