From the Director

“Community” takes on new meanings in the digital age. For us as Jewish educators the challenges of building community are more daunting than ever.

The publication of Robert Putnam’s now iconic book Bowling Alone in 2000 documented what many people already felt: that social capital was harder than ever to build. Putnam’s book explained that although just as many people were bowling at the end of the 20th century as had been bowling half a century earlier, fewer people were joining bowling leagues, and indeed, fewer were joining civic groups of any kind. No wonder we Jewish educators were finding it harder than ever to get Jews with the sovereign selves that Cohen and Eisen described in The Jew Within to join congregations or, if they did, to join boards and committees in congregational schools.

While many Jewish educators are familiar with Putnam’s Bowling Alone, fewer know of his follow up study, Better Together: Restoring the American Community. In Better Together, Putnam chronicles communities in America that work, including neighborhood initiatives, branch libraries, unions, online communities… and churches. In portraying two very larges churches that succeed in building community, an evangelical mega-church in Orange County and a liberal Episcopal church in Pasadena, he identified a common method to the way that these churches build community: They help community members feel connected by sharing their stories with one another.

The Experiment in Congregational Education has figured out how to do this well. In the “Six-Part Meeting Structure” developed as part of its RE-IMAGINE project, every meeting includes a section called “Connection” in which board, committee or task force members are asked to bring something of themselves to connect with one another and to the work of the meeting. As explained by the ECE, “We forge a sense of community — even amid diversity — by connecting with one another in authentic and meaningful ways…[One way] to build community is to learn more about each other’s lives than just names, hometowns, and family circumstances. By sharing memories, experiences, perspectives, and opinions about matters of importance to us and to the synagogue, we create connection.”

The RHSOE has always been good at building community. Under Bill Cutter’s and Sara Lee’s leadership, students — including most of you reading this article — became part of powerful learning communities. When alumni gathered — at early morning breakfasts at NATE conventions and at Alumni Kallot — graduates forged community across generations by using shared language and by talking about our shared purpose. It was easier to build community in those days when the school was small and the number of alumni, while growing, was not vast.

Now that our small school has matured (we have a student body of 17 in residence in LA with a larger number expected next year, and the number of alumni has surpassed 350) the challenges to community are greater. We work hard at the school at keeping the sense of community strong even as the size of the student body grows (and grow it will next year and beyond, thanks to the generous scholarships made possible by the Jim Joseph Foundation and the aggressive recruiting efforts of our alumni).

And the Alumni Association is also hard at work building community… and helping all of us think carefully about how we build community, both face-to-face and virtually. This year’s Alumni Day of Learning, attended by over 40
From the Chairperson

Cindy Reich (’84)

For the past several years I have had the opportunity to be a student again... this time in a doctoral program at the University of Minnesota. It’s an experience quite different from my graduate studies at HUC in the mid-1980s. Now I’m a “mature student,” going part time, able to draw on years of professional experience. I’ve had professors who are younger than I, and the majority of students are closer to the ages of my children than to my age. Fortunately my education at Hebrew Union College helps me make my way. Thanks to the graduate work I did at HUC, I feel comfortable thinking deeply about big ideas, analyzing texts, making arguments, moving between theory and practice. Now I’m pleased to be able to bring some of what I’m learning at the UoM to our work with the RHSOE Alumni Association.

My doctoral studies are in Program Evaluation, a field that has grown significantly in the last few decades. According to Michael Quinn Patton, a giant in the field, program evaluation is, “The systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and results of programs to (1) make judgments about the program, (2) improve or further develop program effectiveness, (3) inform decisions about future programming and/or (4) increase understanding.” The executive committee of the RHSOE Alumni Association is interested in evaluating our efforts by collecting information from our alumni about what we do and how we do it. Through an alumni survey we hope to hear from our alumni in order to understand the perspectives of our alumni, guide future decision-making, and increase our effectiveness. The plans for gathering information are just underway and we haven’t yet established our timeline. I want to make you aware of these plans and to request that you set aside time to give us your feedback and ideas. Thank you to all of you who responded to our initial efforts related to communication. I promise, based on my recent experiences, that evaluation can be rewarding and even fun. We will keep you posted as the plans unfold, and you can look forward to hearing what we learn from these efforts.

We hope you will make your plans now to be part of this event where — among other things — we will honor our founders and builders, Bill Cutter and Sara Lee, as they complete their years of phased retirement at the College.

