

In and Around...
FAR ROCKAWAY
 & the **FIVE TOWNS**

UNITY AND GRATITUDE

Siyum on Sefer Tehillim Marks One Year Since Sandy

By Liba Lieberman

The sheer joy of being a *Yid* praising Hashem filled the vast space in Yeshiva Sh'or Yoshuv this past Sunday afternoon as men, women and children packed into the *yeshiva's* dining hall and gymnasium to participate in a *siyum* on the entire *Sefer Tehillim*, a program held to mark one year since Hurricane Sandy. Coordinated by Achiezer, with the endorsement and direct guidance of local *rabbonim*, the "Unity and Gratitude" event created a moment of thankfulness unparalleled in the history of Far Rockaway and the Five Towns.

Clearly, this was an opportunity to praise Hashem for survival and renewal, an opportunity that included the youngest members of the community. Seats were adorned with nosh, cookies and water bottles, compliments of Gourmet Glatt and Seasons. During the storm, children huddled with their parents in the *yeshiva's* vast dining room, coming for food and supplies. Now, children accompanied their parents to join in this celebration of Hashem's great mercy and *nissim*.

"Everyone came with their children in hard times. Now they have come with their kids in good times," observed Sara Stern of Far Rockaway. "I literally stood here in a food line a year ago," she continued to remember.

Her comments were echoed by everyone else in the room, as memories of the hurricane rushed into the present, demanding attention as words of praise and gratefulness came to everyone's lips.

The men's section, filled with men and boys of all ages, was located in the *yeshiva's* gymnasium. Women and girls were seated in the Hersh Dining Hall, where a screen showed the program via video arranged by Prosound Presentations. For a *siyum* of this magnitude, what was remarkable was the presence of all the children everywhere one looked. They, too, had suffered, and they, too, needed to express their *hakoras hatov* to the *Ribono Shel Olam* for restoring their homes and sparing their lives during the worst storm to hit this community in one hundred years. Those who are back in their homes and some who have yet to return to their damaged homes came together.

Sitting at the podium in the front section of the gym were the *rabbonim* of the Far Rockaway and Five Towns communities, including Long Beach, West Hempstead and Belle Harbor.

After the recital of *Tehillim*, Rabbi Baruch Ber Bender, executive director of Achiezer, opened the program, explain-



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ing that one year ago, the beautiful hall in which everyone was sitting was being used as a relief center after the storm. The *yeshiva* quickly became a local haven for the homeless, offering warm meals, laundry services, clean-up volunteers, and racks and racks of clothing for those whose clothing had been ruined. In return for the *yeshiva*'s critical role during those dark and cold times, Rabbi Bender called for a *bracha* that the *yeshiva* will continue to prosper and grow.

After mentioning the many *shuls* and organizations that worked tirelessly to help families hit by the storm, Rabbi Bender

Hashem runs the world, and there was no loss of life. So many people were saved by volunteers that night. This is the singular reason we are here today: to thank Hashem for the *ruach* and *achdus* we needed to rebuild during this difficult year."

The program then featured various *rabbonim* reciting a *kappitel* of *Tehillim*. The *rabbonim* included Rav Menachem Feifer, *rov* of Agudas Yisroel of Bayswater; Rav Binyomin Kamenetzky, founding *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva of South Shore; Rabbi Chaim Wakslak, *rov* of Young Israel of Long Beach; Rabbi Kenneth Haim, *rov* of Congregation



shared the history of the event, beginning with two women who wish to remain anonymous. They felt that the entire community should come together to thank Hashem for His kindness. Through *nissim*, there was no loss of life.

"I want to share one memory," Rabbi Bender said. "Just hours after the storm had begun, that first evening, several activists were huddled together. Our dedicated assemblyman, Phil Goldfeder, sat down with us. I'll never forget it. He looked at us and we looked at him. It was not a question of 'if' tragedy would strike, but when and how.

