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West Orange Welcomes Community Kollel

By Harry Glazer

Judging by the initial response to its very soft opening in Congregation Ohr Torah, a new community kollel in West Orange is well positioned to grow in leaps and bounds.

As Rabbi Marc Spivak, spiritual leader of Congregation Ohr Torah, explained to The Jewish Link, the Kollel opened quietly at the beginning of Elul. Though it started with very little advance publicity—a few announcements from the pulpit in the weeks prior—the Kollel has already attracted an enthusiastic and growing chevra. With a stellar team of rabbis, and plans to widely promote the initiative after Sukkot, the Kollel seeks to grow fast and involve many more community members in intensive learning.

The Kollel currently operates Monday through Thursday nights, from 8:30 to 10:00 p.m., with two 45-minute learning sessions. Initially, Maariv was held at 8:15 p.m., with a variety of snacks, drinks and pastries offered to participants. Just this week, however, Rabbi Spivak announced that there will also be a 10 p.m. Maariv minyan, to accommodate the rabbis and participants who are learning late. He also made a teaser announcement regarding daytime hours for the Kollel, which will be announced soon. Additionally, the Kollel offers “executive learning,” in which one of the rabbis will come out to offices and other places of work to study a Torah topic with someone or to give a shiur. The Kollel further plans to start offering shiurim, regular classes and other events before Chanukah.

Rabbi Yehudah Brand, the director of community engagement of the Kollel, speaks with each prospective participant and asks them what they want to accomplish in learning. Then, working with the participant and the Kollel’s rabbinic staff (who each have different areas of speciality), they tai-



Michael Spool and Rabbi Daniel Eisenberg at the new West Orange Kollel.

lor a learning program to meet the needs of the participant.

Rabbi Spivak reports that in the initial group of participants, a few people are learning about tefillah, a few people are learning Gemara in an advanced manner, some are learning Halacha in depth, one person is practicing their tefillah so they can lead the davening and one person is learning the Aleph Bais. Rabbi Brand reported to The Jewish Link that there are currently 14 community members in the Kollel, with others in town expressing interest in joining soon.

Judging from the reactions of a few of the participants, the community Kollel has identified and met an important need in the area.

“Though the Kollel has been operating for just a few weeks, I feel that in my several sessions with Rabbi Dubin I have made good progress in basic Gemara skills,” said Dr. Bruce Bukiet. “I hope more people will make use of the Kollel to avail themselves of one-on-one expertise in the Torah topic or skills of their choice.”

“Rabbi Eisenberg has been an absolutely wonderful chavrusa,” said Yoni Glatt. “He is quite knowledgeable—both in halachic and secular matters. He’s insightful and always has a smile. I legitimately look forward to learning with him, even after a long day of work! Also the Kollel has great snacks!”

“When I heard of the Kollel coming to West Orange, I jumped at the chance,” said Jonathan Weber. “As a baal teshuva, I now have a chance for to fill in some of those gaps in my learning. Thank you—loving it 100%!”

One prominent feature of the Kollel that attracts interest in prospective members is the high caliber of the rabbis involved.

Rabbi Brand was previously director of the Paramus Community Kollel and has volunteered for years as a learning partner in Oorah’s TorahMates program, introducing baalei teshuvah into Jewish learning. He studied at the Yeshiva Gedolah of the Five Towns and then at the Kollel of Rabbi Binyomin Forst, a well-known halachic-oriented Kollel that trains future halachic decisors in their communities.

Kollel Scholar Rabbi Gershon Dubin has taught Gemara at the high school level and served on the rabbinic staff of Beis Medrash Ohr Chaim in Monsey, where he answered halachic

lished Passaic Torah Institute Kollel. He has studied at the Talmudic Academy of Baltimore, Yeshiva Tiferet Jerusalem, Mir Yeshiva and the Kollel Zichron Yehoshua Zorach in Jerusalem.

Kollel Scholar Rabbi Yossi Volovik teaches at the Yeshiva High School of Money and offers halachic instruction for high school boys in the summers at Camp Yoreh Deah in West Virginia. He has studied at Yeshivas Mir in Jerusalem and is now studying for an advanced semicha degree with Rabbi Betzalel Rudinsky of Wesley Hills, New York, while also writing his own Halachic Sefer on the complex laws of niddah.

Kollel Scholar Rabbi Yechiel Weinberger runs Camp Piesetzna in the greater Arizona area in the summers, which attracts yeshiva bochurim from all over the East Coast for in-depth shiurim and intensive encounters with nature. He has learned at Yeshivas Brisk in Yerushalayim and at Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood. He is studying



inquiries. He studied at the Chevron Yeshiva and received semicha from Yeshivas Ohr Reuven in Suffern, New York.

Kollel Scholar Rabbi Daniel Eisenberg is the mashgiach ruchani of the SINAI program at Heichal HaTorah in Teaneck, teaches Jewish history in Bais Yaakov Machon Ora High School and offers lectures in the beis midrash of Congregation Tifereth Israel in Passaic. He is a popular speaker on YU’s Torah Online, which has posted 500 of his classes. He previously taught in the Shulamith School for Girls in Brooklyn and served as Day School Director for NCSY Queens. He received semicha from Lander College’s Bais Medrash L’Talmud and a master’s in Judaic studies from Touro College.

Kollel Scholar Rabbi Yoni Ference has offered shiurim and taught students at Aish HaTorah, Ohr Somayach and Darchei Noam in Israel. He currently learns and teaches at the newly estab-

lished Passaic Torah Institute Kollel. He has studied at the Talmudic Academy of Baltimore, Yeshiva Tiferet Jerusalem, Mir Yeshiva and the Kollel Zichron Yehoshua Zorach in Jerusalem.

The Kollel plans to add two more Kollel scholars in the next few weeks.

The Kollel has firm plans to gradually expand and engage many more corners of the community. As Rabbi Brand explained, the Kollel is developing plans for programming for women and teens, which it intends to introduce in the next few months. The Kollel also intends to roll out an interactive website, to allow community members to learn about and express interest in different ongoing learning opportunities.

Rabbi Brand shared that the vision he has for the Kollel is to have it expand widely, to involve many different participants from the MetroWest area.

For more information on the West Orange Community Kollel, email info@wotorah.org or call 973-486-2319.

