‘Community doesn’t just happen, it has to be created,’ says Federation chief

STUART MELLAN
Special to the AJP

Seventy years! My how the world has changed!

While we are always trying to keep up with these changes, we remain very much rooted in our values and our mission. Underlying our Federation’s work is the adage that “community doesn’t just happen, it has to be created,” which begs the question: “What kind of community do we want for ourselves and our next generation?”

While there are many answers, we know our Federation’s work is a series of small steps informed by this simple teaching. While the steps are small, the results can be powerful. Examples of this work, which are always the product of collaborations with our agency, synagogue, and volunteer partners, are as follows:

• We recently launched a concierge project that is representing all of our congregations and agencies — handling all newcomer and other inquiries in a warm and welcoming manner. We also launched jwistruc.org to facilitate engagement and connection to Jewish community activities of all kinds and for all ages.

• We are fulfilling a 40-year dream by expanding our Holocaust History Center, a joint project of the Jewish History Museum and our Jewish Federation. This new 2,000-square-foot space opening this month will preserve the stories of our local survivors and teach the lessons of the Shoah. We expect thousands of school children to be visiting annually — and it will transform the world view for many!

• Our Weintraub Israel Center has helped establish pen-pal relationships (using Skype and other technologies) between 300 Tucson kids in our local schools and synagogues with children in our partnership region of Israel bordering Gaza. This month 44 Tucsonans are traveling with the WIC in Israel; this past summer I had the privilege of accompanying our mayor and 24 other community leaders to Israel.

• We worked with our Greater Tucson Fire Foundation to host four top-level Israeli first responders who spent two weeks interacting with hundreds of Tucson’s first responders; and we continue to plan new opportunities to build the connection between Tucsonans and the people of Israel.

• We have expanded our Homer Davis Friday food pack program — our signature social action project in the general community — now sending nutritious foods such as canned tuna, macaroni and cheese, cereal and more home with 65 kids who otherwise might go hungry on weekends.

• Our LGBT Jewish Inclusion Project, one of the first established by a Federation over a decade ago, changed its name to JFLA Pride to coincide with the recent Supreme Court decision and in recognition of the increasing acceptance we have enjoyed since the project began.

• Our Women’s Philanthropy is continuing a project to raise awareness with regard to sex trafficking. At the WP Annual Meeting, care packages were made for distribution to survivors. Through our WP Mitzvah Magic project, in conjunction with Jewish Family & Children’s Services, we provided personalized care-packages at each of the major Jewish holidays for 25 of the most vulnerable Jewish families in Tucson.

• A community collaboration called J-TAG began this year bringing together teen leaders from the youth groups and youth programs in Tucson to plan joint social action/service learning programs and engage Jewish teens with an emphasis on reaching those not currently engaged in Jewish life. The Teen Advisory Council of our Youth Philanthropy program raised $12,000 for a local program that aims to prevent elder abuse.

• A new Moishe House Without Walls

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