

NEWS&VIEWS  OF REFORM JEWS

## NOTEWORTHY

**New URJ Sports Camp**

**Opens Next Summer:** On June 22, 2010, the URJ camp 6 Points Sports Academy



BASKETBALL AT GOLDMAN UNION CAMP INSTITUTE, 2007.

will open on the American Hebrew Academy's 115-acre campus (with a 22-acre lakefront) in Greensboro, North Carolina. At this new Jewish camp (made possible by the Jim Joseph Foundation and the Foundation for Jewish Camp), a team of elite college-level athletes and coaches will offer young people two weeks of specialized athletic training at AHA's state-of-the-art sports facility; in addition, they'll experience the best elements of traditional Jewish summer camp. To learn more about the camp, visit [www.urjcamps.org](http://www.urjcamps.org). To find out about enrollment and available staff positions, contact Camp Director Randy Colman at [rcolman@urj.org](mailto:rcolman@urj.org), (212) 650-4070.

**Cantor Campership**

**Concerts:** Recognizing that children who attend a Jewish camp are more than twice as likely as other Jews to maintain their Jewish identity and to join synagogues in adulthood (2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey), the American Conference of Cantors (ACC) and the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) have established an ACC Campership Fund which offers children in Reform congregations scholarships towards attendance at URJ summer camps. To raise the funds, ACC mem-



SWIMMING AT OLINSANG-RUBY UNION INSTITUTE'S NEW AQUATIC CENTER.

**ACTION** *continued from page 59*

Winters, the congregation's vice president of education, says, "may be key to one student's success."

"Jews with disabilities are not invisible anymore," emphasizes Becca Hornstein (**photo #4**), a consultant on disability and family-related issues and executive director of the Council for Jews with Special Needs. Twenty-six years ago, she began searching for religious education for her nine-year-old son who has autism and was told, "We're not aware of Jews with disabilities." At the time, the fledging special education program she soon helped launch at Temple Chai, Phoenix, Arizona (<http://www.templechai.com/>) instructed four students; today, 12% of the congregation's religious school children have a special need, and the temple is there to help.

Still, Hornstein acknowledges that religious schools remain challenged to find appropriate resources.

**Inclusion Ideas**

To make the most of the bar/bat mitzvah experience, Hornstein notes that "people with disabilities have unique gifts which should be reflected in the ceremony. Ask yourself: *How best can this person's talents and feelings about Judaism be expressed? Does he or she have a particular love for music or dance? Can he/she paint an interpretation of the Torah portion?* We should celebrate the unique strengths these children possess."

She also advises parents to be patient, stressing that even the smallest religious school program can grow, particularly if the educators are willing to make individualized modifications for the students' benefit. For example, she says, nonverbal students have used voice-output devices to deliver a *d'var Torah* at their bar or bat mitzvah.

"If your child reaches thirteen, you have a bar or bat mitzvah," says Rabbi Shira Joseph, spiritual leader of Congregation Sha'aray Shalom in Hingham, Massachusetts

(<http://www.shaaray.org/>) and mother of a daughter with special needs. She recommends that parents and educators "create a celebration that is meaningful and within the skill level of the child." One nonverbal youngster in her congregation who uses a wheelchair wore a *tallit* his loved ones had made for him; held a small Torah scroll; and, once it was opened, also held the *yad* as a family member read the *parashah*.

Shelly Christensen, program manager at the Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities of Minneapolis, chair of the Union for Reform Judaism's Disabilities Task Force, and author of the *Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities*, encourages synagogue leaders to be proactive in offering inclusion opportunities to families. She tells of one rabbi who called the family of an eleven-year-old child who has autism to schedule the date for his bar mitzvah. Often in families with special needs there is anger with God, she says, and it is up to the clergy to keep the doors open and show that the synagogue can be supportive in many ways.

Hornstein and Shelley K. Rosenberg tell the story of another rabbi, aware that the bar mitzvah boy might wander throughout the sanctuary, who explained to the congregation that the entire room was the *bimah* that day. "The ultimate success of such a [welcoming] ceremony is a triumph, not only for the individuals involved, but for the entire Jewish community," they write. "The bar or bat mitzvah of a young person with a disability demonstrates vividly what Judaism is, or should be, about."

To engage children with special needs in temple services, Hornstein points to the Simchat Shabbat model at Congregation Beth Israel, Scottsdale, Arizona (<http://www.charityadvantage.com/cjsnorg/SimchatShabbat.asp>), a collaborative endeavor with the Council for Jews with Special Needs. The forty-minute service includes music and stories to engage even children with the most severe cognitive impairment; each young person stands (or sits in a wheel-