

Terdiman to put JUC on 'Pittsburgh map'

By JO MARKS RIFKIN

Staff Writer

As a student at New Jersey's Drew University, he dated "almost every Jewish woman there."

But then, that's why David Terdiman, the new executive director of Pittsburgh Hillel's Jewish University Center, joined Drew's Hillel.

"I'll admit it. Initially, it was to meet Jewish women," he said.

Later, it became more, and in his senior year, Terdiman was actively involved as an officer in the organization.

So it doesn't faze Terdiman that Jewish students join campus Hillels for, well, whatever reason. And he's determined to work with the administrations at the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon, Chatham and Duquesne to obtain religious, social and cultural programming, although it's not just about "doing Jewish."

"If there are 10 kids who want to watch a football game and eat pizza, I'll provide the pizza," said Terdiman, who wants to reach all of the roughly 4,000 Jewish students at the four schools.

He also hopes Jewish students from community colleges and other higher educational institutions will become involved. If a Pittsburgh kid from UCLA is home on vacation, he can come here too.

"We're not going to say 'no' to anyone," he said. In fact, Terdiman plans to be inclusive and pluralistic when it comes to the branches of Judaism.

Terdiman, himself, grew up Reform in an Orthodox, shomar Shabbos house (his mother is a Reform Jew; his father, Orthodox) in a "very Jewish community" in Bergen County, NJ.

"We want to find all kinds of Jewish kids and get them into the fold," he said. That means reaching out to them, he added. "We'll go to them if they won't come to us."

Although he's grateful to the Jewish Federation and Edward and Rose Berman for Hillel's sleek new Jewish University Center, he said not all events will occur there.

"It's an amazing building, but it's not about the building; it's about the students," Terdiman said.

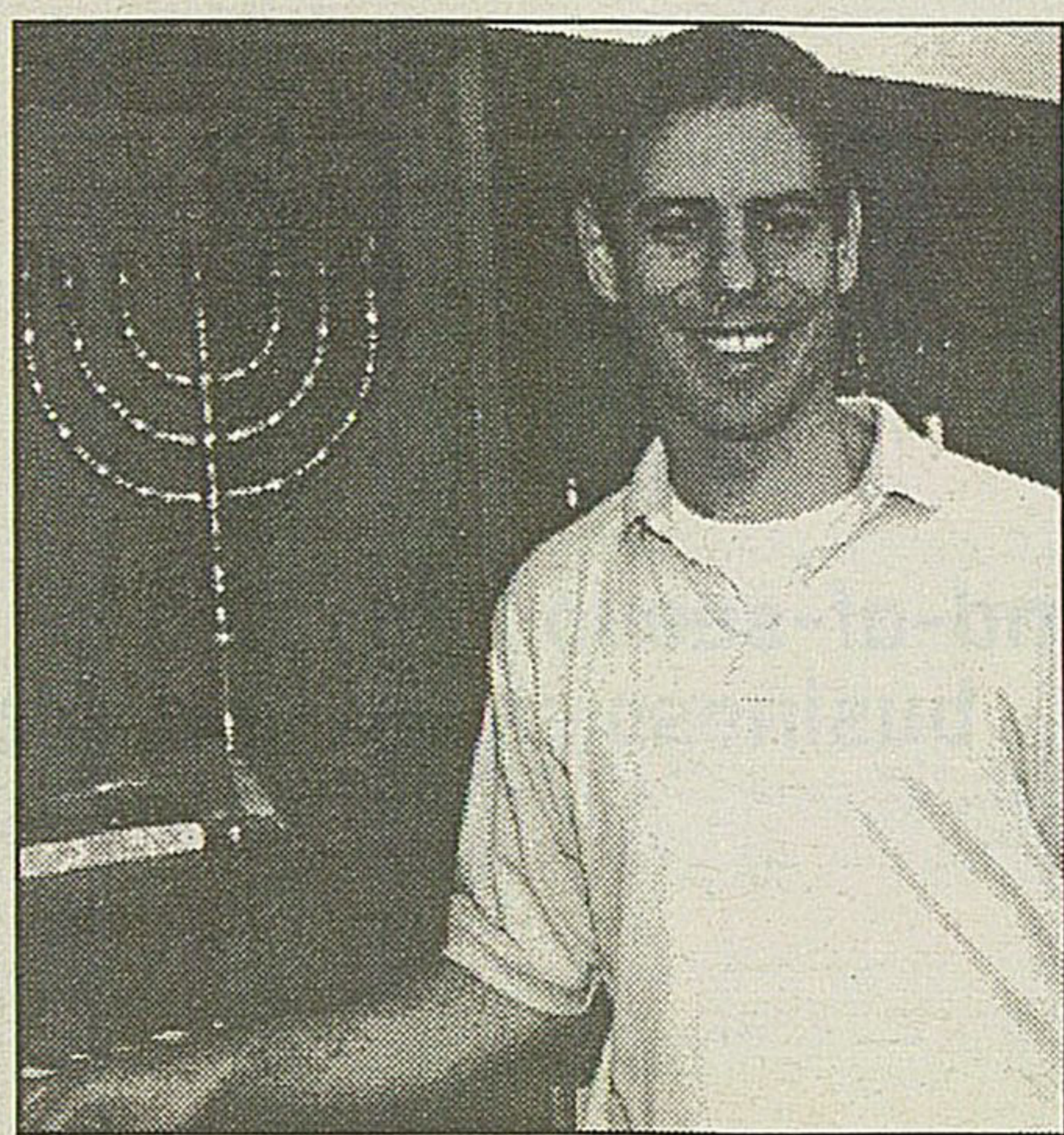
Student centers on campus, residence halls and student lounges will also hold Hillel events. Hillel will seek out Greeks and jocks (student slang for athletes), leaving few stones unturned when welcoming Jews.

