

\$5.5M goal set for new Lubavitch center With number of participants rising, Chabad community aims toward major expansion

By: Jasmine Salters Posted: 10/31/07

The spiritual influence of Penn's Lubavitch leaders will soon translate into something tangible: a new home for over 100 students.

The Perelman Center for Jewish Life will house the Lubavitch House at Penn, as well as the Steinhardt/Cayne Jewish Heritage Programs.

The new site was officially announced and celebrated at a ground-breaking ceremony last week.

Slated for completion by fall 2008, it will triple the Lubavitch House's usable space, currently located at 40th and Spruce streets.

The center will specifically accommodate 150 students for Shabbat and holiday dinners. It will also include both a student lounge and a synagogue that will hold over 100 students.

"The older building was kind of cramped," director of the Perelman Center for Jewish Life Rabbi Ephraim Levin said. "Now, people won't feel crowded, and, also, it will be updated. There will be a student lounge, so when a number of larger groups meet, they will have a larger and more comfortable area."

Over the years, Lubavitch programming at Penn has grown immensely.

In the group's first trip to Israel in 1993, fewer than two dozen students participated. Fourteen years later, a record 140 students went on the trip.

Levin credited his wife, Flora, campus Rabbi Levi Haskelevich and his wife and Lubavitch House associate director Nechama Haskelevich with the development of the Lubavitch programming.

The center, named after its benefactor, billionaire Ronald Perelman, is no small fee.

Although the capital campaign committee has already raised \$2.1 million for construction of the facility, the goal is to collect \$5.5 million.

"We started out in a little apartment on 40th Street near Baltimore," executive director of the Perelman Center for Jewish life Rabbi Menachem Schmidt said. "Now, with the new center, I think it will create some wonderful new possibilities for Jewish life and life in general on campus."

Many students credit the Lubavitch House and its leaders for encouraging students to be both a part of and enjoy Jewish life.

"It's a very comfortable environment," Wharton junior Jon Gitman said. "It's a place where you can grow as a person, an environment where you feel like you're with family."

"Rabbi Levin and the Lubavitch House support us," added Wharton junior Ezra Cohen said. "The new center will be a great success."