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Matters

RUDLIN TORAH ACADEMY RICHMOND HEBREW DAY SCHOOL

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RTA Matters Editor



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Making An Impact: The Midor L'dor Program

This year RTA received an Impact Grant from the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond. The grant was for a new RTA program called Midor L'dor - From Generation to Generation. The name of the grant captures its purpose: for RTA students to engage and bond with seniors living in and around the Richmond community. As part of this program, we have collaborated with our sister agencies: The Weinstein JCC, Jewish Family Services, and the Beth Sholom Home.

How successful was the program? When you hear quotes from the participating seniors like "Being with the kids makes us feel young again!" and "This is the best program I have been to. I really had a great time!" – you know you're doing something right.

DECORATING & EATING SUKKOT!

We kicked off the Midor L'dor program over Sukkot. Our students, with the help of art teacher Jane Samora, made beautiful decorations to brighten up the Beth Sholom sukkah. The Beth Sholom residents were so appreciative!

Also during the Sukkot holiday, our second grade class went to Marywood to sing Sukkot songs with the residents there and build edible sukkot out of graham crackers, pretzels, and marshmallow fluff. A delicious and festive time was had by all!



TOP: RTA's 7th & 8th grade students captivated a crowd of over 160 at the 11th annual Intergenerational Model Seder

BOTTOM: 4th grade student Avi Greene and his senior friends enjoy exploring the learning and play of Chanukah

RTA BRINGS COMEDY TO THE ELDERLY

Our next event was a multigenerational comedy show at Parkside. Our comedian, RTA alumnus Avi Frier, had the whole room – kids and seniors – laughing hysterically! Following the show, cake and coffee was served and the seniors and students from the fifth grade class got an opportunity to sit and chat and get to know each other.

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Our Vision

Stellar Education for Every Jewish Child

Our Mission

The Rudlin Torah Academy (RTA) provides the highest quality Jewish and General Education to children in grades K-8. Open to Jewish youth of all backgrounds, RTA prepares its students to meet the challenges of modern society by promoting educational excellence, instilling an appreciation and love of Judaism and Torah, and imbuing respect for all humanity.

Our graduates are responsible community members, role models, future leaders, and lifelong learners. RTA is an integral and integrated part of the Richmond Jewish Community.

In providing excellent Jewish and General Education, RTA:

- Creates an environment where all of our students and families feel welcome, engaged, and respected;
- Inspires our students ethically, morally, and spiritually;
- Promotes a love of and sense of responsibility for the people and State of Israel;
- Provides instruction and learning opportunities that challenge our students to reach their maximum level of language proficiency in modern Hebrew;
- Implements state-of-the-art technology and environmentally responsible practices;
- Develops enriching extracurricular, after school, and arts programming;
- Emphasizes community service to foster a strong sense of social and civic responsibility; and
- Strengthens relationships with local Jewish organizations through creative and innovative programs and activities.

RTA's mission is best achieved by an active partnership involving students, parents, administrators, teachers, staff, and the community. Open lines of communication, straightforward assessments of challenges and opportunities, and thoughtful, transparent decision-making and planning are vital for the continued success of our program, our students, and the Richmond Jewish community

RTA's 50th Birthday!



RTA students spell it out - 50 Years of Stellar Education!

More than 200 people, including current families, alumni, and community members, joined together at the Weinstein JCC back in February to celebrate RTA's 50th birthday.

It was a joyous evening filled with giant games for the kids (including oversized Connect Four, Jenga, checkers, and tic-tac-toe), double shot basketball, a zero gravity booth, balloon animals made by the talented Ruthy Levinson, face painting, and of course, plenty of ice cream and birthday cake.

LOOKING BACK AT THE LAST HALF-CENTURY

The birthday party featured a large table covered with past RTA journals, going back decades. Everyone gathered around to find their own old pictures or pictures of their parents or their teachers from past years.

It was an evening to reflect on the past and to look ahead to the future. People spoke of their fond RTA memories. RTA alumnus Michelle Hampton talked about her memories of RTA's first principal, Rabbi Donald Patchen. "He was so gentle, but you would never misbehave, never want to disappoint him," she said. "All he had to do was look at you. He didn't have to yell."

