

# The Jewish Week

## 'Going Green' As Jewish Value

by Merri Rosenberg  
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Recognizing that concerns about the environment transcend individual denominations, the Westchester Jewish Conference and the Jewish National Fund recently presented a "Go Neutral Boot Camp" at the JCC of Mid-Westchester in Scarsdale to raise awareness and offer specific strategies for synagogues and other Jewish community organizations. "This comes from Judaism; it's a commandment," said Roberta Roos, chairman of the Westchester Jewish Conference social action roundtable. "This is the Jewish thing to do. There is so much going on, with our congregants involved inside and outside the Jewish community."

The evening was organized with support from UJA-Federation of New York as part of Jewish Social Action Month and featured representatives from such diverse Jewish and non-Jewish environmental organizations as Riverkeeper, Hazon, COEJL (Coalition on the Environment

Exploring the "environment through a Jewish lens" was a natural fit for the social action roundtable, explained Nancy Zaro, assistant executive director of the WJC. "Running an environmental boot camp is an extension of Jewish values," she said. "Our goal was to provide specific information, and to connect our community with Israel as a laboratory for the world." Plans are underway for an online environmental handbook to assist member organizations put some of these ideas into place.

Some of the ideas included ways to measure institutional carbon emissions, encouraging community-wide efforts to install compact fluorescent light bulbs, plant trees in Israel and reduce such habits as using bottled water.

"Planting a tree in Israel provides a benefit to the entire world," said Gary Suskauer, director of the Brownfield Initiative and a policy analyst for the Baltimore Development Corporation. "The JNF has planted more than 240 million trees, which have absorbed 110 million tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere."

Alex Cicelsky, a native of Westchester who has lived and worked for more than two decades at Kibbutz Lotan in the Negev desert as an environmental scientist and educator, appealed to attendees to re-think attitudes.

"It's about transforming our relationship with the world," he said. "Ten years ago, there were no recycling programs in Israel. Lotan recycles 70 percent of our waste. We have carbon-negative buildings that are passively heated."

Closer to home, Harriet Shugarman of the Jewish National Fund offered such strategies as expanding a synagogue's recycling program, buying environmentally friendly cleaning supplies, and connecting the observance of Jewish holidays, from the Sabbath to Sukkot and Hanukah, to environmental practices.

"Start with something that can be successful," she said. "The Jewish holidays are a way to bring environmental issues to the community. Make being environmental about being Jewish, that you're doing it from a Jewish perspective."

That understanding was a key theme of the evening.

"Is the environment a Jewish concern?" asked Rabbi Eric Lankin, chief of institutional advancement and education for the JNF. "Under tikkun olam, we have an obligation and need to restore the broken world. We have an obligation to love all of God's creatures. When we endanger something, we have to correct our ways. The environment is a topic of Jewish concern. Jewish people have been living these values for thousands of years."

Organizers intended the evening to be a departure point for embracing that responsibility.

"I would hope that everyone walked away with a connection to another synagogue, or to an environmental organization," said Roos. "The idea is that it wouldn't just end with the evening."