

# Yeshiva Simchas Chaim Holds Gathering in Flatbush

By Yoel Gesser

On Thursday evening, 17 Elul/August 26, a special gathering was held at the home of Assemblyman and Mrs. Dov Hikind in Flatbush on behalf of Yeshiva Simchas Chaim.

The yeshiva, which is beginning its second year, *b'ezras Hashem*, is a unique one that seeks to provide a fulfilling Torah environment for its *talmidim* by fostering opportunities for individualized expression and creativity, with an emphasis on personal growth rather than testable academic attainments. Currently, the yeshiva has a select group of 15-20 eleventh- and twelfth-grade young men who have struggled in mainstream institutions and who may be classified as "at-risk" but remain productive, positive and interested in finding meaning and fulfillment in *Yiddishkeit* and Torah learning. The *talmidim* hail from various backgrounds across the spectrum of the Torah community.

The yeshiva's *rebbeim* and teachers are chosen for their ability to reach out to their young charges and transmit the learning in a manner that is engaging and reflects allegiance to *mesorah*, and also serve as role models for the *talmidim* to emulate. There are *shiurim* on *Gemara*, *Hashkafah*, *Halachah*, *Chumash* and other topics, presented in a manner that the *talmidim* can relate to, and aimed at counteracting any negative learning experiences they may have had in the past.

Since the yeshiva believes that the most effective way for each *talmid* to maximize his potential is to do so with an accent on each one's individual needs and style, the yeshiva's approach is to educate rather than to preach, and to inspire rather than to demand.

Rabbi Elchonon Schwartz, the yeshiva's *Menahel*, noted that, beyond the actual learning, the *kasher* the *rebbeim* forge with students is of equal if not greater significance, and makes the greatest impact, both long-term and short-term, in inspiring them in growth in *rachmim*. The yeshiva's *rebbeim*, who all invest incredible *kochos hanefesh* in inspiring their *talmidim*, view their *tafkid* as one not restricted to the classroom and are available to provide direction and answer questions.

The secular studies component of the yeshiva offers a choice of programs for students, depending on their capabilities and interest, including the New York State Regents Diploma, Penn Foster High School Diploma, GED program and Pre-GED programs. An Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) is set up for each student, in which personalized learning strategies are mapped out, designed to enable each to taste accomplishment, for, as General Studies principal Mr. Reuven Kamin says, "Accomplishment breeds success," which allows the *bachurim* to build future successes upon previous ones.

There are extracurricular activities and *chessed* projects to supplement the



Assemblyman Dov Hikind addressing the gathering.



Rabbi Elchonon Schwartz, the yeshiva's *Menahel*.

*limudim*. For example, prior to last Sukkos, *bachurim* from the yeshiva volunteered to erect *sukkos* for those unable to, as well as for the Masbia soup kitchen.

The staff includes fully-trained therapists who are available to discuss with students any issues or questions that they have. Mr. Yoni Hikind, LMSW, clinical director, stresses that this feature reflects the yeshiva's approach towards *chinuch*, which is to strive to understand each *talmid's* essence and needs, in order to facilitate his growth in the best possible way in all areas.

In conversation with *Hamodia*, Mr. Yisroel Tabi, who devotedly serves as the yeshiva's administrator, underscored how he and the other staff members see their work with the *bachurim* of the yeshiva as an honor and privilege.

Members of the *hanhalah* consult with *Gedolim* and Rabbanim such as Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky, *shlita*, *Rosh Yeshiva*, Yeshiva Gedolah of Philadelphia, and Harav Moshe Weinberger, *shlita*, Rav of Kehillas Aish Kodesh of Woodmere, regarding issues that arise in the course of their *avodas hakodesh*.

The speakers at the event were Assemblyman Hikind (who gives lectures at the yeshiva), Rabbi Schwartz, Mr. Yoni Hikind and Mrs. Shani Hikind.

For more information concerning Yeshiva Simchas Chaim, please call (646) 671-3587 or (917) 751-2021.