We wish you much success in all of your efforts to build communities both real and virtual so that we and our institutions can be “better together.”

Michael
A Year of Learning and Building

Deborah Niederman (’93)
Alumni Affairs Coordinator

I have just returned from our Alumni Association’s 2011 Leadership Team Meetings where we focused on Professional Learning, Institutional Advancement and Community Building. The articles in this issue of Tikshoret focus on those same areas. You will find reflections on our Leadership Team Meeting, Virtual Book Group, and the Day of Learning which connected over 40 alumni virtually on both the LA and NYC campuses and included a panel of alumni to address the issue of building community.

This year’s Alumni Breakfast at NATE hosted over 50 alumni, the largest alumni gathering since we honored Sara on her retirement. There we acknowledged the many on-campus projects that our alumni support, including the Sara S. Lee Seminar, the Cutter Colloquium and the Alum-in-Residence program. We recognized the contributions of our many alumni in the work of NATE, the conference co-chairs Melissa Buyer (’00) and Beth Young (’02), the out-going president Mindy Davids (’90) and incoming president Lisa Lieberman-Barzilai (’87). We have much to celebrate and it is always a great joy to be able to do so.

As Cindy Reich (’84), our Alumni Association Chairperson, wrote about in her column, we are working hard to create an ever more meaningful organization. At our meeting we identified several new initiatives that we hope will just that. Please don’t wait to be asked, look at the working group projects described below and consider how you might like to become a part of our work. Our association functions as it does only because of the efforts of many volunteers. We want and need your passion and creativity. We want to hear from you about how you wish to be involved.

Please feel free to contact me <dniederman@huc.edu> or Cindy <reichcin@aol.com> if you wish to explore ways to get involved.
Working Group Updates

**Educator-in-Residence and Alumni-in-Residence:**
Debra Sagan Massey (’99) and Lesley Silverstone (’86)

The working group, in partnership with the faculty, has invited Michelle Lynn Sachs (’96) to serve as the Educator-in-Residence for our second Cutter Colloquium in the fall of 2011.

**Honorary Doctorates Advisory Committe:**
Barry Lutz (’84) and Audrey Friedman Marcus (’76)

This working group has just completed their review of alumni profiles from the class of 1987 and has recommended that a number of our alumni receive honorary doctorates next year. Over the last two years Audrey and Barry have been contacting alumni of several classes to explain the Honorary Doctorate process.

**Student Recruitment:**
Lori Sagarin (’84) and Debra Cotzin Kellner (’04)

The working group chairs are working with the recruitment staff at HUC to support the new HUC on the Road recruitment programs and have develop a program for alumni to guide applicants through the application process. Last year every applicant that worked with an alumni guide completed the application process.

**Continuing Alumni Education:**
Tamara Lustgarten-Gropper (’94) and Renee Rubin Ross (’99)

Under the coordination of this working group subcommittees have supported several learning initiatives, including; the Day of Learning, the virtual book groups and an RHSOE Alumni Community of Practice. They are eager to have more alumni join them in this working group.

**Kallah:**
Shaina Wasserman (’06), Tami Weisman (’10) and Karen Strok (’00)

The working group chairs are hard at work planning the February 10th-12th, 2012 kallah. Please put the date in your calendar now!

**Communications:**
Tamara Lawson Schuster (’92)

This new working group has brought together the Social Media and Website working groups under one umbrella to look at our current communication tools and how we can use them more effectively. They are designing an interactive website to promote the work and community building efforts of all our working groups and our association.

In alignment with our new focus on institutional advancement we have renamed our membership working groups:

**Outreach to Students:**
Sharon Amster Brown (’00) and Julia Witkow (’07)

This working group will continue to host student lunches, send letters and gifts to students in Israel and create new initiatives to reach out and to include students in the programming and activities of our association.

**Community Building:**
Susan Cosden (’94) and Jane West Walsh (’85)

This working group will address new projects to help keep our ever-growing community of alumni connected to each other in both virtual and personal ways.

Save the dates for our next Alumni Virtual Book Group:
*Peak: How Great Companies Get Their Mojo from Maslow* by Chip Conley,
Led by our esteemed colleague Dr. Michelle Lynn-Sachs.

