

# DOROT Generations

## Reflections on Westchester Chess

Almost every Wednesday afternoon during the school year, Marian E. drives nearly 40 minutes from her New Rochelle home to the Solomon Schechter School of Westchester's Hartsdale campus to play chess. She has only been playing the game since DOROT Westchester launched its chess program at the school last fall, and she loves it. An expansion of DOROT's popular Manhattan-based chess program, the weekly sessions at Schechter Westchester bring teens and seniors together over chessboards. The Manhattan program was started and funded by Josh and Kim Targoff after their son, Zachary, and senior Herman Bomze, were matched through DOROT. What started as a chess partnership grew into a close relationship between the family and Mr. Bomze. The Westchester

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*Tech tutoring at the Riverdale Y*

## New Teen Internship Launched

DOROT's Summer Teen Internship is the highlight of the year for many older adults, teens, and DOROT staff. Since 2001, teen interns have brought energy and enthusiasm into our building for eight weeks out of the summer, touching the lives of seniors as well as affecting their fellow interns. Through a targeted grant, DOROT adapted its successful Manhattan Jewish Summer Teen Internship Program for a pilot program with The Riverdale Y Senior Center. This new community partnership opened the door for 11 teens to enhance the lives of 70 older adults in Riverdale.

Throughout the course of just three weeks, the teens helped seniors with technology tutoring, facilitated virtual reality experiences, and led teleconference classes on the history of Jewish life in the Bronx. Together,

they took Israeli dance classes, engaged in brain games, and had passionate discussions about current events. With the help of the nonprofit Old School Films, the teens set out to learn the craft of documentary-making. The interns learned the fundamentals of film production and how to interview seniors on camera, and then created six final short documentaries. Some were informational, such as an overview of the Teen Internship Program. Others focused on meaningful moments in the seniors' lives, with topics including immigrating to Africa to escape the Holocaust and working in the burgeoning New York City fashion industry. Through all of the shared activities and experiences, the interns learned that the generation gap isn't as large as it sometimes appears to be.

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## Summer of Success

Dear Friends,

Each year, the summer months usher in a vigorous wave of spirit to DOROT. Our combination of innovative programming, commitment to excellence, and partnership across generations creates an almost palpable energy in the building. Without a doubt, our onsite programming, which includes wellness classes and gatherings for older adults, combined with our teen and college interns and volunteers, contributed tremendously to our summer energy. For two months, 60 interns volunteered their time with us. We were pleased to bring back both of our Manhattan internships, and thrilled to introduce a third program at The Riverdale Y.

The 40 Manhattan interns touched the lives of over 120 older adults this summer. Interns visited and shopped for the homebound, read to the visually-impaired, and taught computer skills. They cooked kosher dinners at DOROT and shared the meals with the seniors once a week in the seniors' homes. Interns and seniors participated in an on-site discussion group which met weekly for four sessions, exploring current issues such as immigration and drug reform through a Jewish lens. The Riverdale interns were also busy, as you can read in our front page article.

At DOROT, these activities are so much more than summer programs. They are friendships and life lessons. They are the best part of someone's day. They are connections that make a difference. A DOROT senior left us this voicemail after a regular visit with three of the teen interns: "I just felt that I had to get back to tell you what a splendid visit I just had with the young wonderful people that you sent. Honestly they were a sheer delight. Tears came to my eyes when I heard them talk. They were just lovely." I am proud of our outstanding staff and commitment to excellence. Our distinguished and nationally-recognized intergenerational programming is the backbone of our mission, the drive behind our work, and the reason we receive voicemails like the one above.

Another point of pride in our internship programs became clear to us this summer: appreciation of diversity. This internship introduces people from all religions, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds to each other, creating unique and valuable connections. DOROT is committed to bringing people together, broadening their horizons, and opening their hearts. We know that this meaningful engagement across differences further strengthens the bonds between us.

To quote Renée Adler Ascher, past Board President, "DOROT adds years to life and life to years." In this issue of Generations, it is my pleasure to share stories and pictures that exemplify this message. While the summer may be over, we plan to bring the energy from our interns and volunteers into the new year. I look forward to sharing with you where that energy carries us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark L. Meridy". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Mark L. Meridy

## New Teen Internship *continued from page 1*

In the words of one teen participant, “Though I may be generations younger, I can still find a friend in a senior.”