Terdiman expects considerable partnering with the local community: the JCC, synagogues, the federation and the Kollel. He foresees river cruises and student retreats at the Emma Kaufmann Camp in Morgantown.

He'll go to the Student Affairs Division and the Dean of Students, just like he did as the interim executive director of Rutgers' Hillel.

Helping Terdiman establish his goals will be a Steinhart Jewish Campus Service Corps Fellowship intern. A recent Jewish college graduate, Leah Abrams, like other Steinhart interns, will help create stylistic and charismatic events outside of Hillel during her two years of service.

This is all taking place during a "Renaissance" in Judaism on campuses, said Terdiman. Today, the kids are, for the most part, more Jewishly sophisticated. Many have had the experiences of day



Chronicle photo by Stefanie Weiss

David Terdiman

school or youth group backgrounds, or have been to Israel or at Jewish camps.

Birthright, the program sending Jewish students to Israel for free has "turned Hillel and other Jewish organizations right onto their heads," said Terdiman, who has visited Israel several times.

"Expectations of Hillel are higher than in the past," he said.

Terdiman has two major goals for Pittsburgh's Hillel/JUC.

First, he wants to increase the level of fund raising so Hillel can introduce new programs.

Second, he wants to get all the Jewish students on the four campuses involved.

Using his own background as a guide, the 33-year-old Terdiman, said that college experiences are lasting experiences that students carry with them throughout their lives. He wants Hillel to be one of those experiences.

Terdiman previously served as both a Hillel professional and college administrator. Prior to his one year Rutgers' position, he was executive director of Hillel at the University of Hartford for three years.

Before his Hillel affiliation, he was the North American director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' KESHER/College Education Department and director of campus youth services for the United Jewish Federation of Bergen County. He has also worked on campus as an admissions officer at Drew University and Manhattanville College.

He holds a master's degree in student personnel administration from Columbia University's Teacher's College.

As far as helping students with detailed Judaic issues, Carol Staitman, Hillel, The Jewish University Center board member and chairman of the group's search committee, said the area has many rabbis who can help with the Judaic piece.

"The new model for Hillel doesn't have to be a rabbi," said the wife of Rodef Shalom Congregation's Rabbi Mark Staitman, noting the shortage of rabbis nationwide.

What she and the committee see in Terdiman is a man "with the right skills and right motivations who is going to make an impact on the community."

"David is going to help us put Hillel, The Jewish University Center on the Pittsburgh map," and end the confusion between Hillel the day school, and Hillel, the college campus organization, she said.

The fact that Terdiman had Hillel executive experience was a plus, Staitman said. "All he has to learn is a new location and a new building."