

President's Message December 2008

Rabbi Stacy Offner of the [Union for Reform Judaism](#) (URJ) led a webinar a few weeks ago discussing how small and mid-sized congregations could help their members who are suffering from the current economic crisis. Since my desktop and laptop always seem to be lacking a working "sound card," I was encouraged by the fact that there was a telephone dial-in option for the conference. The call concentrated on two aspects of the crisis, and offered approaches to dealing with them.

The first aspect discussed ways to lower Temple costs during these difficult times. Discussion included buying in-bulk, forming buying groups of local religious institutions and using volunteers from the Temple. Needless to say, we have become true experts in the latter category, and could teach the URJ much in the area.

I was honored to attend the Eagle Scout ceremony on November 29 for AJ Seidorf. At age 16, AJ is among the youngest of Eagle Scouts. We know what a fine job the scouts, under AJ's supervision, did painting the interior of much of the first floor of The Jewish Center. AJ was an inspiration for me, which I will address below. This is one of the best examples of volunteerism that we have witnessed at the Temple.

The second half of the webinar discussed ways that congregants might assist others during this financial crisis. I have spent my entire professional life as a statistician. I doubt that many congregants need my help in calculating a standard deviation or providing a p-value for them. However, after I "retired" from that profession, I decided to get training in financial planning at Fairleigh-Dickinson University. The course work is much more difficult than work "a few years ago" earning a Ph.D. in Statistics at Stanford.

Based on this work, and also on pro-bono work that I have performed with the Financial Planning Association (www.fpanet.org), I have developed the confidence to help, gratis, many individuals in the Essex to Warren county corridor. I am willing to meet confidentially with my fellow members and offer them whatever assistance I can. Possibilities include organizing a budget, building an emergency fund, diversifying one's investments as much as possible and planning for retirement. I am not an expert in picking stocks, but then it seems that nobody has been good in that arena. A thorough review of one's financial situation inevitably uncovers options that were not available before this type of review.

I would only ask that this pro bono offering be accompanied by a signed waiver to not sue the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey, myself personally, or my business, Strategic Solutions and Services, Inc. If one decides to take me up on this offer, we could meet for as many meetings as necessary, either at your home, my home or the Center.

Finally, I want to mention another service available to our community, Jewish Family Services based in Somerville. One does not have to be Jewish to utilize this service. I googled "Jewish Family Services" "Somerville, NJ" and found a lot of information there.

Most recessions do not last that long, less than a year. This one appears as if it will last much longer. Please contact me at arvesen@att.net or by phone at 917-941-4332 for any questions or comments.

Shalom,
Jim Arvesen

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