

Articles of Faith

HIGHLIGHTS FROM MICHAEL PAULSON'S BLOG | FOR THE FULL BLOG, VISIT WWW.BOSTON.COM/RELIGION | FOLLOW!

Jewish venture program to launch in Boston

An organization that attempts to promote innovative and entrepreneurial programs to strengthen the Jewish community is coming to Boston.

PresenTense, a relatively new but buzz-rich organization headquartered in Israel, has been chosen by Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the establishment coalition of Jewish organizational life in Boston, to oversee a new fellowship that will launch in January aimed at helping Jewish young adults with innovative ideas figure out how they might translate those ideas into action. CJP will finance the program, and PresenTense will run it.

I talked with Karyn Cohen Leviton, director of strategy implementation at CJP, who said the program is still taking shape, but it will involve 10 to 15 part-time (evenings and weekends) fellows in their 20s and 30s who will be chosen for the strength of their ideas for new Jewish social ventures (i.e. programs intended to strengthen the Jewish community in some way). They will be offered training on business basics as well as access to potential donors and investors. The fellows will also be offered mentors with experience in launching ventures and will be invited to do something called "board-hopping," which apparently involves observing the boards of venture capital firms and small businesses. The idea is that some of the fellows will then launch organizations based on some brilliant idea that will address a challenge facing the Jewish community. I asked Cohen Leviton whether there are already too many organizations in the Jewish world — a frequent critique of Jewish communal life in the United States — and she said, "It's a market economy — some of these [new] ideas could be so good that they should be promoted, and an old one should go away."

PresenTense was founded three years ago with a magazine, and it runs a summer institute in Jerusalem for "social innovators" — people seeking to launch programs that will improve the world. I e-mailed Ariel Beery, codirector of the PresenTense Group, in Israel to ask him to explain what the organization is and what it's doing in Boston. He said that PresenTense "set out to build the Jewish community's next generation of pioneers, to solve social problems, and inspire the Jewish people," and that, "In order for us to fulfill our mission to grow pioneers, we have recognized that we need to work with the community to build new infrastructure for the Jewish people to address social problems and inspire innovation — and we can't think of a better place to start our state-side fellowships than Boston."

At Dorchester center, faith, swimming, and

Monday morning several hundred people gathered under a white tent on a muddy 6.5-acre construction site in Dorchester where, if all goes according to plan, a large community center will open in early 2011 with an array of recreational and educational facilities.

I was interested because the Boston Kroc Corps Community Center is being sponsored by the Salvation Army, a small Protestant denomination that has devoted itself to providing social services to some of the most down-and-out residents of America's cities.

The charitable work has won the Army lots of fans, but none more generous than the late Joan Kroc, the wife of McDonald's founder Ray Kroc, who left the denomination \$1.5 billion.

Part of that money is being used to build 30 community centers around the country, and the one in Boston, which is on Dudley Street next to the Uphams Corner commuter rail station, is the only center in New England.

The 90,000-square-foot project has a staggering \$115.5 million budget, of which \$85.5 million came from Joan Kroc. The budget includes a \$45 million endowment, the income from which will be used to partially finance the center's operations.

At the ground-breaking, lots of dignitaries spoke about all the programs the center will offer — including education (English as a second language and vocational training), social services (food pantry, heat assistance), health (a fitness center, pool, and counseling), and performing arts (facilities for theater and music) — but I was interested in the religious element, so I called up Major William H. Bode, the Salvation Army's divisional commander. Here's a partial transcript of our conversation:

Q. *What role will religion play in this project?*

A. We already have a corps, which



Shovels before they were used to break ground on Dorchester last week. The Salvation Army is sponsoring the project.



Salvation Army Major William H. Bode, Mayor Tom Sawyer, and Suffolk Construction CEO John Fish at the ground-breaking ceremony.

is a congregation, in Roxbury, about a mile away, and when the new center is built, that congregation will move into the new building. Anybody who