

New association ensures cemeteries' future

By IRIS M. SAMSON, Assistant Editor

Death is an integral part of the Jewish life cycle. But while the community is quick to celebrate birth and other life events with great involvement, death is often overlooked.

What of our forebears, those Jews who made their lives in the area, who had their own families, contributed to the community, and are now gone? Who keeps their memories alive, and accords them their due respect?

A new organization has just been "born" that will ensure that members of the Jewish community are not

forgotten. The Jewish Cemetery and Burial Association of Greater Pittsburgh held its first board meeting last week, and looks forward to its aim of preserving Jewish cemeteries throughout the area.

The Association, according to President Bernard Bauer, "will be available to the Jewish community

for the management and maintenance of abandoned Jewish cemeteries, or those managed by people who can no longer do it. These include," he continues, "congregations that do not exist any more, or older people who can't physically or financially maintain the cemeteries. We're giving them another option."

Bauer is the former head of the Hebrew Burial Association, which merged with the Jewish Cemetery Association to form the new organization. Hebrew Burial Association has been active in the community for 150 years, providing burial services for indigent Jews, another aim of the new group.

Nelson Young, chairman of the board of Jewish Cemetery and Burial Association of Greater Pittsburgh, formerly headed the Jewish Cemetery Association. "It was a paper organization that was formed as an agency of the Federation to deal" with the problem of abandoned and neglected cemeteries. "Thirty years ago, my father, Aaron Young, tried to do something about the problem," Nelson Young continues. "We recognize that it's a problem that's been around for a long time."

The Jewish Cemetery Association was set up to assist cemeteries in need of management, and those with financial problems. But Pennsylvania's laws governing tax exempt status dictated that the organization own property.

"For us to qualify and receive tax exemptions, it was necessary for us to own a cemetery," Young elaborates. "We did some interesting searches, and found

some properties abandoned, other properties in trust." After considerable negotiations with the Hebrew Burial Association, which owns two cemeteries, one dating to 1850 and another, to 1920, the two organizations banded together.

"Ernest Nachman of Hebrew Burial told his board that it was time for us to get on with our work. And the HBA knew that it mattered," Young continues. "His statement moved everybody along."

All funds of the Hebrew Burial Association moved to the new organization; funding will also come from the United Jewish Federation and private sources, according to Bauer.

For Bauer and Young, service to the community through their respective cemetery associations has been a family tradition. "Hebrew Burial has been handed down to me," Bauer comments. "My father was involved with it in the 1940's, and my mother, in the 1940s and '50s. It really is a family tradition."

"It's a mitzva" to help these cemeteries. "Now, with so many older synagogues fading out, there was genuine concern that there wouldn't be anyone to take care of the old cemeteries. And that would be a 'shanda,'" he adds.

Young's father was at the forefront 30 years ago to upgrade and maintain area Jewish cemeteries. A series of articles was written back in the early 1960's about the issue but the neglect, somehow, continued.

"Everybody now recognizes the changes in the world and that the need of these cemeteries has accelerated and even been exacerbated," Young explains. "But that recognition took years."

The group is constantly finding more cemeteries. Young estimates that there are between 60 and 75 Jewish cemeteries in the area, and though most are not in disrepair, the group isn't sure "just how big the horizon is. Some of them are bad, some have no one with whom we can talk. Who will care for the cemeteries in the future?"

"I think the Jewish community has the responsibility to see that old cemeteries are not an embarrassment to the Jewish community," adds Bauer. "Our forebears would appreciate it if they knew. And hopefully, there will be somebody to take our place."

The Jewish Cemetery and Burial Association of Greater Pittsburgh will be meeting once a month. They encourage inquiries, and direct them to Hesh Reinfeld at the UJF, 681-8000. In the near future, they will be bringing in the head of Boston's cemetery association to give the group advice and share his experiences in setting up the organization.

Other board members and officers of Jewish Cemetery and Burial Association of Greater Pittsburgh are Sidney Deutsch, Bruce Horvitz, Jack Bergstein, Blair Jacobson, Libby Forman, Harvey Wolsh, James Bachman, Doris Binstock, Ronald Hartman, Eric Kruman, Ernest Nachman, Judy Palkovitz, and David Rosenbloom.

Rabbi Levine accepts post at De Pauw U.

Rabbi Joseph H. Levine, director of Pittsburgh's B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation since 1976 has accepted an invitation to become professor and director of Jewish Study and Life at DePauw University in Greencastle, IN, effective August 1.

In his new capacity Rabbi Levine will have the freedom of the University and access to all departments to do individual and team teaching, specifically in the area of Judaism and issues of multi-



Rabbi J. Levine culturalism. His focus will be on innovative courses on the frontiers of contemporary Jewish thought relevant to Jewish college students in our time. These will be interdisciplinary courses that will bring together the resources of the university community in focusing on the meaning of Jewish values, ethics, religion and culture to the crucial decisions and life commitments facing young

people today.