While participants bonded, they shared life stories, laughs, and lunch every day. The older adults and teens often became so engrossed in lunchtime conversations with each other that the staff had to strongly remind them to go to their next program. On one occasion, the seniors and teens were found doing the Macarena together. “This internship exceeded every possible expectation I had,” a teen participant shared. “The other interns made it an incredibly comfortable environment. The seniors were welcoming and taught us about things we would have never thought to care about. I made new friends and felt genuine joy for three weeks straight.”

As reported by seniors and teens alike, the program at The Riverdale Y was a success. “This was the best summer in the 13 years I’ve been a member at the Y. It was uplifting. The teens brought such energy. They were wonderful, helpful, terrific. They fit in just right, it was very comfortable. All of them were lovely, bright, young people,” commented one senior participant. At the program’s closing ceremony on August 10, Sharon Asherman, Director of The Riverdale Y Senior Center, remarked, “Participants got to hear stories, learn about life as an older adult and what the life of a teen is like, but there were also opportunities for good old-fashioned fun. The teens brought life and light into a lot of seniors’ lives this summer.”

Although their three weeks together came to a bittersweet close, the life lessons learned and the memories shared between the seniors and teens will be long-lasting. As summarized by one of the teens, “When you bring the generations together, you can really create some beautiful things.”

**This program is jointly funded by UJA-Federation of New York and the Jim Joseph Foundation. The Jewish Education Project serves as lead operator of the Initiative.**



*Lunchtime intergenerational conversations at Riverdale Y*

## HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS SHARE THEIR STORIES WITH VISITORS FROM GERMANY

For the second summer in a row, DOROT was honored to host a delegation of young German politicians who came for the opportunity to meet with Holocaust survivors. The officials traveled to the United States under the auspices of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which promotes freedom, liberty, peace, and justice in partnership with the American Jewish Committee. Their collaboration works to forge further understanding and cooperation between Germans and American Jews.

DOROT clients Hannelore H., Ingrid F., and Paula W. generously agreed to share their Holocaust experiences, life views, and hopes for the future with the guests as part of a panel discussion moderated by DOROT social worker Jane Blumenstein. Each survivor provided details about her own experience during World War II as the audience was held in rapt attention, clearly affected by the women’s stories. A question and answer period followed, with many of the delegates moved to tears as they posed their queries and expressed appreciation to the panelists. All those present were struck by the women’s grateful attitude and sense of optimism, as well as their message to remain vigilant in the present uncertain times.

Although the German participants learned about the Holocaust during their secondary education, this was the first time that members of the group were privileged to meet Jewish survivors. DOROT staff members who know these women were moved once again by their stories as well as by the extraordinary immediate connection between the delegation and the speakers.



*Seated left to right: Ingrid F., Paula W., Hannelore H., and Jane Blumenstein, surrounded by representatives from Germany*



# Reflections on Westchester Chess continued from page 1

Intergenerational Chess program is also funded by the Targoff family.

The program, which launched in Westchester in the fall of 2016, attracts about a dozen students and an equal number of older adults. The two groups sit on opposite sides of a long table filled with chessboards and play. Some participants are seasoned chess players; others are still learning the basics. When a match ends, players switch seats and begin new games with different partners, giving them the opportunity to engage with opponents at a variety of skill levels.

When a participant winds up across the table from an equal match, serious strategizing ensues. A teen or senior sitting opposite a partner with less experience, on the other hand, often results in serious teaching. Both scenarios require thought and concentration, building skill and brain power. Though perhaps more importantly, this structure gives participants a chance to engage with different people.

“Chess involves a lot of thinking and strategizing,” said Cippi Harte, Director of DOROT Westchester. “It’s a great opportunity for a brain workout.” But this program is about more than the mental benefits of chess. “It’s about cultivating intergenerational relationships over a chessboard.”

Marian joined the program because it seemed like a wonderful opportunity to learn to play a very popular and stimulating game. She enjoys both the challenge of

learning such a complicated game and spending time with her fellow participants, whom she described as “not only brilliant and great chess players, but also delightful people.” As a retired teacher, she’s particularly impressed by how focused the students are, coming to play after a long school day. Another major benefit to joining the chess program for Marian was meeting Cippi, who connected Marian with a wonderful bat mitzvah student named Sara. Sara, who has been playing chess since she was a little girl, visits Marian weekly and the two often play chess. What began as visits to help Marian gain experience in the game has blossomed into a beautiful relationship that now includes Sara’s family.

Seventh grader Matan K. agrees that the program is more about the relationships that develop rather than the chess matches. An experienced player who has been participating in tournaments since he was in second grade, Matan has learned some chess moves and strategies from the more experienced adult participants and has enjoyed teaching chess basics to the less experienced adults. “Matan has always enjoyed the company of older adults,” said his mother, Diane. “He has no older relatives living locally so this program has been a wonderful opportunity.” Matan is pretty busy; he plays soccer and the piano and is studying for his upcoming bar mitzvah, but, “he participates enthusiastically every week — it was one of his favorite activities last year.”

