

Inaugural Class

ATID program graduates its first group of high school seniors.

Keri Guten Cohen

Story Development Editor

ATID: Alliance for Teens in Detroit completed its first year with the graduation of 47 seniors on May 18 at Hillel Day School of Metropolitan Detroit in Farmington Hills. In their graduation gowns and mortar boards — white for girls and blue for boys — the graduates received their diplomas before an audience of nearly 300 people.

This innovative Hebrew high school program combines students in grades 8-12 from four congregational synagogues — Adat Shalom in Farmington Hills and Congregations Shaarey Zedek of Oakland County and B'nai Moshe and Beth Ahm, both in West Bloomfield. Nearly 300 students met Mondays for dinner and classes at Hillel. Most core classes kept kids with their home synagogue; elective classes blended the students. Teachers included congregational rabbis, cantors and education directors as well as experts from the community.

"I like that more people came together from around the community and not just from my shul," said Leslee Klein, 18, who belongs to Shaarey Zedek. "We got to meet a lot of people and also got to know other rabbis."

Klein, who will attend University of Michigan next fall, spoke at the graduation about the memorable three-day trip the ATID juniors and seniors took to Washington, D.C., where they participated in various community service projects.

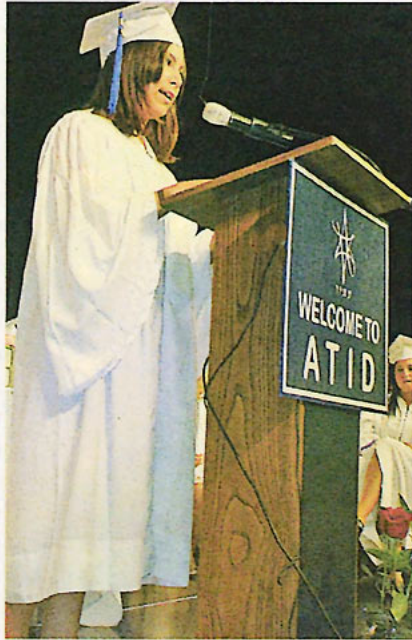
Lt. Ofir Ziv, commander of an Israeli Air Force paratroop platoon, spoke to the group of his experiences during the war in Gaza. He was in town on behalf of the local Israel Bonds office.

Popular elective classes at ATID included the Jewish Web, Jewish cooking, Yoga & Yiddishkeit, Dunk 'n Drash (Torah study and basketball) and an art class where teens made Judaica and studied text.

"Next year, we plan to offer more classes that incorporate text study integrated with the arts (music, theater, photography, etc.," said Rabbi Jason Miller, ATID director.

Miller was pleased with ATID's successful inaugural year and looks forward to growing the program next year.

"We conducted a thorough survey



Leslee Klein, 18, of Congregation Shaarey Zedek of Oakland County speaks at the ATID graduation about the school's trip to Washington, D.C.

during the final session of the program in which we polled our students about their core classes, electives, dinner menu, special programs, teachers and more," he said. "We will take a hard look at those surveys and tweak the program for next year. Throughout the year, we made several adjustments so that we are constantly improving our program."

He sees ATID as "a healthy balance between Jewish education and fostering a fun, social experience for Jewish youth." A highlight of the year was a back-to-school social program following winter break at the Jewish Community Center's Teen Center in West Bloomfield. The program included social action and tzedakah. Also, a United Synagogue Youth chapter was formed through ATID.

"I recommend everyone try ATID," Klein said. "I enjoyed it and wish I'd had it many more years."

More than half of ATID's students receive financial assistance through Federation's Alliance for Jewish Education. "Additional funds have been secured for financial assistance for the 2009-10 academic year," Miller said. "No family will be turned away for financial reasons."

Any local Jewish teen may enroll. For information, go to www.atidhs.org or contact Miller at (248) 539-5783. □

Goal: Women Rabbis

Orthodox women's yeshivah program aims to elevate spiritual leader training.

Ben Harris

Jewish Telegraphic Agency

New York

Two months ago Sara Hurwitz — then the "spiritual mentor" at Rabbi Avi Weiss' Orthodox synagogue, the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale — was given a new title: *Maharat*, a Hebrew acronym that stands for spiritual, halachic and Torah leader.

Now Weiss is trying to export that somewhat cumbersome title to the rest of the Jewish world with the launch of a yeshivah to train new maharot.

Yeshivat Maharat, as the school will be known, is expected to be up and running in September and will offer women part-time instruction in all areas of Jewish law, pastoral training and even a synagogue internship. The full course of study to become a certified maharat will take four years.

"We're training women to be rabbis," Hurwitz told the *Forward*. "What they will be called is something we're working out."

Orthodox feminist leaders, several of whom were pulling hard for Weiss to go all-out and call Hurwitz rabbi, nevertheless were pleased by the new developments.

The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance in a statement called Hurwitz's new title a "historic moment" and, in the only hint of disappointment, noted that another milestone would be reached with the ordination of Orthodox female rabbis.

Some, however, saw the clever new title as a cop-out.

"I respect anyone who believes there is a serious reason for allowing women to be rabbis, and I respect anyone who has serious reasons not to," Jonathan Mark wrote in the *Jewish Week*. "This isn't my fight."

"On the other hand, I'm having a hard time rooting for anyone who believes women should be rabbis, but who won't say it out loud, who wants to back-door it, to fake it, by calling the woman not rabbi, but *Manhigah Hilkhatit Ruhanit Toranit*, as if that will fool the traditionalists, as if that will fool the [Orthodox Union] shuls where [Yeshivat Chovevei Torah] graduates can't get hired — like changing the name of a sickly child to Alta to fool the Angel of Death."

"You have to start somewhere," Hurwitz told JTA. "We have to put one foot in front of the other and keep moving forward, and I think that the community will follow." □

Israeli Conversion Controversy

Jerusalem/JTA — Israel's Supreme Court ordered the state to fund private non-Orthodox institutions that prepare potential converts to Judaism. In addition to ordering the state to create an equal funding formula, the court mandated that the government retroactively fund the affected institutions for the past three years.

The May 19 ruling was in answer to an appeal filed by the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism, which performs Reform conversions.

Prospective converts must attend conversion classes to prepare them to go in front of the rabbinical court. The converts can be prepared by the Institute for Jewish Studies, a public institution set up by the Ne'eman Commission to teach converts from any background, and under the auspices of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption.

Other public conversion ulpan are operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. In addition, prospective converts can attend classes under the auspices of private institutions, which are operated by all streams

of Judaism.

Meanwhile, Israel's Supreme Court has ordered the High Rabbinic Court to explain why it nullified conversions by the former National Conversion Authority chief. The move to cancel hundreds of conversions overseen by special conversion courts headed by Rabbi Haim Druckman came in February 2008, when a religious court judge in Ashdod retroactively annulled the conversion of a woman that Druckman had converted 17 years ago. The annulment also affected the Jewish status of the woman's four children.

The Supreme Court's May 18 ruling came after a petition was filed by several organizations and two women whose conversions were affected, the *Jerusalem Post* reported. The petition asked the court to order Israel's rabbinic courts to recognize all conversions registered by the National Conversion Authority. The rabbinic court has 90 days to respond.

The woman and other converts in her position remain registered as Jews with the Interior Ministry, but the rabbinic court wields the power to refuse to marry them.