

Community Connection / By Devorah Klein

North Miami Beach: A Growing Community

Miami, Florida, is known throughout the world as a warm, sunny place to vacation or live. The city has a large, well-established Jewish community that consists of several smaller communities in various suburbs, each with its own personality, including Miami Beach, North Miami Beach, Hollywood and Aventura.

Like many communities in America, these cities have seen a growth in Torah in recent years, especially with the addition of *kollelim*. This week we focus on the North Miami Beach community, its people and institutions, and the effect that the North Miami Beach Community Kollel has had on the *kehillah*.

A Look at the North Miami Beach Community

North Miami Beach is about a half-hour's drive from the older, more established Miami Beach community. It is a newer, quieter and more affordable place to live in that is further away from the beaches and some of the problems they present. A growing community, it currently has approximately nine hundred *frum* families.

The city has many shuls. Some of the largest ones are Young Israel of Greater Miami, which was started by Rabbi Zev Leff, and is currently under the guidance of Rabbi Dovid Lehrfield; Torah V'Emunah, under the leadership of Rabbi Yeruchum Bensinger; Congregation Shaarey Tefillah, headed by Rabbi Efraim Eliyahu Shapiro; and Beis Menachem, a Chabad shul run by Rabbi Yosef Marlow.

North Miami Beach also has several schools, including Yeshiva Toras Chaim/Toras Emes Academy, Bais Yaakov of Miami, Hillel Community Day School and Landow Yeshiva (associated with Chabad). We spoke with administrators in a few of these schools to get a better idea of life in NMB.

Yeshiva Toras Chaim/Toras Emes Academy

Yeshiva Toras Chaim and Toras Emes Academy are affiliated institutions under the direction of graduates of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim. Toras Emes includes a preschool division, a boys' and girls' elementary division and a boys' middle-school division. Toras Chaim accommodates *bachurim* in high school through *beis medrash* on a separate campus. These combined institutions are under the leadership of Rabbi Mordechai Palgon, Rabbi Binyamin Luban and Rabbi Yisroel Niman.

Rabbi Hillel Bubovic, *Mashgiach* of Yeshiva Toras Chaim, shared some ideas about what makes this institution special.

"There is a very strong culture of self-improvement among the staff. We stress professional growth, constantly working to

make ourselves better *mechanchim*. It is not easy, but the credit for this goes to Rabbi Palgon — it is his *hashkafah*, and it really makes a difference.

"In addition, we don't just preach individuality, we really do it. We deal with each individual student at whatever level he is at so that he can perform his best. When they leave here, they can go to whatever yeshiva they want. After *beis medrash*, they can go to whatever college they want if they choose to do so. It is hard to produce both. We have different levels of *shiurim*, especially in *bekius*, as well as different levels in the secular studies, so that barely two boys in the yeshiva are in the same classes together all day."

There are seventy *bachurim* in the *beis medrash*, which is a major asset for the high school. According to the Chofetz Chaim outlook, the *beis medrash bachurim* are encouraged to become peer mentors to the high-schools boys.

"In effect, this gives me another seventy people who are willing to help out the high-school *bachurim* — a real bonus," explains Rabbi Bubovic. "There has to be a reason that we quadrupled our numbers in the past ten years."

Bais Yaakov of Miami

Bais Yaakov of Miami opened in 1983 with seven students. Today it is a growing institution that educates about three hundred girls in grades six through twelve. Almost all of the graduates attend a year of seminary in Eretz Yisrael. Rabbi Ephraim Leizeron has been at the helm of the school since its establishment.

"The school is completely a part of the Bais Yaakov system," explains Mrs. Chana Sostchin, administrator at the school. "We take direction from *daas Torah*, and there has never been any compromise."

Extracurricular activities play a strong role in the school's program. The girls engage in *kiruv* activities through a JEP program, help children with special needs, visit the elderly in nursing homes, run a Chinese auction to raise money for *ma'os chittim* and stage a yearly production that attracts an audience of about a thousand people.

"There is a tremendous mix of girls in the school," commented Mrs. Sostchin. "I think it enhances the school since there are no stereotypes. The girls can work on their individual potential and become true *bnos Yisrael*. We really see the girls grow in *Yiddishkeit* through the various programs. It is a real pleasure at graduation each year to see the seniors and how they have developed. Then they come back married to *bonei Torah* with beautiful chil-

dren; it is a real *nachas!*"

North Miami Beach Community Kollel

Several years ago, a group of *baalei batim* in North Miami Beach saw the need to develop some type of organized learning in the *kehillah*. Beginning with a Thursday-night *beis medrash* program featuring special speakers, the program developed into a nightly *beis medrash* with more than forty *baalei batim* coming to learn.

"Previously, there had been no organized place of learning for *baalei batim* and the need was very great. After the success of this evening *beis medrash* program, we made the decision to bring in a full-time *kollel*," recalls Rabbi Avi Wakszul, one of the originators of the program. "It was easier to bring the *kollel* into the community after they had a taste of what it could offer them."

Mr. Chaim Meisels, Mr. Avi Blumberg and Rabbi Avi Wakszul, along with some others, embarked on a mission to establish a community *kollel* in NMB. They approached Rabbi Tzvi Eliyahu Meir Schmeltzer, the former *menahel* of Mesivta of Miami, and hired him to become the *Rosh Kollel*. Rabbi Schmeltzer put together a group of eight high-caliber *yungeleit*; six were from Lakewood, one was living in Eretz Yisrael and one is from Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin.