"RTA's 50th birthday celebration was a wonderful example of RTA as a family," said Board President Dr. Bob Weisberger. "It was great to see today's RTA students having fun alongside the early graduates of the school, demonstrating

the continuity that 50 years of RTA has provided to the Richmond Jewish community."

Dr. Weisberger also commented on the leadership of RTA's longest-serving principal, Rabbi Hal Klestzick, who ran the school's day-to-day operations from 1990 until 2014.

"Under Rabbi Klestzick's leadership RTA grew from around 35 students to a peak of 174," said

Dr. Weisberger. "He was instrumental in bringing on many of RTA's most respected teachers – including Rabbi Baruch and Perel Sherman, Mrs. Cathy Klosenberg, Mr. Dabney Lewis, Mrs. Pauline Carlton, Mrs. Jeannie Dortch and many others. Rabbi Klestzick was tireless and devoted – he gave everything he had to the school."

The party was free to the entire community, thanks to the very generous sponsorship of AJTickets, a local events ticket company founded by RTA alumni Josh Goldberg and Ariel Klestzick. Huge thanks also Yali Klestzick and Hilary Bender for devoting endless time and energy to making this party one of the highlights of the year.

THE CELEBRATION CONTINUED...

The celebration continued at the 50th Anniversary Chesed Gala on June 7th, which honored all past Chesed honorees and past presidents. Dr. Will Recant, an internationally renowned disaster relief expert who brings aid to refugees, disaster victims, and Jewish communities worldwide through his work with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, was the keynote speaker at the event.

Recant, the son of Holocaust survivors, said in an interview with the JNS news service recently that Jewish memories of the Holocaust play an important part in today's relief efforts for refugees of all nationalities. "It's dominant in our thinking," he said. "We were there, that could be us. We understand what it is

to have a child and just want your child to grow up in security and safety."

Recant was introduced by Mark Sisisky, a board member of the JDC and a past president of both the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond and the Richmond Jewish Foundation. Sisisky has accompanied Will Recant several times on international relief missions. Mark and Susan Sisisky were the lead sponsors of the 50th Anniversary Chesed Gala.

RTA HISTORY

It's tough to sum up fifty years of a school like RTA – five locations, 1,250 students, scores of teachers and staff.

In 1966, Milton Marder, Abraham and Emil Dere, and other members of the Richmond Jewish community launched Richmond Hebrew Day School after meeting with and being inspired by the work of Rabbi Nathan Bulman of Newport News. The number of Jewish day schools in the U.S. had slowly grown from just 35 in 1940 to about 300 in the mid-1960s, and Rabbi Bulman was urging American Jews to begin more. (Today there are 861 schools with more than 250,000 students enrolled.)

With the help of Torah Umesorah, the international organization of Jewish day schools, Marder's core group determined to make the effort.

"Our goal was a school that would provide a superior secular program coupled with a superior program in Jewish studies," said Mr. Marder in an interview this year.

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Co-chairs of the 50th Birthday Celebration event - (left to right) Hilary Bender and Yali Klestzick

After School Enrichment at RTA

Some RTA students just can't get enough of the fun and learning that goes on during the regular school day. So for these kids, we've extended the day to offer after-school clubs and activities. More than half of our student body participated in one or more of this year's after-school programs, which included some oldies but goodies (like the Chess Club and Art Club), as well as some newbies, which we'll talk more about below....

KARATE

Karate is great for teaching self-defense, but it's also so much more: Week-by-week, the kids in the Karate Club built their strength, improved their focus and concentration, and increased their self-confidence, respect, and discipline – and those are just a few of the body-mind benefits that our kindergarten through 4th grade students received from Competitive Edge Karate's Kyoshi Roger Dabney. Stronger bodies, stronger minds, and of course, a whole lot of fun – these were the pillars of this year's Karate Club.

CODEMONKEY

Computing coding is a necessary skill for kids wishing to excel in today's tech-centric world. In this enrichment class, running for its first year, RTA's budding programmers (grades 5 through 8) learned CoffeeScript coding – a programming language used in the industry primarily for web applications - through a fun interactive online game, CodeMonkey. And according to their teacher, RTA's Marketing Director Eric Miller, the class surpassed all expectations!

