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The Chabad House of Lamorinda Helps Locals Explore Their Jewish Identity

By Sophie Braccini



Children learn how to make olive oil used in an oil lamp at the Chabad. The olive press is shown on the left. Photo provided

interested."

Labkowski was born into a religious Jewish family with Russian origins in Brooklyn - the 11th in a family of 12 children. He studied in Canada, Israel and Los Angeles. He and his wife, Tzipora, were both raised by parents who were part of the Chabad movement. "We were both raised with the idea that it's not just important to live your own life, and mind your own business," he says, "but with the idea that a Jew's mission in life is to help out another Jew." Therefore rather than staying in their comfort zone, they decided to venture west. There are about 4,500 Chabad Houses throughout the world. The Labkowski asked friends and family for seed money so they could start their service.

One of the first steps the Labkowskis took was to ask the Lafayette City Council to let them install a menorah on the Plaza during the eight days of Hanukkah. "This was a symbol of light, warmth and beauty that we wanted to share with the community," says Labkowski. "Now we have started to offer classes and activities for all ages and open to all. The activities are for people to be involved; we are not preaching. For the children, it is very hands-on, teaching by feeling." For example, children made candles for Hanukkah or they made their own lamp, learning to press olives that produced the oil that burned in the lamp.

There are many classes and activities offered: Mommy and Me, Hebrew school, monthly community Shabbat dinners, Torah reading, Jewish history, and many more. There is also a special class for women, challah bread making, which provides an opportunity of women to socialize and reflect on the meaning of challah. The next challah bread making class is scheduled for Tuesday, March 1. The Chabad also organizes celebrations for each Jewish holiday, the next one being Purim March 23-24.

For more information, go to www.chabadoflamorinda.org.

A new community center in Lafayette, steeped in the Jewish tradition, aims to provide educational and outreach activities for people of all ages with Jewish roots. Rabbi Yisroel Labkowski, who recently opened the Chabad House, follows the words of the founder of the Chabad movement, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who said that "(a Chabad) should serve as a key to open the hearts of all who will visit it and all who will come under its sphere of influence - open their hearts to the very core of their Jewishness."

Labkowski says that Jews are equal, regardless of their circumstance, and therefore everyone is welcome in the Chabad. "A Jew is a Jew regardless of his affiliation, regardless of his observance; he is born Jewish and will always be a Jew," he says. "The idea is to awaken the Jewish identity everyone born Jewish has. There is no idea of membership into the Chabad, it is a place open to everyone

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