Thursday, May 5, 1-2 pm (EST) Part I • Thursday May 26, 1-2 pm (EST) Part 2

To register for both sessions, go to: https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/950596978

This book, highly recommended by Michael Zeldin, is an intriguing read from the business world. Alumni who have already read the book say it is a compelling read with many applications to our work. Peak describes the miracle of human potential and demonstrates what can happen when those we work with live up to their full potential.
On Telling Our Stories and Saying, “Hello” : Reflections from the Day of Learning

By Renee Rubin Ross

If I had to boil down our daylong discussion of the complexities of building community into two essential ideas, they would be, “tell our stories” and “say hello.”

Now let me explain.

About six months ago, we opened our Sustaining Alumni Education working group meeting with a question: share a recent moment when you experienced a strong sense of community.

In asking the question, what I anticipated was that each person would describe how they felt cared for and supported, and indeed, this was the case. Participants on the call spoke about the support that they received coordinating the first day of religious school or a family camp, the way that friends and congregants showed their love and care after a parent’s death or before the birth of a child, and the realization that their current home was the longest place that their family had lived, and it was becoming a true community for their family.

But something also emerged that I hadn’t anticipated. For almost everyone on the call, feeling part of a community contained a memory of a time when he or she had felt like an outsider. It may have been an awareness of the difference between last year, when someone was new to a particular community, and this year, when he or she had begun to build stronger connections. It may have been the difference between having less in common with other community members, and then something changing so that he or she had more in common. The point was, everyone carried a memory of the challenge, and perhaps some loneliness and pain, that comes in the process of building community.

I was surprised. Personally, I’ve moved six times in the past 12 years, so I’ve had multiple experiences of feeling like an outsider and building community over time. But I tend to think that everyone else has deeper roots and has been in (fill-in-the-blank city) for a while, and feels easily at home. The perspectives on the call suggested a more complicated reality. I learned something from the conversation, and I felt closer to the other members of the working group.

Rabbi Lydia Medwin ’08 told us a similar story in her presentation at the Day of Learning. Her story was about a community organizing project in which no one was really listening to one another. The group was trying to accomplish something, but before it could even get started, it was about to break down.

Then the group did the following exercise: each person was asked to tell something about the community that they came from. In hearing these stories, people started to see each other as people. They started to consider each other’s origins, and be curious about each other’s lives, and most importantly, to want to listen to each other and connect.

So what did I take from both of these experiences? Before we try to “accomplish something,” we need to see each other as people. Building community, one cup of coffee at a time as Lydia reminded us, involves having a deep sense of who the people in the community are.

And one last point made by my classmate and colleague Debra Sagan Massey ’99. Debra reminded us of the importance of families being known in a community; specifically of saying hello to parents in a pickup line and knowing their names. The idea was simple and profound. I couldn’t help but think about the idea of “strangers”: when we don’t know people’s names, or when our names aren’t known, we are strangers. In our world of moving and mobility, we are often strangers, and others are often strangers, more than we realize. I came away from the Day of Learning thinking about this: A challenge of building community is to move ourselves and others from strangers to people whose stories are heard and known.
**RHSOE Community of Practice Book Club**

**Sue Huntting (’80)**

“Out in the field,” as we call the place where we practice what we learned at the RHSOE, can be a vast and lonely place. Other than meeting up at conferences (when budgets allow), it can be difficult to stay connected to the intellectually stimulating RHSOE environment that grounds our professional work every day. Living on the west coast of Florida, I usually feel quite far “out in the field,” but my recent experience with the Alumni Virtual Book Club put me back in touch with colleagues and exposed me to new ideas that are already informing my thinking and my work.

As the brainchild of the Sustaining Alumni Education Working Group of our alumni association, the Virtual Book Club met online twice, about 10 days apart, to discuss Daniel Pink’s book, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-brainers Will Rule the Future*. Michael Zeldin describes the book as one of the “hot books” educators have been buzzing about; and as Even Fein shared, she used it with the clinical faculty. How fortunate, then, to have Eve as our book club facilitator, along with Julie Lambert (’97).

It was remarkable to be able to sit in front of a computer screen, viewing a list of participants from all over North America, raising our hands with a click of a button and talking to each other over the phone while notes of what was being said were appearing on the screen. It was an experience that has tremendous potential to keep us connected and to extend our learning as a uniquely trained community of practice.

If you have not yet read Pink’s book, run — don’t walk. Though already almost five years old, his argument is compelling and challenging. Using as a metaphor the kind of differentiated thinking we associate with the left and right hemispheres of the brain, Pink argues that we are moving away from a past that placed more value on left-brain knowledge-based thinking into a present and future that measure success through right-brain thinking, or the ability to command a new set of aptitudes: design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning. At a time of abundant social and cultural options, the outsourcing of routine transactions overseas and the automation of information collection and many services, Pink contends that the aptitudes he outlines are crucial in order for organizations to thrive in the 21st century.

