

Oakland Y tenants find homes

By IRIS M. SAMSON, *News Editor*

Where have all the tenants gone?

With March 1 fast approaching, the Jewish Community Center's building in Oakland—home to many Jewish agencies—will soon change hands.

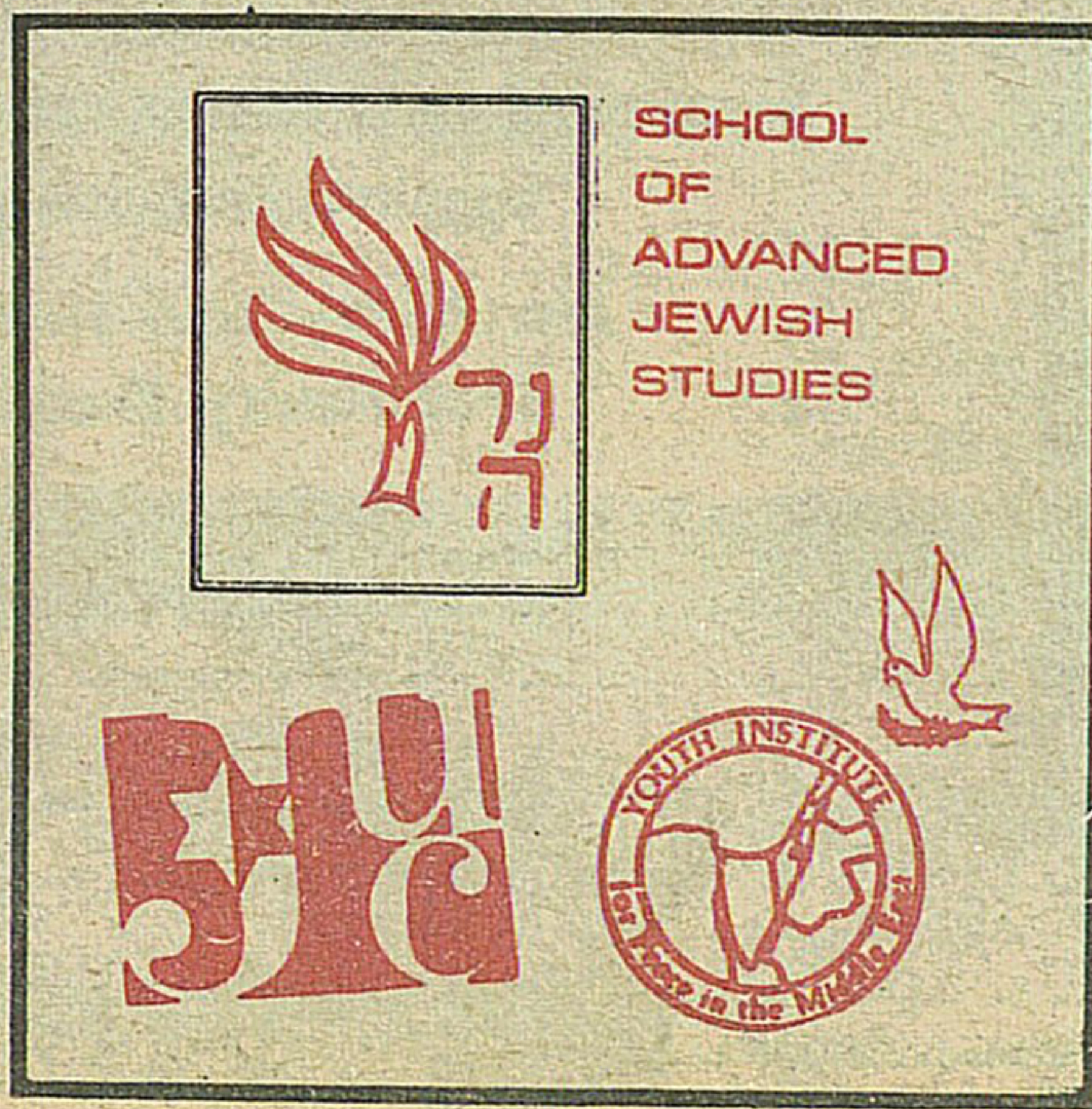
The sale of the building last year by the JCC to the University of Pittsburgh has meant that several organizations housed in the facility at 315 S. Bellefield Ave. have had to search for other quarters.

The massive, four-story, 60-year-old building was, at its inception, the YM & WHA. Over the years tenants moved in, until the building held not only the Morris Kaufmann Auditorium and health and physical education club, but also B'nai B'rith Hillel, the School of Advanced Jewish Studies and The Jewish Chronicle.

In all, 10 separate agencies and organizations use the Oakland facility.