Longtime Westchester resident Simon A. also signed up to play because he liked the idea of older people interacting with younger people. As the president of Aging in Place in White Plains, an organization that enables seniors to age in their own homes, he understands how important these interactions can be for both age groups. Simon is a retired associate publisher of *Scientific American* and an experienced chess player. He enjoys the program and thinks his chess game has improved because he’s been learning from the teens who are stronger chess players. Mostly, however, he just enjoys engaging with smart teens.

Tenth grader Adam S., another experienced chess player in the group, also appreciates the benefits of spending time with people in different age groups. It was actually Adam’s grandfather who taught him to play, and the two still enjoy playing together. A second generation DOROT



*Marian concentrates on her next move*



**“It’s about cultivating intergenerational relationships over a chessboard”**

*— Cippi Harte*

volunteer — Adam’s mom Rachel was a DOROT Friendly Visitor after college and developed a meaningful relationship with the senior she visited — Adam thinks this DOROT program is a great idea and loves that it “bridges the gap between generations.” He enjoys both the chess matches themselves and the conversations that begin over the chessboard. Adam participates in a wide variety of extracurricular activities including art, robotics, and magic clubs, and is active in USY (United Synagogue Youth). He is no stranger to volunteering in the community; he teaches English classes for immigrants, but “this program is a highlight of Adam’s week,” said Rachel. Last year, DOROT was fortunate to receive a grant to help fund the Westchester Chess Program from UJA-Federation of New York. Adam was among the presenters during the application process and pointed out that “chess is a thought provoking, intriguing game that is a common ground that young and old can both relate to.” He also shared that “both seniors and students benefit tremendously from the program and the way it brings the present and future of Judaism together,” and explained that he “feels a stronger bond with Jews of all ages as a result of the remarkable connections formed with the help of the DOROT Chess Program.”

Richard L. has long recognized the social benefits of chess. A dentist by profession, he’s been teaching chess for almost 40 years and has taught the game in elementary schools, high schools, a summer camp, and even a jail. He’s also spent time teaching chess to orphans in South Africa. He enjoys conveying the excitement and beauty of chess and can’t overstate the tremendous benefits that stem from the game, from learning to think and problem solve to meeting people from all walks of life. He’s met a lot of interesting people through chess over the years and in this innovative DOROT program, and has formed friendships with adult and teen participants.



Richard has been teaching fellow program participants since he joined last fall, but recently assumed the formal role of program instructor. He hopes to add a small component to help participants get to know one another better, using chess as a catalyst, of course. Perhaps he will offer participants a chance to give a brief presentation to the group, similar to a TED talk, about a meaningful chess encounter, what inspired them to play chess, or what they hope to get out of playing. He’s encouraging more people to join and benefit from playing the game.

**DOROT is grateful to the Targoffs and UJA-Federation of New York for their vision and sponsorship of DOROT’s Intergenerational Chess Program.**

## SHANA TOVA

*As we celebrate Rosh Hashanah and DOROT begins a new year, we thank you for being part of our community.*

*Wishing you a year of peace, happiness and good health in 5778.*

# BRINGING ART TO LIFE

Since January of 2016, Lasting Impressions: DOROT's Legacy Project has provided creative means to convey legacy stories. DOROT clients impart their stories to ensure that their beliefs and values, life lessons, important memories, and hopes for the future are recorded for loved ones and generations to come. This summer, 22 older adults convened to share their legacies through art. For this program, DOROT teamed up with Elders Share the Arts to offer a new way to interpret legacy – collage. DOROT's Drawing & Life Collage class met for four weeks at Partners in Caring Synagogue SAJ, each week creating both collaborative and individual works of art. Not only did the class promote creativity and social engagement, but it shed light on previously untold stories and challenged traditional notions of legacy.

The class relied on art to share wisdom, advice, and even gratitude. Throughout the four weeks, the workshop followed a pattern of look, notice, wonder, create, and share. "Look, notice, and wonder" often involved discussion and reflection on personal understandings of legacy. After that, the group began to create. The artists found inspiration

in everything from New York City streets to English proverbs to their own words of wisdom. Through an array of prompts and materials, they created a collection of beautiful collages. To culminate the experience, the artists had the opportunity to show their work at a final gallery with friends and family. The exhibition displayed each participant's unique interpretations of legacy, as well as artistic talent.

