

BBYO teens gather for convention in Atlanta

Compiled by CJN Staff

Atlanta hosted more than 1,100 visitors from multiple countries Feb. 16 to 20 for the largest-ever international convention of BBYO, one of the world's major Jewish youth groups.

Teen delegations represented Jewish communities in Argentina, Bulgaria, Canada, Curacao, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Macedonia, Serbia, South Africa, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States.

For 80 years, this convention has brought together leaders of BBYO's AZA and BBG, to plan for the coming year, determine strategies for strengthening BBYO as a youth-led movement and connect teens to the worldwide Jewish community.

At the convention, Benji Fages, 16, a Grade 11 student at the Anne and Max Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto, was elected to BBYO's 2012-2013 international board. As grand aleph shaliach (vice-president for Jewish heritage), Fages will serve as a resource, adviser and sounding board for his counterparts across the system, while focusing on enhancing the Judaic content in programs in every community.

"I want to stress the importance of



Sixteen Toronto-area delegates were among 900 teens from 13 countries attending the 86th international convention of BBYO in Atlanta, Ga., last month.

having a united global Jewish community," Fages said. "The strength of the Jewish teen community is vast, and by focusing on what beliefs and interests we share, we can take strides towards becoming more socially responsible while building our Jewish identity and love of Israel. BBYO has helped nurture within me a responsibility to assist in creating a united, socially responsible and Judically connected future."

In addition to the nearly 900 teens in attendance, 16 of them from the Toronto area, the convention also brought together BBYO professionals, members of the board of directors and volunteer advisers.

With the convention theme Our Tomorrow Starts Today, participants focused on what they can do, as representatives of a movement of more than 31,000 teens, to make an immediate difference in the world.

The weekend was headlined by a Day of Service and Advocacy, during which the teens dispersed throughout Atlanta to 18 service-learning sites. One track included the first all-teen audience premiere and a question-and-answer session with Lee Hirsch, director of *The Bully Project*, a new feature-length documentary that follows "a year in the life" of America's bullying crisis.

Another track, focusing on pro-Israel advocacy, was held at Emory University Hillel in partnership with leadership development staff from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), with guest speakers including the Vanguard Group, an African-American young professionals and graduate student pro-Israel advocacy network from Atlanta, as well as members of AIPAC's board of directors and congressional staff.

Other service sites included media and advocacy training at CNN and Fox News; an urban expansion study, discussion and cleanup hike with the Atlanta Beltline Project; and the creation of a new panel for the AIDS Memorial Quilt Names Project.

For more information about BBYO in the Toronto area, contact Kevin Goodman, executive director, at 416-398-2004 or kgoodman@bbyo.ca.

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