The Hillel Experience

Emily Judson—Secretary
Hillel for me has been a sanctuary. I am in RPI’s architecture program and it is nearly all-consuming. All of my schoolwork and most of my friends are in architecture. Shabbat dinners and Hillel events are places where I can remove myself from the stress of everyday life and connect with other Jews on campus. I can’t speak for others but I feel that this sentiment is shared by non-architecture students as well. When I come to a Hillel event I know that I am going to get to relax with great people and enjoy taking part in a wonderful Jewish community. Hillel is an essential part of my college experience and, as a sophomore, I look forward to continuing to make it an important part of my life for years to come.

Under New Management

Joshua Gabai—Outgoing President
Those three words tend to give people pause. Over this past Winter break, my friends and I went to our favorite local diner back home only to discover that these three words stood for worse food, smaller portions, and higher prices. But the neat thing about this little phrase is that it isn’t always a bad thing.
The graduating class of 2013 contains more Hillel officers than any other year in recent memory, so it goes without saying that there is a large turnover of officers on Hillel’s board and the new board looks very different.
And they hit the ground rolling. I feel like I’d barely raised the starting gun when they were drafting event calendars, planning recruitment events for the Spring semester, talking with national Hillel, and preparing to meet with Sodexo and RPI Auxiliary Services to negotiate a Passover Meal Plan to be used for years to come. A rolling board is nothing new to us and is something that all college organizations deal with. After all, every 4-5 years, the entire student body is completely different. Year after year, the graduating seniors suffer a moment of melancholy. What will Hillel be doing next year? Will it still be here to welcome and provide a sense of community for the next group of students? There is a certain amount of trust that comes with letting go. But there is also a realization, that now I have a different role to play. Although the current students do the groundwork to make the activities happen, the fact is that without funds in the previously mentioned bank account, there would not be any activities to make happen.
And so, as 2013 rolls in, I’m proud to announce that the RPI-Sage Hillel is now under new management.

A Message from the Webmaster

Although the RPI Hillel website is in its infancy, Hillel proudly concludes that the dear old website has made Aliyah and is Geshmak! As an updated, cross browser, and fully mobile compatible website, RPI-Sage Hillel is ready to embark on a new quest. A quest to inspire the international Jewish community to start sending its future engineers, scientists, and architects to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute while embracing the opportunities to grow as a Jewish individual at RPI-Sage Hillel. Since this website is still under development, we are asking the alumni for ideas of what they would like to see on the website. This may include: Design, Usability, Features, Content, or more!

—Aaron Tobias

Inside this issue:
- Procuring a Sukkah | 1
- Under New Management | 1
- The Hillel Experience | 1-2
- A Message from the Webmaster | 1
- Treasury Report | 2
- Housing Report | 2
- Donation Appeal | 2
Hillel Treasurer Report

Ben Krieger—Outgoing Treasurer

It’s important to leave a legacy. Heck, if it weren’t, how would we ever get any donations? Trust me; as a senior I know how hard it is to leave Hillel to a new group of kids while simultaneously desiring for Hillel to keep developing and remaining the way I knew it.

Four years ago Hillel was just an office with a stone-age computer, a bunch of Passover kitchen ware, a mostly empty fridge, and two kids with dedication I have seen unmatched anywhere I’ve gone in life. Today we have a much larger group with more spread out responsibilities. The stone-age computer is still there, but the fridge is always bursting (then empty, then bursting again), and the Passover supplies are shoved into a closet to make room for everything else. And despite always having overflowing shelves, we can’t seem to stop running out of plates and forks. If that’s not a good sign, I don’t know what is.

And now, just as I’m preparing to move on from RPI and my Hillel, we’re even getting our organizational skills together. I know! But I swear we’re still a group of college-aged Jews. In the near future the IRS will be classifying us as an officially tax-exempt non-profit charity. So let us celebrate this new Hillel we have all one way or another contributed to creating, even if we only know it through newsletters. It’s a really great place to be and it’s giving Skidmore, Union, and even UAlbany a run for their money.

Procuring a Sukkah for Hillel

Caren Irgang—President

My little brother loves woodworking. It’s his passion, evident from the tree house and massive storage cabinets in my backyard and the bed in my room. Of course, it made sense that my dad would donate a Sukkah to Hillel, because of the close connection with my brother’s work. His condition was that he would pay for the wood, paint, nails and tarp. After putting it up with Ben and Kieda on Freshman Hill, I thought it was beautiful, decorating the outside with Sukkah information for passerby’s and placing the brachot inside. Unfortunately it rained, so we had to let it dry for a month before we could paint it. After Abbey, Kieda and I dismantled the Sukkah, we were ready to let Ben pick it up later. However, when Ben came it was gone! It was pretty upsetting at first, but luckily we found out that the RPI maintenance had taken it, not desolate IED students. It’s so nice to have a Sukkah to celebrate the mitzvot of Sukkot.

Hillel Housing Report

Daniel Ben-Chrtrit—Religious and Cultural VP

Over the past 12 months, the RPI-Sage Hillel board has tried to implement new programs while keeping existing programs and budget the same. As the former Housing Coordinator I have research a variety of ways to get a Hillel house. This effort morphed into trying to accommodate students who wanted to keep kosher. While RPI was enthusiastic providing on campus housing to accommodate these students, our small numbers did not translate well into accomplishing this goal. While the plan for kosher housing is on the back burner, we are again trying to find a way to have a Hillel house, where we can hold events and cook food for weekly Shabbat dinner, instead of using the local Orthodox kitchen as we do now.

We have seen homes in the vicinity of RPI that are in the range of $300,000 that would suit the purpose of a Hillel house. In order to make this project a reality, we need one or more major donors who will provide funding so we can purchase the property. Ongoing operating costs will be paid for using ongoing donations from donors and, hopefully, from new funding sources.

Our only funding at this time comes from alumni and parent donations. With these monies, we are able to run our current programs, including Shabbat dinners and holiday festivities. The Executive Board is working on acquiring money from the National Hillel Organization and the Albany Jewish Federation to help fund the Hillel house, but these funds will be used for operating expenses. We need additional funds and your support to make this project a reality. Please consider aiding our efforts to enrich Jewish life at RPI and Sage by supporting Hillel financially. If you already planned to make a donation please accept our gratitude. If you were unaware of the importance of your contribution but are able to make a donation to help fund our housing project, we hope that understanding our objectives will encourage you to do so. If you know of any benefactors/philanthropists who would be interested in supporting our efforts, your introduction to those individuals would be greatly appreciated.

For more information please contact me at benchd@rpi.edu.