



summertime on Jewish time

by Julie Schonfeld, RA executive vice president

With the approach of summer, I am delighted to direct your attention to the launching of an important new venture: the Rabbinical Assembly–Camp Ramah Partnership.

This new collaboration seeks to take one of the most successful institutions in contemporary Jewish life to a new level of excellence through the worldwide influence of the Conservative rabbinate.

The summer of 2010 marks the 64th season of the phenomenon known as Camp Ramah. The longevity of the Ramah Camping Movement has hardly gone unnoticed; indeed, in the past two years, the movement has attracted a staggering \$20 million in funding from such sources as the AVI CHAI Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, the Grinspoon Institute for Jewish Philanthropy, the Jim Joseph Foundation, the Foundation for Jewish Camp, the Legacy Heritage Fund, and numerous private donors. New partnerships have been forged with educational institutions, including the Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education at JTS.

The reason for this outpouring of support? Numerous studies confirm the Jewish summer camp experience as one of the most potent transmitters of Jewish identity and Ramah as one of the most successful Jewish camping models.

While summer can sometimes be a quieter time for Jewish institutions, giving way to preparation for the Yamim Nora'im, and the activities of the new year, Camp Ramah teaches us that summer time is a precious opportunity to share with our people what it means to put our lives on “Jewish time.” Camp Ramah’s

model of infusing every aspect of “regular life” at camp with holiness, whether it be tefillot in an exquisite setting or bringing Jewish values to the intense relationships of camp bunks, has had a transformative impact on tens of thousands of Jews. There is no disputing the fact that Ramah alumni number not only many of the leaders in Jewish communal life, but are also *dugmaot* of yiddishkeit throughout our communities.

During the past six-plus decades, hundreds of thousands of Jewish children and teens have been molded and enriched by Camp Ramah. Last year alone, more than 9,000 children and teens attended Ramah camps in North America and nearly 400 took part in Ramah Israel programs. With seven overnight camps and three day camps in North America, a variety of award-winning Israel programs and an exciting outdoor adventure specialty camp in the Colorado Rockies being inaugurated this summer—Ramah Outdoor Adventure—Camp Ramah is one of the most vibrant products of contemporary Conservative Judaism.

It is surprising to note that this record of outstanding success was achieved with only SEVEN PERCENT of camping-age children of the Conservative Movement attending Ramah camps.

But imagine, if you will, what is possible if we aim for even a modest increase in numbers, to, say, ten percent. Or let us aim to double the current percentage so that fifteen percent of our children and young people attend a Ramah camp.

This is where the Rabbinical Assembly–Camp Ramah Partnership comes in—this is an achievable goal. It is one of the many achievable goals that is well within the grasp of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Conservative Movement and which could have exponential impact on the future of the Jewish community.

In addition to this longer-term goal, the

Rabbinical Assembly can play an important role this summer in ensuring that every spot in a Ramah camp is filled. While Ramah enrollments continue to be outstanding despite the economic downturn, we do see camps that are currently anticipating enrollments at 90-95% of capacity. Each Ramah spot that goes unfilled is a place in Jewish leadership for the next generation that may be unrealized. In fact, this year there are more scholarships and financial incentives for families than ever before that will help get kids to camp. In particular, with the support of the Foundation for Jewish Camp, every first-time participant in Jewish overnight camping who attends Ramah will receive a \$1,000 campership incentive award!

Over the coming weeks, you will receive information from the National Ramah Commission of The Jewish Theological Seminary to help you in your efforts to promote Camp Ramah in your communities. Our colleagues have been some of the most effective catalysts for transforming Jewish lives and families by directing them towards Ramah. Through this partnership, we seek to utilize the networks and the collective wisdom and experience of the Rabbinical Assembly to do this even more effectively.

Every day, our work as Conservative rabbis builds the foundation for the next generation of Jews. Our efforts support the raising of young people whose unique outlook—their appreciation of tradition and their open-minded embrace of the complexity of their world—will allow them to bring forth the generation to follow them. Camp Ramah is one of our most effective and successful tools for realizing these goals.

We’re excited at the myriad possibilities that this partnership represents. I encourage you to visit Ramah online at www.campramah.org to learn more. Please be in touch with me or with Rabbi Mitch Cohen, National Ramah Director, (mcohen@jtsa.edu) to share your ideas as to how we can work together to make the Ramah Camping Movement, in which we all take such great pride, even better.