Beth Shalom; Rabbi Pinchas Weinberger, *rov* of Bais Tefilah of Inwood; Rabbi Tsvi Selengut, *rov* of Congregation Ohab Zedek; Rabbi Zalman Wolowik, *rov* of Chabad of the Five Towns; and Rav Avraham Halpern, *menahel* of Yeshiva Sh'or Yoshuv.

The recitals were followed by a message from Assemblyman Phil Goldfeder, who succinctly told the standing-room-only crowd, "The *Ribono Shel Olam* doesn't give us *nisyonos* that we can't overcome. We came through at the other end. We showed

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218 Harborview South

Shabbos Morning

שחרית • 8:45 am
Beis Medrash Heichal Dovid
215 Central Avenue

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שחרית • 8:30 am
Khal Zichron Moshe Dov
1045 Beach 9th Street

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Congregation Shaaray Tefila
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Unity and Gratitude

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the world an *achdus* that no other community saw. It was hard to top. It was an amazing *kiddush Hashem* this community made while the whole world was watching.”

The keynote speaker was Rabbi Fischel Schachter, whose ability to reach the hearts and minds of people of all ages shone brightly as he began with a story.

“I have a friend who is scared to speak in public,” he started. “At his son’s *bar mitzvah*, he asked me to write a script for him. I wrote him a script, but he told me it could be better. He wanted me to start with a joke. I began to think.

“This is the joke I came up with. There was a *bar mitzvah* boy and someone gave him an umbrella for his *bar mitzvah*. The boy had received *seforim* from everyone else, but this one guest gave him an umbrella. When he asked the man why he gave such a present, the man replied, ‘I wanted to give you something you would open.’ Now, when the man actually spoke at the *bar mitzvah*, he confused what I had told him and simply said that there was a *bar mitzvah* boy who received an umbrella to open.”

He continued the story: “He asked me what he did wrong, and I told him that it is the unexpected that makes something funny.”

He then explained that people who expect everything to be given to them in life are never happy. On the other hand, people who expect nothing are always happily surprised.

“I was by Rav Chaim Kanievsky. The Rebbetzin would

say *Birchos Hashachar* very early and Rav Chaim would answer *amein* to her *brachos*. Then he would say *Birchos Hashachar* and the Rebbetzin would say *amein*. They knew nothing was coming to them, and they were the happiest people in the world. When someone says thank you to Hashem, Hashem gives them more of what they are thanking Him for.”

In another story, a woman from the community of Emmanuel in Eretz Yisroel was travelling an entire day without eating, running from one appointment to the next. On the way home, near her community, her armored bus was attacked by terrorists. Even though the bus was armored, the roof of the bus had windows, and through those windows the terrorists fired their shots, hitting this woman. At one point, she was looking directly into a terrorist’s eyes. She was eventually taken to a hospital, where her life was saved, precisely because she had not been eating that day, which caused her to lose less blood. When she was recovering, someone asked her what she had been thinking when looking into the terrorist’s eyes. She said that at that moment she told the *Ribono Shel Olam* that her life was in His Hands. Nothing else mattered. Surprisingly, she felt a certain peace.

“Our lives are in the hands of the *Ribono Shel Olam*. Once we know that, our lives can be happy,” Rabbi Schachter concluded.

A special youngster, ten-year-old Gavriel Webberman of Far Rockaway, then spoke about what

he lost, and recalled what the gym looked like in the aftermath of the hurricane. “Hurricane Sandy hit every house on my block,” he remembered.

The *siyum* concluded with three

rabbonim finishing *Sefer Tehillim*: Rabbi Yaakov Bender, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Darchei Torah; Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva of South Shore; and Rabbi Eytan Feiner, *rov*

of Congregation Kneseth Israel/The White Shul.

The afternoon concluded with spiritually uplifting and heartfelt songs sung by Eitan Katz and Baruch Levine.

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Woodmere - Kehillas Aish Kodesh - 894 Woodmere Place [BETWEEN CLUB DRIVE AND WOODMERE BLVD.] in the back of the parking lot

Far Rockaway - Mikvah - 1121-A Sage St at the end of the parking lot opposite the women's entrance

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