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE ROOM

RTA partnered with The Universal Language Room, a dynamic and innovative program founded by Richmonder Jason Caplan. In the URL, people of any music skill level gather together, to 'speak' through improvisational music. In RTA's maiden voyage of the URL, Jazz educator Joe Lubman facilitated the experience, providing each student with a different instrument, and guiding them in communicating - much like an orchestra conductor.



TOP: Kyoshi Roger Dabney and his RTA karate class show their moves!

BOTTOM: Morah Jane Samora continues one of our most successful and long-running enrichment programs

Every week, by creating parts for each student to speak within the song, the group built its own full composition – original and creative!

CHESS CLUB

The Chess Club concluded a successful second year with returning players and new players of all levels (grades 2 and up) battling it out with their improving notation skills. Students spent their time solving chess programs, playing team chess, understanding how to avoid amateur mistakes, and learning other expert tips from chess master Mr. Keith Rakofsky. Topping it all off was the tournament which ended in fine dramatic fashion, as the two 3-0 students battled to a final draw, to retire undefeated. You better watch out, as these students will soon surpass their master! Checkmate!

ART CLUB

RTA students always get super creative with Morah Jane Samora when they enjoy one of our longest-running (more than ten years!) and most popular after-school enrichment programs. Our little artists (K-4th graders) worked on some really cool projects, including weaving, sculpture, painting, 3-D construction, and papier-mâché puppets.

If you were an RTA student, wouldn't YOU want to extend the fun and learning and stay another hour at the end of the day? And just imagine what exciting new opportunities are in store for 2016-17!



RTA's Chess Champions!

The Midor L'dor Program (continued)

SPREADING THE LIGHT OF CHANUKAH

At Chanukah time, RTA sixth graders spread the light and joy of the holiday season by lighting the menorah with seniors at Gayton Terrace and then presenting a Chanukah slideshow explaining why we celebrate the holiday, the correct way to light a menorah, the customs that we have on Chanukah, interesting facts about the holiday, and how to play dreidel. The students and seniors then worked together to make beautiful sand art projects, and then ended the fun activity with delicious jelly donuts.

Meanwhile, the second graders were off spreading the holiday cheer over at Beth Shalom where they lit the menorah, sang songs, and then worked on engraved Chanukah cut-outs for the seniors to hang in their rooms.

The fourth graders had their own Midor L'dor Chanukah event as well, as they went off to hang out with their senior buddies over at the JCC where they sang songs, played dreidel, and made beautiful sun catchers together.

A GREEN CELEBRATION WITH SENIORS

Next up on our calendar of Midor L'dor events was a Tu B'shvat activity at Parkside where the second graders sang a song about the plant lifecycle, and then decorated planters with the seniors, each child taking drawing requests from their senior partner. The group continued their celebration of

trees and the natural world by making fruit kabobs together.

Meanwhile, at the other end of town, the fourth graders headed back to the JCC to eat lunch with their senior friends. The kids presented a special Tu B'shvat poem (in Hebrew and English) that invoked laughter and cheers from their captive audience, and then sat down to decorate flower pots together. This party also ended with healthy, festive fruit kabobs.

MODEL SEDER

RTA's model seder with the seniors at the WJCC is an annual communal highlight, but this year was by far the greatest of all 11 years of running this event. Typically the model seder brings 30-40 seniors – this year that number hit 160. The packed crowd was enthralled with our seventh and eighth grade students, who displayed tremendous class and poise, gliding smoothly from delivering polished words of Torah to socializing with a table full of seniors to efficiently serving food to their new friends.

The feedback from the seniors and volunteers from our WJCC and JFS partners was overwhelming, as all were effusive in their praise of our outstanding students and the delightful, engaging program.

MORE MIDOR L'DOR EVENTS

There have been other small events throughout the year where our students visited with Parkside and Marywood residents. The third graders visited

Parkside back in November and sang songs about shabbat, while the seventh and eighth graders braided challah with the residents. And we had an in-school activity where Mrs. Francine Blum, a senior community member, came to read to the first grade class – the plan was for her to read one book, but when she was done, the kids begged for another, a request our guest couldn't turn down.

