



A MITZVAH IN NOLA!

United Synagogue Youth Hosts International Convention in New Orleans
December 22-26, 2013

Hundreds of Jewish Teens Spend Holiday Week Doing Good Works

Highlights include presentations by USY Alum Andy Fickman, Jessica Abo
Media Stars Give High Praise to USY; Credit it with their Success

2013 Convention Celebrates Changemakers

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New York, NY (December 12, 2013) - While hundreds of thousands of American teens head for the slopes and seashore this winter holiday break, a committed coterie of Conservative Jewish high school students will make their way to New Orleans to spend several days rebuilding, reflecting and rejoicing at United Synagogue Youth's International Convention.

The theme of the annual USY gathering, which will take place December 22-26, is *Tikun Olam*, literally meaning "Repairing the World." Over the course of five days, nearly 700 USYers will engage in a variety of projects, meet with local community leaders, study, celebrate, tour and meet with A-list USY alum who have served as changemaker role models, professionally and beyond.

Eight years after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, the leadership of USY was unsettled by the fact that rebuilding of New Orleans was still not complete, said Rabbi Dave Levy, director of teen learning for United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the parent organization for USY.

“IC is about making inspiring teens to make a quantifiable, positive change within the world,” said Rabbi Levy. “Last year, our rally against gun violence at the IC in Boston could not be more timely. This year, we wanted a chance to use our hands to quite literally shape a better world. In addition, the energy, electricity and excitement of New Orleans is an irresistible lure. This year’s IC will be especially memorable because our theme – Repairing the World – will come to life.”

At the NOLA convention, the teens will have an opportunity to be inspired by two USY alum whose lives have been dedicated to bringing about significant change. Hollywood director and executive Andy Fickman is receiving the USY Alumni of the Year award; NY1 News reporter and social entrepreneur Jessica Abo will deliver the keynote address during the Abraham Joshua Heschel Honor Society inductions.

As an award-winning director, writer, and producer, Fickman was named one of the “DIRECTORS TO WATCH” by *Daily VARIETY* and *FADE-IN MAGAZINE* listed him as one of the “100 PEOPLE IN HOLLYWOOD YOU NEED TO KNOW.” Fickman started his journey in Kadima and USY at Beth Am Synagogue in Houston, Texas. He held numerous USY leadership positions, including serving as a regional vice president for the SWUSY (Southwest USY) region. His USY experience helped set the stage for a career in the entertainment industry. Without the leadership training and people skills garnered by his time in USY, Fickman never would have achieved all that he has achieved within his career, he said.

A glamorous powerhouse for good causes, actor and award-winning broadcast journalist whose career is wide-ranging, New York’s Jessica Abo also came up through the USY ranks. A self-described “Journalist by day. Social entrepreneur by night” Abo has singlehandedly planned and executed fundraisers for a variety of important social causes. Currently, she is supporting and promoting the Gift of Life Bone Marrow Foundation.

“When I was in high school, the highlight of my year was attending USY’s International Convention,” she said. “I loved spending time with my region, seeing my friends from USY on Wheels and USY Israel Pilgrimage/Poland Seminar and meeting people from all over North America. I feel honored to be joining everyone in New Orleans this December as the Abraham Joshua Heschel Honors Society keynote speaker. I look forward to addressing this year’s attendees and finding ways we can change the world together.”

A schedule of events at **USY’s International Convention in New Orleans** are available upon request. Members of the press are invited to attend **USY’s International Convention in New Orleans** but must RSVP and receive security clearance.

To request interviews with any members of United Synagogue Youth or the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, or for any questions pertaining to this event, please contact Shira Dicker at shira.dicker@sd-media.com or 917.403.3989, Andrea Glick at aglick@uscj.org or 347.564.7228, or Matthew Halpern at halpern@uscj.org or 908.896.2024.

About United Synagogue Youth

USY is the high school affiliate of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the association of Conservative synagogues, representing more two million Conservative Jews throughout North America. USY is comprised of 17 regions with over 350 local chapters. Along with its pre-teen affiliate, it includes 20,000 members throughout the United States and Canada. Learn more about USY at www.usy.org.

About United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism is a community of nearly 630 North American and another 200 worldwide kehillot – sacred communities – committed to a dynamic Judaism that is learned and passionate, authentic and pluralistic, joyful and accessible, egalitarian or traditional.

Our kehillot create the conditions for a powerful and vibrant Jewish life, empowering Jews in North America to seek the presence of God, to seek meaning and purpose in Torah and mitzvot, to fully engage with Israel, and to be inspired by Judaism to improve the world and the Jewish people.

It serves over 200,000 households, representing more than one million people. More information is available at www.uscj.org.