

State & Local

Local women add names to petition seeking relief for wives in legal limbo

by Johanna Ginsberg
NJJN Staff Writer

More than 260 New Jersey residents added their names to a petition seeking solutions to the problem of *agunot*, or Jewish women who remain in legal limbo because their husbands will not grant them a divorce.

The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance organized the petition, which appeared as a six-page ad in the New York *Jewish Week* March 1.

It calls on the Orthodox rabbinic and lay leadership to issue clear guidelines on divorce. JOFA officials and others say the current procedures are often clandestine and arbitrary, allowing recalcitrant husbands to extort their

field.

Like many others who signed the petition, Freeman did not attend the annual JOFA conference last month — where the petition began to circulate — nor is she a member of JOFA.

Freeman is a member of Congregation Anshe Chesed, an Orthodox synagogue in Linden, and a teacher at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Essex and Union in West Orange.

She was forwarded the petition via e-mail. "I always feel I am not doing enough *tzedaka*," she said. "Here, with one click, I can do something."

Signatures were gathered between the annual conference Feb. 11 and closed before last Thursday's Fast of Esther, preceding Purim.

"We have been advertising nonstop in different cities to get people riled up," said JOFA president Carol Kaufman Newman.

Particularly disheartening, she said, was the cancellation of an international rabbinic conference convened by Israel's chief rabbinate, scheduled last fall in Jerusalem, focusing on the plight of the *aguna* — literally, a "chained wife."

"We have a written tradition of Torah, but there is also an oral tradition. It's not right that we should be muzzled today," she said. "People are realizing that perhaps we can't come up with a solution, but at least we should try."

The goal of the petition, according to Newman, is to raise awareness of the issue and to get rabbis to take action. While she said JOFA was planning further action on the *aguna* issue over the next few weeks, she declined to offer details.

"I hope we will not have to take out ads anymore," she said. "I hope this will be a dead issue by next year."

"This is an issue that needs attention," said Ayala Zoltan Rockoff of West Orange, who signed the petition. "I hope it will achieve more awareness and that it will result in renewed vigor on the part of leaders and rabbis to help *agunot* as much as possible." ■

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Elisa Spungen Bildner, back row, second from left, advises Teen Tzedeka Program members to pool their resources for more effective giving. Photo courtesy Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life

Montclair philanthropist urges teens to pool their own charitable giving

by Robert Wiener
NJJN Staff Writer

Montclair philanthropist Elisa Spungen Bildner urged a group of Jewish teenagers to pool their resources to solve problems inside the Jewish community.

Speaking at a local program that trains teens in the ways of philanthropic giving, Spungen Bildner drew on lessons she learned after she and her husband, Robert,

founded the Foundation for Jewish Camping in 1998 and turned their own charitable giving from "helter-skelter" to a "more focused approach."

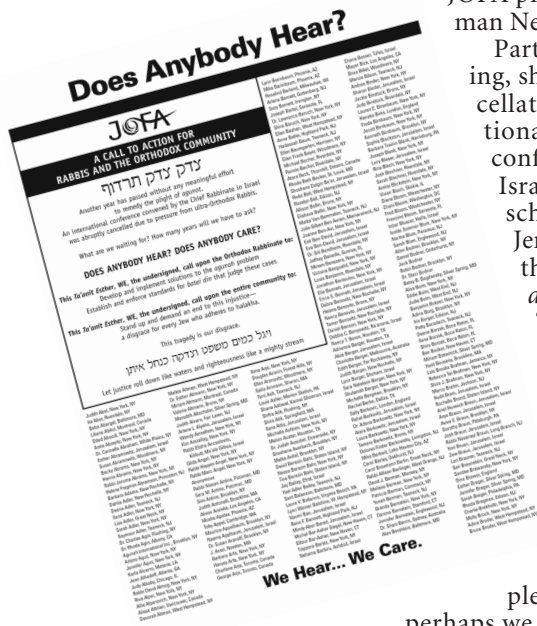
"I said to these kids, 'When you pick an area, one way to be successful is to find other people to partner with.' The kids in this group are pooling their money to increase their impact on whatever groups they choose to give it to," she said.

The teens were part of the Iris Teen Tzedeka Program, which is

sponsored jointly by JCC MetroWest, the Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life of MetroWest, and the Jewish Community Foundation of MetroWest.

Each teenager in the program must donate \$200 of his or her own money to a pool of funds, which is then matched by the Herb Iris Youth and Family Philanthropy Endowment. The teens then allocate the funds to agencies supported by United Jewish Commu-

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A petition on "chained wives" bears 2,000 names.

wives or to wring out concessions concerning child custody and other matters.

Under Jewish law, a women may not remarry until her husband issues a *get*, or writ of divorce.

"Does Anybody Hear? Does Anybody Care?" the petition asks. "What are we waiting for? How many years will we have to wait?"

The advertisement carried 2,000 names, far more than the 600 the first such ad carried when it was published by JOFA in 2005.

"I'm so thrilled to do this. I hope it will call attention to this issue and that something will come of it. It's been on the radar, it seems, for a very long time," said signatory Jane Freeman of West-

Jewish communities driven to find marrow match for leukemia sufferer

by Debra Rubin
NJJN Bureau Chief/Middlesex

Jewish communities in three states are rallying to help a Morristown man — a former longtime East Brunswick resident — in desperate need of a bone marrow transplant.

Alan Rubinfeld was diagnosed with AML, an acute form of leukemia, in June. Although five cycles of chemotherapy initially sent the disease into remission, the 61-year-old has relapsed and is now in Morristown Memorial Hospital for another month of treatments in the hope of again pushing the leukemia into remission.

However, his only real hope is to find a compatible bone marrow donor.

"It is a very aggressive form of leukemia," said his daughter, Lauren. "We have been told that even if he goes into remission with this round of chemo, he would not stay in remission."

To help Rubinfeld with the difficult task of finding a matching donor, bone marrow drives have been organized at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick, where Rubinfeld has been a member for about 30 years, at Morristown Jewish Center Beit Yisrael, and in Connecticut and Manhattan.

"If he doesn't get the transplant, the prognosis is not good," said Lauren, 26, a third-grade teacher in the South Bronx. "The doctors aren't very specific. But they do say



Alan Rubinfeld of Morristown, formerly of East Brunswick and a member of Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick, needs a bone marrow transplant to save his life.

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