MULTIGENERATIONAL INSPIRATION & RESPECT

What do we like about Midor L'dor? We've loved seeing the kids bond with our elderly community members and watching the mutual respect, admiration, and interest bloom for the youngsters and the elderly alike. We enjoyed seeing the kids make the seniors laugh and smile, and the children become more and more comfortable performing and talking to their senior buddies. As a people, we value the traditions and stories of those who came before us, and witnessing these important interactions gives us faith that our children and our children's children will continue to respect the elderly and show loving-kindness Midor L'dor, from generation to generation.



LEFT: 2nd grade student Yehoshua Gunzburg demonstrates how to make a graham cracker sukkah!

RIGHT: RTA hosted the seniors from Parkside for a special Chanukah program and comedy-magic show

The Sounds of Music

Thanks to the wonderful generosity of the family of Patricia "Tish" Marmorstein ob"m, RTA's curriculum has been further enriched with a dynamic music program which began in September 2014.

In this initiative, RTA proudly partners with a premier educational institution, The Academy of Music & American Youth Harp Ensemble, Richmond's leading classically based music school located in Carytown.

"The Academy of Music has taught generations of students to develop their musical talents and we are honored and excited to share our music programming and resources with the Rudlin Torah Academy," stated Mrs. Lynnelle Ediger-Kordzaia, founder and director of the Academy.

Features of the RTA music program include weekly music appreciation classes for all grades, with a focus on string instruments, classical music, and exposure to various forms, structures, and rhythms of music.

Last year our first-year music students in third grade and up enjoyed learning to play the recorder, and seventh and eighth graders had a two-month introduction to the harp. This year, under the tutelage of our talented and energetic music instructor, Mr. Jonathan Lingerfelt, students in grades 5-8 now have the treat of weekly instruction in the violin.

Rabbi Yosef Bart, RTA principal, stated, "We are excited to partner with the Academy, whose reputation as a premier school of music instruction is world renowned. Their exceptional instructors and resources have enthralled our students and delighted our parents."

What a treat it is to walk into a weekly class of middle school students and hear them playing pieces on the violin!

Our thanks to our partners in music education – the Academy of Music and the incredibly talented Mrs. Ediger-Kordzaia and Mr. Lingerfelt who make this all possible.



TOP: Music instructor Mr. Jonathan Lingerfelt with his 5th grade violin class.

MIDDLE: 8th grade student Nancy Alexander enthralled the 50th Anniversary Gala attendees with her harp solo.

BOTTOM: Our inaugural year-end Celebration of Music program last May enchanted an overflow crowd.

RTA's 50th Birthday (continued)

"We had to sell the concept. The idea of a day school just didn't exist in anybody's mind, not in Richmond."

It began as a very small enterprise, about a dozen students in kindergarten and first-grade classes at the Jewish Academy of Richmond at 4811 Patterson Avenue (today the Kol Emes building and home of Shaarei Torah of Richmond). Tuition was well under \$1,000 a year, Mr. Marder recalled. After his day job as a chemical engineer for DuPont, he and others would meet with prospective families in the evenings to persuade them of the need for a day school.

Willa Kalman – whose late husband, Malcolm, was one of the early leaders of RTA, and whose daughter, Rebecca Kalman-Winston, was one of the early students – remembers that it did not feel like a sure thing at all.

"We all had to take a leap of faith, so to speak," Kalman said. "My husband and I felt that as much as we were able to teach our children at home, they needed more."

For those early families, enrolling at a new Jewish day school meant that their children were either leaving the public schools or never attending a public school at all.

"It was definitely a sacrifice at first," said Beverly Soble, whose three sons attended RTA. "We were going against the tide at the time, all our friends' children were going to public schools."

They stuck with it, and word of mouth spread. By 1970, the school had expanded to K-4th grade, with 26 students enrolled, and by the mid-1970s, after a stint in classrooms at Keneseth Beth Israel, Richmond Hebrew Day School constructed the first building it could call its own, at 6801 Patterson Avenue (now the home of Yeshiva of Virginia).

A generous donation in 1979 from Joseph and Fannie Rudlin helped the school continue expanding and led to its new name, Rudlin Torah Academy.