In my opinion, he is right. His examples of where we were, compared to where we are, ring true. In synagogue and Jewish communal life, what we offer must also have aesthetic appeal. What we do must provide context, deepen understanding, and enrich lives. We have to learn to help people connect the dots in their lives in order to find their own meaning and be willing to engage their playful sides, even when exploring the sacred. We know this makes educational sense. Now we also know it makes good business sense.

Having a virtual discussion with other RHSOE alumni about how they see the implications of Pink’s arguments in their own work “out in the field” brought us back together in real time, if not real space. Consider joining the next virtual book group discussion on *Peak: How Companies Get Their Mojo from Maslow*, by Chip Conley (Jossey-Bass, 2007,) facilitated by Michelle Lynn-Sachs (’96) on May 5th and May 26th.

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**Faculty Bookshelf: For Your Continuing Professional Learning**

This new “bookshelf” has been initiated by the Continuing Alumni Education Working Group in their efforts to provide for your continuing professional growth and we hope will become a valued part of each issue Tikshoret. For this issue we approached Isa for her recommendations.

**Here are a number of pieces I’ve read in recent months:**

*Tours that Bind*, an ethnography of Birthright Israel by Shaul Kelner. A close look at the good, bad and ugly of Birthright Israel, set in the context of Diaspora tourism worldwide.

Nicole Gréninger’s article on different approaches to t’fillah in three different religious schools, in the most recent issue (vol 76 #4) of the *Journal of Jewish Education*. Very important for anyone responsible for organizing t’fillot, regardless of setting.

The article on *Ha’aretz* by David Remnick in the February 21 issue of the *New Yorker*. A fascinating (though depressing) look at the evolution and continued challenges facing this important organ of (what’s left of) the Israeli Left.
Mazel Tov & Milestones
מצל טוב

Isa Aron, our teacher, who along with her co-authors, Steven M. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman and Ari Y. Kelman, won the 2010 Jewish Book Council’s National Book Award for their book, Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary (The Alban Institute). The book was the winner of the Education and Jewish Identity category and recognized as finalist in the Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice category. Steven M. Cohen and Lawrence A. Hoffman are HUC faculty members at HUC in NYC. Dr. Ari Kelman, the third co-author, is the son of Dr. Stuart (former RH SOE professor) and Vicky Kelman.

Mara Braunfeld (’06) and her husband Daniel on the birth of their daughter Ronit Bina Braunfeld on January 28, 2011.

Brad Cohen (’10) and his wife, Claire, on the birth of their son Elie Lev Cohen on January 24, 2011.

Debra (’04) and Rick (’05) Kellner on the birth of their daughter Shira Danielle on December 21, 2010.

Tali Zelekowicz (’00) and her husband Benny on the birth of their daughter Gavriel Kinor on December 4, 2010.

In Memoriam: Joel Goldman, z”l
January 24, 1958 — August 20, 2010
Lori and Joel Abramson ’91

It is just so very difficult to imagine our lives without Joel Goldman, z”l. We met Joel and his wife Orly as they were about to join us in Los Angeles for the second and third years of the MAJE program at the Rhea Hirsch School. It was clear from the beginning that Joel was a force to be reckoned with, a whirlwind of energy, and a visionary and passionate educator. He and his whole family also became very close personal friends of ours.

Joel was born and raised in Morton Grove, Illinois and made aliyah with his entire family in the early 1970’s. Joel completed high school and four years in the Israeli army before beginning his career in education.

Joel succeeded in combining his love of education with his passion for Israel and Zionism, and constantly sought bigger and more exciting ways to draw youth, college students, teachers and colleagues into his vision of the Jewish people. His impact on the world of Jewish education was felt in both the U.S. and in Israel. He founded the seminar department of the Diaspora Museum. He served as a guide for the UFC Missions Department and as a teacher in the Alexander Muss High School in Israel program. He completed an undergraduate degree in the History of the Land of Israel at Tel Aviv University and was a 1991 graduate the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at Hebrew Union College in LA. He was a member of the faculty of the Oranim School of Education of the Kibbutz Movement and directed the Oren Kibbutz program for college students.

