

PlanitJewish Launches Interactive Calendar

By Susan Jacobs, Associate Editor

Beginning Monday, members of the Jewish community will have a new online tool to find out about local events and organizations. That's when the United Jewish Federation will launch the Pittsburgh Jewish Community Calendar, powered by PlanitJewish, a non-profit organization that already hosts online calendars in San Francisco, Baltimore and Houston. The calendar can be accessed through the federation's Web site, www.UJFpittsburgh.org.

More than just a calendar, those involved in launching the site are calling it a portal to Jewish Pittsburgh. "It helps bring the community together," said Evan Indianer, chair of the UJF committee overseeing the site, "and allows agencies, synagogues and organizations to promote their events in a non-threatening way, as well as enabling people to plan their Jewish involvement by bringing to one location all the activities of the Jewish community." The Web site is free to users, and local organizations have already been invited to post events and other information.

Indianer said the calendar committee looked at several options before deciding to work with PlanitJewish, but the decision was an obvious one. The non-profit organization offered a product that was structured to serve the Jewish community and offered many functions that would be expensive to create in a new program. The UJF will spend approximately \$5,000 for its first year of service with PlanitJewish. Most of the startup costs were covered by a grant which PlanitJewish applied to the UJF, and the rest of the cost will be covered through the UJF's existing marketing budget. "We could not come close to providing the functionality if we were doing it ourselves," he said.

Planit Jewish allows users to sign up online for programs and helps organizations connect directly to current and potential members. Most important, the calendar provides a venue to present all activities of the Jewish community in one place. In the past, volunteer Chelle Rosenfeld kept a community calendar, which helped organizations avoid schedule conflicts with one another. They could reserve a date with Rosenfeld, but the calendar was not available in a public way. "It's important for the community to recognize how Chelle did this," said Indianer. The new calendar will not prevent organizations from booking events at the same time, but will make them aware of potential conflicts. "We're asking organizations to work together," he said.

The calendar grew out of suggestions from the marketing division of the Agency Operations Committee, which brings together marketing professionals from the UJF's 11 beneficiary agencies. In meetings over the last two years, marketing professionals discussed ways of sharing information and resources, and a shared calendar was a top priority. "It enables the community to have full access to everything going on in Jewish Pittsburgh at any given time," said Jessica Smith, UJF internet marketing and communications manager. "It adds another level of community and opportunity for community members to get involved." The project also allows community organizations to get the attention of community members in a venue that is technologically advanced and easy to use. "It's a tremendous conduit to the non-traditional user," said Brian Schreiber, president and CEO of the Jewish Community Center.

PlanitJewish launched its first online Jewish community calendar for the San Francisco Bay Area in 2002, and plans to continue adding communities to its roster. All of the calendars may be accessed through www.PlanitJewish.com. In the cities where PlanitJewish has been active for some time, organizations are reporting increased attendance at events and more volunteers identified, said Howard Brown, co-founder and president of PlanitJewish. "People have connected," said Brown. He and Steve Kaufman, the co-founder and chairman, first began discussing the idea of an online Jewish community calendar five years ago. "There was a need always," he said. "No one had figured out how to do it." The two men worked for a year to create the architecture and software for the calendar and then applied it to a region that includes three Jewish federations in the Bay Area. Both men are involved in other Internet businesses, and did this project as a service to the community. "We said we're going to do something good for the Jews," Brown said.

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Want to see it? The new calendar can be accessed by going to www.UJFpittsburgh.org and clicking on The Pittsburgh Jewish Community Calendar. For more information please email planitjewish@UJFpittsburgh.org or call Jessica Smith at (412) 992-5247.