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New organization looks to expand Jewish community

PHOTO

By Ian Thompson | DAILY REPUBLIC | January 04, 2010 14:50

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Rabbi Chaim Zaklos, who is starting the Chabad of Solano County, stands next to a portrait of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, at his Vacaville home. Zaklos and his wife, Aidel, hope the Chabad will help bring the Jewish community of Solano County together. Photo by Brad Zwerink

VACAVILLE - Vacaville does have a Jewish community.

It's just that many of Vacaville's Jewish residents didn't realize it until Rabbi Chaim Zaklos hosted the town's first menorah lighting Dec. 13.

At the lighting, one woman told Zaklos she had lived in Vacaville for 30 years and had not taken part in celebrations of the Jewish faith for the past 25 years until then.

'People were surprised that there were so many here,' Chaim Zaklos said. 'That really brought so many Jewish people together.'

Chaim Zaklos and his wife, Aidel Zaklos, are now building on that to bring Solano County's Jewish community even closer together by establishing the Chabad of Solano County.

The Chabad offers high holiday services, educational classes and social gatherings, all aimed at invigorating Judaism here by teaching about Jewish beliefs and

traditions.

'One of our main goals is to bring Judaism alive,' Chaim Zaklos said.

The couple had been laying the groundwork for establishing the Chabad since February, making visits and meeting one-on-one with Jewish residents, Aidel Zaklos said.

'We felt this was where we were needed the most,' Aidel Zaklos said.

Chabad is a Hebrew acronym for the words chachma (wisdom), binah (comprehension) and da'at (knowledge). The Chabad-Lubavitch movement is a branch of Hasidism that was born 250 years ago in Russia and has spread ever since, according to Chabad of Solano's Web site.

Today's organization can be traced to the early 1940s when Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson was picked to head the educational and social service part of the movement.

Schneerson, known as the Rebbe, expanded the movement to enlist 4,000 emissary families who have since opened more than 4,000 centers around the world, making it the largest Jewish organization in the world.

Chaim Zaklos described Schneerson as the most revered Jewish leader of the last century who dedicated his life to rebuilding Jewish life after the Holocaust and who had 'a dream of making the world a brighter, more gentle place.'

'He had a real effect on us,' Chaim Zaklos said.

Early in the fall, the Chabad of Solano County became the newest of these centers to spread what Zaklos says is the warmth of Judaism throughout the area.

Chaim Zaklos was born and raised in Detroit, studied in New York, Israel and Montreal, and received his rabbinical ordination from the Central Chabad Yeshiva.

He has traveled to Ukraine, Estonia and Croatia as well as leading services, seminars and outreach in a half dozen locations around the U.S. before coming to Vacaville.

Chaim Zaklos came to Vacaville to start a Jewish center after the Chabad offered him the task.

'They saw that there was an opportunity here,' Chaim Zaklos said.

Chabads have been successful because each one is responsive to the needs of the local Jewish community.

'We are locally funded and that makes us very in tune with the needs of the community,' Aidel Zaklos said.

The Chabad is organized in a way that Jewish people of all levels of observance can take part in a way that is not intimidating, Chaim Zaklos said.

'We don't believe in labels,' Aidel Zaklos said. 'We are one Jewish people. We don't turn people away. We welcome

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The couple's long-range plans are 'to be there to serve the community for whatever they need to explore their heritage,' Chaim Zaklos said..

These include:

1. To celebrate a community Shabbat, which is usually celebrated at home, with a community event.
2. To host a holocaust education event with plans to bring one of the youngest survivors of Schindler's list to speak.
3. To hold high holiday services and programs such as Purim in February.
4. To offer adult education classes such as the basics of Judaism, courses in Hebrew, and, in the long run, start a Hebrew school for children.
5. To offer a Jewish women's programs.

The Zakloses said they have been pleasantly surprised with the reception the Chabad of Solano has gotten in Vacaville.

'The response has been amazing,' Chaim Zaklos said.

Helen Freibrun, who moved here from New York a year ago, called the menorah ceremony 'absolutely beautiful.'

The Chabad fills a very necessary role in Vacaville, she said, giving Jewish residents a place to come together.

'When I came here, my daughter thought there were no Jews here,' Freibrun said.

Kelly Fine had been going to a Chabad in Pleasanton before the Zakloses arrived.

'My daughter had written a letter asking what it would take to get one in Vacaville,' Fine said. 'We were really excited when one was started here.'

With the Chabad's establishment, Fine has become more involved with the emerging Jewish community.

'I really like it. (Chaim and Aidel Zaklos) have such a depth of knowledge. They are very warm and welcoming,' Fine said.

For more information about the Chabad of Solano County go online to <http://www.JewishSolano.com> or e-mail Rabbi Zaklos at rabbi@jewishsolano.com.

Reach Ian Thompson at 427-6976 or at ithompson@dailyrepublic.net.

S K writes on January 6, 2010 at 08:40:59

A very interesting story. Being a first generation American from Parents that survived and immigrated from Nazi Germany, my Dad being a survivor of both Dachau and Buchenwald Concentration camps, my Catholic raised Wife has often said that I ought to learn about by roots, because sadly when someone, like our Son asks me about a Jewish Holiday, I haven't any idea about most of them, except maybe the majors>LOL. However, I wonder if someone, like me of Jewish descent would be welcome, because I am one who has for many many years accepted that Jesus is/was truly the Messiah that most of the PPL of Jewish faith are still waiting for, when he was there right in front of their eyes, actually doing/living the prophesies of the old testament.

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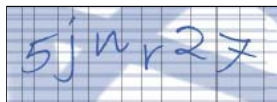
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