Rabbi Levine was instrumental in creating this model for the concept of a multidisciplinary program in contemporary Judaic studies. He will also serve as a Jewish role model on campus in the university's effort to fulfill its mandate in establishing a more active Jewish presence on campus.

Rabbi Levine served Hillel posts in Rochester, NY and Chapel Hill, NC prior to coming to Pittsburgh in 1976. During his years here he also served as a visiting lecturer in humanities in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Carnegie Mellon University and at one time as a field instructor in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh.

"While we are sorry to see Rabbi Joe go after 16 years of service here," said Steve Berez, president of the board of B'nai B'rith Hillel, "we know that his major dream has been to become a university professor, and we wish Rabbi Joe all the very best of luck in his new position."

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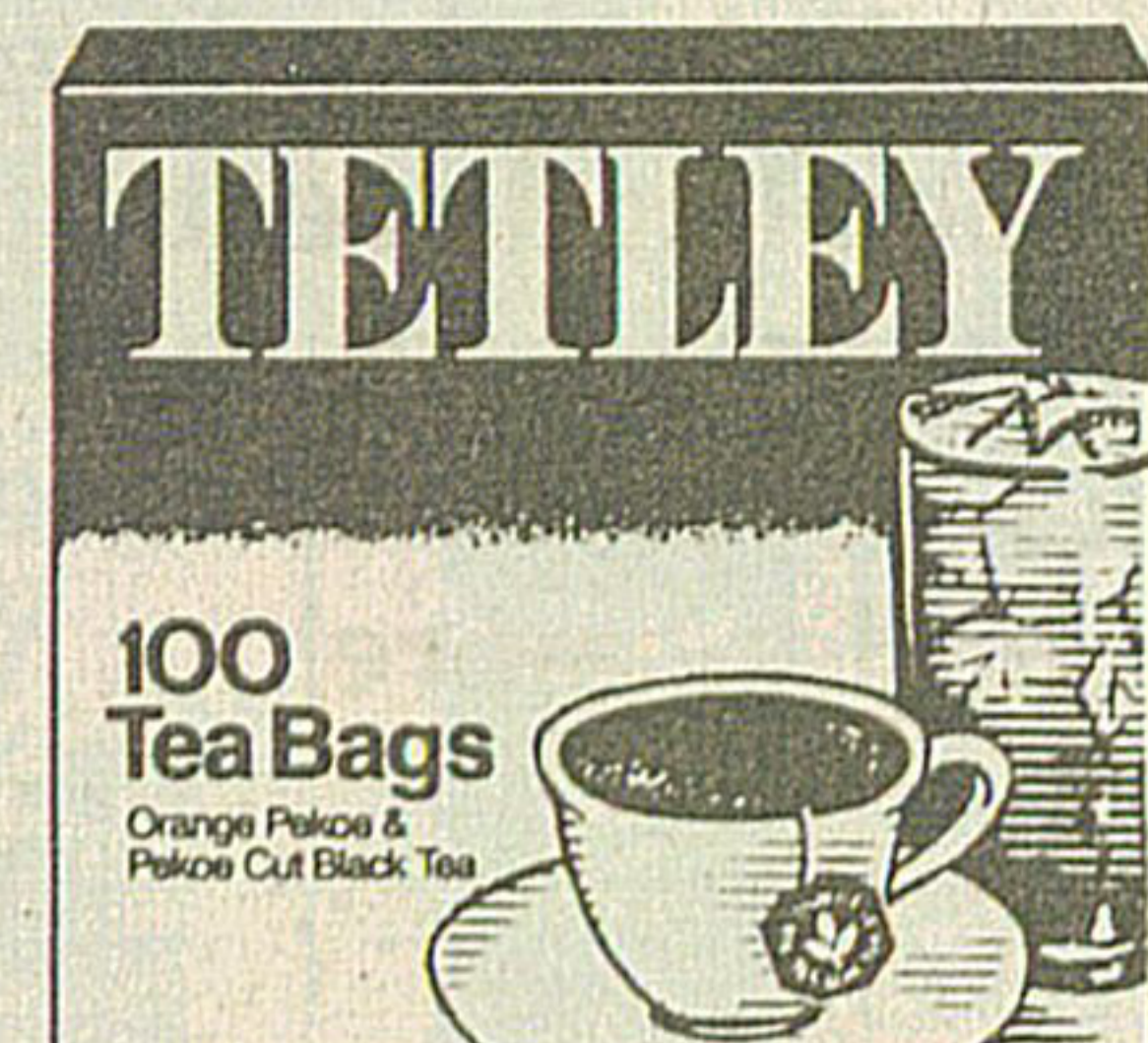
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