By the early 1990s, a Jewish education had become such an integral part of the Richmond Jewish community that many parents wanted more – they wanted a high school so that they didn't have to send their teenagers out of state to Jewish schools. With the assistance of Rabbi Berel Wein, director of a successful high school in New York, the girls high school Shaarei Torah of Richmond was launched in 1994.

The following decade, as RTA's student population expanded, the board decided to build a larger facility, farther west on Patterson Avenue. The new building at 12285 Patterson Avenue opened in 2003, and the previous building became Yeshiva of Virginia, a high school for boys started by Rabbi Hal Klestzick and with Rabbi Chaim Ozer Chait serving as founding Rosh Yeshiva (Dean).

In 2013, the boys' and girls' high schools separated from the K-8 day

school to become independent facilities. Rabbi Hal Klestzick stayed as the principal of the high schools and Rabbi Yosef Bart succeeded him as principal of RTA. The following year, RTA moved to its current home at 3809 Patterson Avenue.

LOOKING FORWARD

Today, the school has 101 students in K-8th grades, routinely outperforms its public school counterparts on standardized tests, and sends its graduates to the region's best specialty high schools every year. RTA graduates have gone on to earn degrees at Princeton University, Harvard University, Columbia University, Dartmouth College, the University of Virginia, Yeshiva University, Boston University and Brandeis University, among others. Several also have served in the Israeli Defense Forces.

RTA highlights in the past few years have included the Chromebook initiative putting laptops into the hands of students and staff for easy access to educational technology, a brand new music program (see article in this issue), expanded partnerships with all of Richmond's Jewish agencies, and the addition of a special needs/resource teacher.

We look forward to seeing what the next five decades bring for the RTA family and the Richmond Jewish community. Here's to the next 50 years!



RTA's Past Chesed Honorees (left) and Past-Presidents (right) were honored at this year's 50th Anniversary Gala

The Magic of TLC at RTA

TLC is a magical program. TLC means Tender Loving Care, but in RTA, it also stands for Teens Learning with Children. The magic begins when each kindergartner is matched up with a Shaarei Torah High School girl.

Each week, the TLC partner and her kindergartner learn and review the Aleph Bet letters. In addition to using materials provided by Morah Perel Sherman, RTA's veteran Kindergarten teacher, the creative high school girls invent their own games such as tic-tac-toe and word searches to facilitate the learning. The benefits of this program are vast. Each kindergartner learns one-on-one with a TLC partner who gives personalized attention that is suited to the child's specific learning style. The nurturing and warm atmosphere helps foster a love of reading Hebrew that is felt far into the child's future.

Years ago there was an ancient Jewish custom to begin the study of the Aleph Bet letters with a sweet touch. Children would learn to read letters while licking honey. Here at RTA, the children are also introduced to Hebrew letters in a pleasant and warm way, and TLC is a big part of that.

But TLC is not limited to just helping kindergartners read. Throughout the year, TLC partners will help their child braid challahs to take home for Shabbat. Also, they will prepare projects and assist in other ways with the kindergarten program. A highlight of TLC is the Trip to Israel. For this simulated trip on Yom Haatzmaut, TLC girls do a lot to help the trip get off the ground and produce an unforgettable memory that is often mentioned at RTA's 8th grade graduation.

Often, there will be a spontaneous cheer by the kindergartners when the Shaarei Torah girls come into the classroom. The warmth and camaraderie between the kindergartners and their 'big sisters' adds so much to the family feeling in the school.

"I can't believe the TLC program is completing its 11th year", says Morah Perel Sherman, RTA's Judaic Kindergarten teacher. "When I first started it, I wasn't sure how TLC would work out. The idea for it was based on a mentoring program that I had read about in New York City with inner-city public school children. It's been such a huge success, far surpassing my expectations! In a world where high school age kids seem more focused on their own needs, it is very encouraging to find this next generation of kids who are so ready to give to others."



TLC smiles



Morah Perel Sherman and Mrs. Noa Klestzick with the Kindergarten and Shaarei Torah TLC partners



TLC buddies enjoy the Biblical Zoo at the "Trip to Jerusalem" Program

Thank you!

Sarah Gold Pritzker RTA Matters Editor (RTA '95 / STOR '99) is a writer living in Israel.

She runs her own writing and editing company, Pritzker Editorial, and is married with three children.