



## Fresh Faces

Michigan ORT recruits new members and ideas.



Above: Paula Wolfe of Bloomfield Hills, left, gets tutored by Brian Kwiatkoski of Farmington Hills and Ruth Klueger of White Lake is helped by Shaindle Braunstein. Wolfe and Klueger are members of the National Council of Jewish Women Greater Detroit Section.

Above left: Michigan Region ORT America board members, standing, Julie Marx and Andi Wolfe, both of Bloomfield Hills; and seated, Harriet Jacobson of West Bloomfield, Dr. Beverly Katz of Southfield and Arlene Barris of Bloomfield Hills.

**Ronelle Grier**  
Special to the Jewish News

**B**lending time-honored traditions with contemporary concerns can be difficult for any organization, especially one that has been around for more than a century. The Michigan Region of ORT America is meeting this challenge with fresh leadership, a newly formed advisory committee, and a restructured board that combines proven experience with youthful energy.

At the helm is Nicole Muchnick, who took over as director of ORT's Michigan Region last year. An attorney and former events planner, Muchnick began working with ORT five years ago as lead coordinator for its largest annual fundraiser, Rub-a-Dub.

New board president Brad "Bubba" Urdan, a business consultant, became involved with ORT eight years ago because its "educational mission struck a chord."

In an effort to rebuild the organization from the ground up, Muchnick and Urdan enlisted the help of Doreen Hermelin, who, along with her late husband David, were very involved with ORT. Doreen most recently served as national president.

Muchnick, Urdan and Doreen Hermelin

developed a strategy that included bringing back some of the original ORT supporters and reinvigorating the board with a new group of younger philanthropists and active volunteers. An advisory committee consisting of several past presidents, many who have served ORT on the national level, was formed to mentor the newer members.

"It was what we needed," said Urdan. "You can't go into the future if you don't know what you had in the past."

Urdan is enthusiastic about the new ORT team. He believes the new board members and advisers are the perfect complement to Muchnick.

"Nicole is unbelievable," he said. "She understands and lives the mission of ORT on a daily basis. She educates the people she works with as well as the donors."

The new board has set some ambitious goals: increasing fundraising donations by 25%, expanding participation in local programs and events, and spreading awareness about ORT's accomplishments in Metro Detroit and around the world.

Urdan recruited new board members who were willing to commit not only their names but their hands-on time as well. Most of the members have been actively involved in the Jewish community.

An example is Steven Tapper, who has participated in many charitable endeavors, both personally and through his business, Tapper's Diamonds and Fine Jewelry.

"The possibility of someone getting a better education really touches me," said Tapper, adding that his involvement with ORT has allowed him to reach out and meet a lot of new people.

The funds raised by ORT Michigan are given to ORT America, which raises money for World ORT. Fundraising is accomplished through four major annual events, plus individual donations. Approximately \$750,000 was raised in 2010, according to Urdan, who hopes to increase the amount to \$1 million this year.

Scott Marcus, Bloomfield Hills attorney and real estate developer, joined the board after serving on last year's Rub-a-Dub fundraiser committee.

"When you have an older organization, sometimes they're not receptive to new ideas and changes," said Marcus. "This board is completely different; they realize the world changes, and the organization has to change with it."

As one of the largest non-governmental educational organizations in the world, ORT has empowered more than 3 million

people through its network of 800 schools and programs in 63 countries. ORT serves men, women, teens and children representing every nationality and economic status. Students range from professionals and unskilled laborers to college graduates and high school drop-outs. The one thing they share is a desire to become productive citizens, making meaningful contributions to their families and communities.

ORT maintains its longstanding presence in Israel by pumping new energy into the country's troubled public education system, especially in some of the poorer areas with high unemployment and drop-out rates. The "Science Journey" program provides interactive whiteboards and laptop computers to students in border communities so they can enjoy the same advantages as their peers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

It is almost prophetic that an organization founded in 1880 by a small group of Russian Jews is even more relevant today than when it began. The explosion of new technology combined with the recent economic downturn, locally and worldwide, has required many people to learn different skills and acquire new proficiencies.

The local manifestation of the orga-



Above: Director of ORT Michigan Nicole Muchnick and board president Brad "Bubba" Urdan.



Right: Instructor Shaindle Braunstein helps Myrna Partrich of Bloomfield Hills with her computer questions.

nization is the David B. Hermelin ORT Resource Center, located in the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield.

Under the direction of Shaindle Braunstein, with Michelle Passon serving as advisory chairperson, a variety of computer classes are offered to anyone in need of training or retraining. The "Better Job Opportunities" (BJO) and "Spring Board for Success" programs help students of all ages learn the skills they need to compete in today's job market, including Microsoft Office, web design, and internet usage. Classes are free to those who qualify and include meals and babysitting. A partnership with Jewish Vocational Service provides assistance with resume writing, interview protocol and job placement. Individual lessons are also offered at rates far below those charged by most computer professionals.

Myrna Partrich of Bloomfield Hills has reaped many benefits from Braunstein's tutelage during the past year-and-a-half.

"I would never know how to do a thing on the computer if not for Shaindle," said Partrich, who uses

the computer to manage her online business, [www.cold-flash.com](http://www.cold-flash.com), which markets a line of cold packs for menopausal women and others.

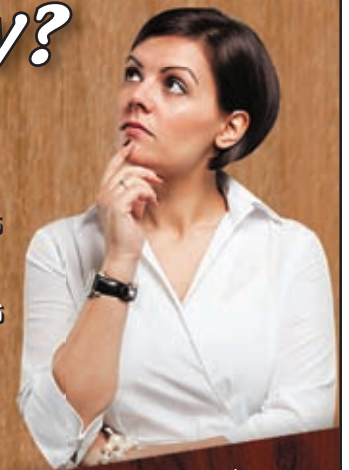
Funding for the resource center came from D. Dan and Betty Kahn, parents of past president and longtime ORT supporter Andi Wolfe, her husband Larry, and her sister, Patti Aaron. The center was named in honor of the late David Hermelin, a former president of the World ORT Union.

"This was my husband's passion," said Doreen Hermelin. "It meant so much to him. Once you give people skills, it opens up so many doors. The resource center gives a local face to what ORT does all over the world."

She is enthusiastic about the new leadership, calling Urdan "an incredibly dedicated community leader." Urdan and the other new board members feel fortunate to be able to learn from experienced volunteers such as Hermelin.

"I'm brand new and I'm thrilled," said Julie Marx of Bloomfield Hills. "I'm excited to get other young adults involved. This is such an incredible group of people, many of whom I look at as mentors." □

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