

NEWS&VIEWS  OF REFORM JEWS

NOTEWORTHY

Former Reform Camper Wins Gold in Beijing:

Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute alum and former camp triathlon champion Garrett Weber-Gale won two Gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympics—in the Men's 4x100m Freestyle Relay and the Men's 4x100m Medley Relay. While training for these Olympics, he chatted with OSRUI summer campers via live video-conference about his experiences as a young swimmer and what a great place camp was for him growing up.

**Reform Couple Help Legalize Gay Civil Marriage in California:**

Diane Olson and Robin



Tyler, two of the plaintiffs in the lawsuits against the

state to legalize same-sex marriages, have since married under the *chuppah* in a ceremony officiated by Rabbi Denise Eger of Congregation Kol Ami in West Hollywood.

First Israeli Progressive Congregation Receives Government Funding:

On May 5, 2008, hundreds of people gathered—and Reform Jews proudly blew *shofarot*—to celebrate the dedication of the first government-funded non-Orthodox synagogue building in Israel—Kehilat YOZMA in Modi'in. The Israel Religious Action Center's fight on behalf of non-Orthodox Jews seeking a place to pray has resulted in the founding of six non-Orthodox synagogues throughout the State of Israel.

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Announcing that this would be the site of Dr. Ginsberg's new free clinic, she asked the doctor, "When do you think you can get started?" Pastor Overstreet assured the startled doctor, "We aren't going to take it one day at a time; we are going to take it one step at a time."

"The message reminded me of the teaching in *Pirkei Avot* that we don't have to finish the work but we can't ignore it either," Dr. Ginsberg recalls. And that's how she took on a forty-hour-a-week volunteer position running the North by Northeast Community Health Center.

Since opening its doors in August 2006, the health center has provided healthcare and medications to more than 1,800 neighborhood residents. About 100 people are helped each month, and all services are free. Dr. Ginsberg explains that more than half the patients are employed but still cannot afford healthcare; some are employed just under full-time—a common tactic to keep them from receiving insurance coverage. Others have lost their jobs. "This center won't fix the huge problem," she says, "but it can save some lives right here in our community."

Across the country, a group of volunteer doctors, nurses, interpreters, social workers, and others—about twenty people a week, most of whom are members of Congregation Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts—gather every Tuesday night to make their synagogue "a real place of healing." For the last three years, the congregation's MetroWest Free Medical Program has assisted thirty to fifty uninsured or underinsured individuals each week, the brainchild of Dr. Paul Hart (photo #5), a congregant and local medical provider. "Nothing gives me more pleasure," says Rabbi David Thomas, "than using our sanctuary for our medical program—the same space we celebrate our baby namings, b'nai mitzvot, and weddings, and say goodbye to loved ones. It is truly a holy place."

Rabbi Thomas recognizes that MetroWest serves as "a stop-gap solution" for those who need and cannot afford medical attention. "The program's ultimate goal," he says, "is to put itself out of business. And the only way to do that is to match our direct-service work with advocacy. Our program has given us a moral mandate to ask the people in power to partner with us to address the healthcare crisis in a more systematic way."

To this end, Sudbury's Congregation Beth El has adopted the advocacy tools of Congregation Based Community Organizing (CBCO), whose vision, says the Union's Just Congregations director Rabbi Jonah Pesner, is to "enable synagogues to engage in internal conversations on questions of justice and then work with like-minded people across cultural, racial, class, and religious lines."

Congregation Beth El did just that, joining with local and regional congregations to advocate for both the expansion of the state's existing healthcare and universal healthcare, a campaign spearheaded by Temple Israel in Boston.

Temple Israel in Boston took up this and other healthcare causes in 2006, when the Federal Medicaid funding waiver, which provides access to affordable health services to seniors and other vulnerable communities, was scheduled to expire. The congregation joined the ACT Coalition (Affordable Care Today) and helped lead the campaign to pressure the state government not only to extend but also to expand the waiver's coverage. "We called legislators, wrote letters, and participated in rallies," says Cindy Rowe (photo #6), co-chair of Temple Israel's Social Action Committee. Members also collected 5,000 signatures to get "Chapter 58," the first statewide program providing Universal Health Care coverage, on the state ballot. "We coordinated the petition push with the High Holidays," Rowe explains. "Our clergy spoke from the *bimah* about how Jewish tradition

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