For many of the participants, this class was a high point of the summer. "I feel the experience has enhanced my life," said one group member. "I love art, but I learned about applying art in a different way. Somehow it seemed to open me up more to let in additional ways of being." The professional and well-planned program fostered not only creativity, but the challenge of creating one's own legacy through a new and unexpected medium. "It made me think more about my legacy in non-materialistic ways. [It] made me think of my own writings, art projects, community theater as legacy to the world, rather than just close friends or family. . . leaving our spirits," added

another participant. The four week workshop helped participants access and express aspects of their legacies in unexpected and beautiful ways, inspiring to all who attended the final exhibition.

"Our objective is to provide DOROT clients with whatever medium is most personally meaningful for them to share aspects of their legacy stories," explained Wendy Handler, Manager of Lasting Impressions. "We are thrilled that so many were eager to explore their legacies through the visual arts and, as always, we were wowed by the results. We look forward to presenting additional exciting legacy-based programming throughout the year in addition to the one-on-one legacy projects we offer."



*The artists and their artwork*

If you or someone you know is interested in creating a legacy project, please call Wendy Handler at (917) 441-3724 or email [whandler@dorotusa.org](mailto:whandler@dorotusa.org).



# “What did you think of your college internship at DOROT?”

“The work I do is really meaningful, and you see that in the effect you have on the seniors’ lives, and the way they smile when they see you. So it’s really nice knowing that you’re actually making a difference in someone’s life.”

“I’m considering a career in which I expect to work with the elderly a lot, and I had no experience working with older adults at all going into the summer. I was a little nervous that maybe I wasn’t making a wise career choice. After working at DOROT, I know that I like working with older people, and I’m confident that I can successfully do that. This internship has made me feel more connected to another generation, and more confident in my career path.”



Intergenerational outing to the Guggenheim

“I learned that there are so many ways one can make a career out of working with older adults. You can go into social work, technology, marketing, or design with a specific focus on aging.”

“My most memorable experience from the DOROT college internship was building a connection with a senior through weekly visiting. My senior taught me a concrete skill (sewing), and I know I will think of her whenever I thread a needle!”



DOROT seniors and interns attending the Broadway show, *Beautiful*

Supported by Eleanor’s Outings

“At DOROT, interns are valued! This isn’t the case with every work environment. The compassionate staff, the structure of the internship position, and the seniors themselves made this experience a great one.”



Interns meeting with Executive Director, Mark Meridy

## STATISTIC

In FY2017, DOROT introduced measures to more deeply assess the impact of participating in intergenerational programs, including our afterschool and school-based initiatives, and behavioral and attitudinal changes among alumni of our Teen and College Internship Programs. Remarkably, 79 percent of teens and 80 percent of college interns expressed an interest in serving older adults in the future in their post-internship survey.



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## DOROT Generations

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## Generations Society Honored at Annual Luncheon

This past June, DOROT held its 15th Annual Generations Society Luncheon. A spring tradition, this event brings together the members of the Generations Society to honor them for their devotion to DOROT's vision, mission, and values. At this special event, attendees meet old friends and make new ones, and DOROT can express its sincere appreciation for them. Members of the Generations Society have made a planned gift or have named DOROT in their will, actively creating their own legacies and at the same time, enhancing the lives of seniors for years to come.

At the luncheon, Renée Adler Ascher, DOROT Board member, past Board President, and member of the Generations Society, fondly reflected on a particular memory. For four years,

Rose Sommers was a devoted volunteer at DOROT in the Executive Director's office, giving generously of her time. Renée shared that when Rose passed away, DOROT was surprised to learn that she left an extraordinary gift in her will, the largest individual gift received at that time. Shortly thereafter, her generosity provided nearly the entire down payment on the building we call home today. Rose's gift did not just cement her own legacy; it gave DOROT a home base for all of our programs for seniors.

Legacy gifts are a true embodiment of all DOROT strives to do, ensuring that the partnership of volunteers and staff will continue to serve New York's older adult population for many more generations. "I cannot emphasize enough what the security of having received bequests and endowments by so many over the years has meant to the stability of DOROT and the elderly whom we serve," said Renée.

We thank our Generations Society members for their lasting dedication to DOROT, and we look forward to seeing all of them at next year's luncheon!

**If you or someone you know is interested in joining DOROT's Generations Society, please contact Audrey Stein at [astein@dorotusa.org](mailto:astein@dorotusa.org) or (917) 441-3746.**

**“DOROT adds years to life  
and life to years”**  
– Renée Adler Ascher