About two and a half years ago, the North Miami Beach Community Kollel opened its doors. Since then the *kollel*, which is housed in the *beis medrash* of Congregation Shaarey Tefillah, has had a major impact on the community.

The *yungeleit* learn *b'hasmadah* for three *sedarim* each day. Many *shiurim* and programs are offered throughout the day. There is a daily *shiur* from 9:30-10:30 for *baalei batim*, many retired; the group has already made a *siyum* on *Beitzah* and *Makkos*, and is now learning *Kiddushin*. A daily lunch-and-learn is attended by over twenty *baalei batim*, and a Thursday-night *mishmar* program features special lectures by Rabbanim and other prominent members of the Miami community. A N'shei division offers programs to the women of the *kehillah*.

The *kollel yungeleit* also reach out to college students through the Jewish Collegiate Learning Exchange, which offers lectures. Many college students also come to the *kollel* to learn with the *Rosh Kollel* each week.

The *yungeleit* reach out to the surrounding communities as well. A daily *shiur*, followed by a learning *sefer*, is given by Rabbi Aharon Dovid Singer in the Beit Edmond Safra Synagogue in Aventura. There is also a night *sefer* on Monday and Wednesday evenings in Aventura.

Many tourists also take advan-

tage of the Torah atmosphere offered by the *kollel*, and the winters always bring in a large group of visitors who sit and learn.

"The impact that the *kollel* has had on the community is simply astounding," says Rabbi Aharon Dovid Singer, director of community development for the *kollel*. "People have come to rely upon the *yungeleit* for *eitzos* and spiritual guidance."

Rabbi Schmeltzer commented, "The main purpose of the *kollel* is to bring Torah to the community and to uplift the families of the community in Torah. It has impacted a large segment of the *kehillah* and upgraded the level of *Yiddishkeit*... There are those who did not know what it meant to ask *she'eilos*, and now they come and ask. The children also come to learn, and it has an impact on the entire family."

Rabbi Schmeltzer emphasized that the *yungeleit* grow and develop in their personal *avodah* through their involvement with the *kollel* by giving *shiurim* and interacting with the *baalei batim*.

"You have no idea how it affects a family when the children see their father going out to learn at night," said Rabbi Wakszul. "One goes into shul at night and sees fifty to sixty people or more sitting and learning. This is truly a community *kollel*. There are programs on all levels, and the participants represent a true cross-section of Yidden — *Chassidish*, Litvish, *kippah serugah* — you name it."

Rabbi Ephraim Leizeron, principal of Bais Yaakov of Miami, stated, "The *kollel* has changed the community. You walk in at night and hear the *kol Torah* and feel the powerful atmosphere of learning. The *kollel* members are *chashuve yungeleit*, and many people's lives have been changed because of their relationship with these *yungeleit*."

Chessed in NMB

Chessed abounds in North Miami Beach, through a variety of venues.

Mrs. Ellen Weiss has been the Southeast director of Chai Lifeline for twenty-five years, overseeing the entire region, from Baltimore to Texas. The chapter offers a host of services for sick children and their families, religious and secular Jews alike, including medical referrals, food, and transportation. Almost fifty children from the region went to Chai Lifeline's Camp Simcha this year.

"We are usually the first call for any medical crisis in the community, even for adults," Mrs. Weiss said. "I have been with Chai Lifeline since its establishment. Never in our wildest dreams did we think it would become what it is today."

Mrs. Weiss was born and bred in NMB, and has watched the community grow. "North Miami Beach is a warm and friendly community. Its residents run the

gamut — there are people on all levels, both financially and religiously. There is kosher food galore, with lots of restaurants. NMB has become more of the focus in this region in recent years — it is a younger community with every amenity and is more affordable than most other communities on the East Coast."

Bikur Cholim of NMB is another active *chessed* organization that provides many services, including transportation to medical appointments, meals, visits to hospitals, nursing homes and individuals at home, assistance with shopping, a medical equipment *gemach*, guidance for those from out of town, and a Shifra and Puah division that provides meals to families with new babies.

Bikur Cholim services the entire Jewish community of North Miami Beach and interacts closely with other *bikur cholim* organizations in South Florida. It can be reached at (305) 690-8949.

About six months ago, a branch of Hatzolah was established to service the communities of NMB and Aventura. Its EMTs are required to take an intensive course that is about a hundred hours longer than other courses.

"*Baruch Hashem*, we have been very well received," stated Mr. Zalmen Cohen, one of the founders of the organization. "Florida does not have a volunteer ambulance service; we are the first one they have heard of. But we have managed to gain the respect of the municipal services."

The phone lines have been ringing steadily since Hatzolah went into service, according to Mr. Cohen. In addition to the excellent services and fast response time offered by Hatzolah, many elderly winter residents are used to being able to rely on Hatzolah in New York and were anxious to have those services in NMB. Many times, Hatzolah volunteers have been able to convince patients to accept treatment and transport from municipal ambulance crews.

"Call volume has been so large that we are working on expanding our services to Miami Beach and neighboring communities," explained Mr. Cohen.

"North Miami Beach is a wonderful place to live," says resident Mayer Rosenberg. "People are moving in from Miami Beach and also from out of town. It is just a pity that more people don't know about it."

Editor's Note: This article is intended to provide a taste of the wonderful Jewish community in North Miami Beach. It is in no way intended to serve as comprehensive coverage of all of the many wonderful people and institutions that helped to form the kehillah historically and continue to support it today.