Joel served as Educational Director of Atidim, a national program designed to enhance teen excellence in the peripheral regions of Israel. In the past year, Joel served as the founding director of Kesher Israel programs, an innovative educational start up that designs and implements creative leadership training programs for Israeli teens and develops innovative ways of teaching Israel to Diaspora Jewish schools, congregations and communities. Joel had also begun coursework towards a PhD. in Educational Leadership and Change from Fielding Graduate University.

Joel left an indelible mark on the thousands of people he touched, with his poignant storytelling, flair for the dramatic, sweet voice, and compelling personality. He was a wonderful and loyal friend, who stayed in touch when they moved back to Israel, welcomed us on all our visits, and supported and encouraged us in our aliyah.

We mourn with Orly and their three sons, Dor, Yadin and Eden, and send them our heartfelt condolences. May Joel’s memory be for a blessing.

Rheah Hirsch School of Education Alumni Association
LA Review of the Leadership Team Meeting

Cindy Reich (’84), Chairperson

And the award for best performance in a leading role goes to… The RHSOE Leadership Team, of course.

What better place to be during the Oscars than Los Angeles, CA? On February 27 and 28, just as the luminaries of Hollywood walked the red carpet and celebrated, members of the RHSOE Leadership Team gathered to build community, to reflect on our work, and to dream and plan for the future. And we had our own group of stars — dedicated to working on behalf of the alumni association, the Rhea Hirsch School of Education and the College-Institute.

The Leadership Team meeting is an annual gathering of chairs of the many working groups of the RHSOE Alumni Association, along with members of our Executive Committee. This year we had over 20 people in attendance including leaders of the Communications, Sustaining Alumni Education, Recruitment, Kallah and membership working groups. Participants, representing a span of classes from 1977 to 2010, brought perspectives from their work in diverse Jewish educational settings—congregations, preschools, day schools, national organizations, publishers, and institutions of higher education. We were honored to have Rabbi Stan Schickler, Executive Director of NATE and RHSOE alum, at our meeting.

A centerpiece of the meeting took place in the College’s distance learning center, allowing us to “meet” with Jane Karlin, the newly appointed Vice President for Institutional Advancement, in her New York office. Led by Dr. Karlin, alumni explored the concept of institutional advancement — a combination of development, public affairs (including alumni relations) and communication. Of equal importance, Jane got to know the alumni of the RHSOE — our work, our commitments, and our aspirations. Together we deliberated about how the partnership between alumni and the College-Institute can serve to strengthen both. By the end of the meeting, we developed a number of potential initiatives that would reach out to students and alumni. Watch future issues of Tikshoret for further developments.

Another compelling conversation focused on Sustaining Alumni Education. Led by Renee Rubin Ross, co-chair of that working group, we began with some RHSOE-esque questions: “In your work as a Jewish educator, what questions ‘keep you up at night’? and “What do you wish you knew?” Ideas emerged about possibilities for both the content (e.g., keeping up with the learning of RHSOE students, research in the field of Jewish ed, keeping up with technology) and structure (e.g., online study groups, regional alumni gatherings) of professional learning opportunities for RHSOE grads, all of which will be reviewed and prioritized by the Alumni Association Executive and the Sustaining Alumni Education Working Group for future action.

At the heart of all of our work is communication, and of course we addressed the challenges and opportunities of using myriad tools to strengthen our work and to serve our alumni and the College. Thanks to the alumni who responded to the online survey about Tikshoret, e-Tikshoret and Facebook as means to communicate. Our Communications Working Group, under the leadership of Tamara Lawson Schuster, will use the survey results and the outcomes of the discussion at the meeting, to direct their work.

I want to express my thanks to all the alumni who participated in the meeting. A special thanks to Debbie Niederman and Joy Wasserman, our professional staff, for their contributions to the ongoing work of the Alumni Association. Thanks to Gregg Alpert for his assistance with technological matters, and for his thoughtful engagement in our conversations. We are grateful that Richard Siegel, the new director of the newly renamed School of Jewish Non-Profit Management, took time to address the group. Thanks to Sara Lee for hosting us on Sunday evening and for her thoughtful involvement in our discussions. And last, but not least, thank you to Michael Zeldin for his remarkable leadership of the RHSOE. We welcome the involvement of RHSOE alumni from across the generations. If you have ideas, suggestions, comments, feedback — please be in touch. And if you have some time you’d like to devote to supporting the RHSOE please let us know.

RHSOE Executive Committee 2009-2010/5770

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