The new landlord, the University of

Pittsburgh, has allowed many tenants to stay. Yet rent increases and the inevitable displacement once Pitt remodels and renovates the building have forced many to look for a new home.



Among those leaving are Arie Rothshtein, the Israel Community Shaliah, and Dr. Isaiah Kuperstein, director of the Holocaust Center of Greater Pittsburgh. Both take up new residence at 242 McKee Pl., a house next door to the United Jewish Federation Building, by the end of this month.

Rothshtein's office will be located on the third floor of the building. He notes that "there will be two Israel Community Shaliah offices now—one at 242 McKee Pl. and every Tuesday and Wednesday we'll have office hours at the Jewish Education Resource Center in Squirrel Hill.

"The JCC was an important place; the center of the community," Rothshtein continues. "We were located here originally" because of the proximity to students, who participate heavily in the Shaliah's programs. "It is my hope," he adds, "that they

will continue to come, to our new offices."

The Holocaust Center of Greater Pittsburgh will be housed on the first floor of the McKee Place facility, according to Dr. Kuperstein. "We'll have a physical presence in the new location we don't have here at the JCC," he says.

"I have mixed emotions about leaving. On the one hand, the location in Oakland was phenomenal. We're right next door to the Board of Education and universities.

"But the opportunity to move gives us a visibility and a physical presence we don't have here. It also gives us space to construct and put together an exhibit on the Holocaust."

As a result of the move, Kuperstein points to an expansion in Holocaust Center programming. Besides erecting an exhibit,

(Continued on Page 7.)

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(Continued from Page 1, Col. 4.)

he hopes to open an audio-visual room and add to the present library. "We'll involve more volunteers in our operation and ask survivors to help us out. Our presence will reach further into the community."

Also leaving the Bellefield Avenue building is the Association for the Advancement of Creative Judaism—Congregation Beit Or. The Congregation, under the direction of Rabbi Peter Gluck, will relocate to new offices in Squirrel Hill.

The biggest upheaval has been for the JCC/YM & WHA, which for 60 years called Oakland home. "This is a highly emotional time for us," according to JCC Executive Director Barton Schachter.

"We're leaving our home. This is an historic time of transition." Schachter notes that the JCC racquetball courts, health center, Nautilus rooms, pool and gym remain open in Oakland until June, 1987, when the new JCC superstructure in Squirrel Hill is slated to open.

Staying in JCC hands until completion of the building are the Hyman Rogal

Room, Richard Novick Lounge and Morris Kaufmann Auditorium, all located in Oakland. Y Music Society Concerts will continue undisturbed in the auditorium.

In cleaning out the building, readying for the move, JCC workers have discovered files and memorabilia lost for decades. "We'll put together a show at the Y-IKC's (Squirrel Hill) of the paper work and paintings. When we build our super building we'll have a room for displaying our memorabilia.

"This is a time of transition for us," Schachter muses. "Squirrel Hill has become the 'flagship' of JCC operations, because of the population density and because it garners 85% of all JCC business.

"The Y Building in Oakland was showing its age. With our superstructure, we hope to take the best of both buildings—Squirrel Hill and Oakland—and put it into one facility. This will serve for 50 years," he concludes.

Not everyone is leaving. The Oakland School, home to some 45 students,

remains intact, and the Youth Institute for Peace in the Middle East will keep its third floor office.

"I really love this building," says Youth Institute Director Wendy Rosenberg. "We're near the students and it's easy for them to come to us between classes. It's convenient to stay here as long as we can.

"We will be looking for additional contributions, however, to make up the rent increase."

Staying, too, because of its proximity to students, is the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation. Rabbi Joseph Levine, BB Hillel director explains: "We've negotiated with Pitt, and we'd like to remain. We're clarifying our options for the future.

"Eventually, however, we may have to move, so we've begun investigating the alternatives."

Demographically, he feels BB Hillel should remain in Oakland. "We draw students here," says the Rabbi, "and we need to consider them. We're working closely with Federation on the problem; but for now we're happy Pitt wants us to stay."

Like BB Hillel, the School of Advanced Jewish Studies is in the process of negotiating its lease with the University. "We'll be here for a while," Dr. Eunice Baradon, SAJS dean, assures. "We like it here. We're comfortable here."

The Oakland Y has been a "Jewish landmark for 60 years," according to one tenant. "It's really been the center of Jewish life, and it makes me sad to feel like it's the end of an era."

But Schachter sees the impending sale as positive for the Community groups. "This can be a springboard for their futures—these organizations can use this transition to examine their own futures.

"I also feel the sale has been a catalyst—to examine where we're going, how we'll all operate for the next generation."

What about the Jewish Chronicle—whose offices have been located on the Y's third floor for the past 15 years? As Executive Editor Joel Roteman notes, "that's another story."