

## Lubavitch Builds Upon Its Success

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**Zach Pontz**

*Jewish Exponent Feature*

The building at 40th and Spruce streets, an unassuming four-story twin that now bears a fading coat of paint, will soon be transformed into a state-of-the-art facility -- an expansion of the former Lubavitch House -- to better meet the needs of Jewish students on the University of Pennsylvania campus.



That was the message delivered Sunday by various speakers during the groundbreaking ceremony for the new structure, to be called the Perelman Center for Jewish Life.

Purchased by Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov, Head Shilach of Philadelphia, for the Lubavitch in 1980 the organization's current building has outgrown its usefulness. One of the major concerns has been the limited seating capacity for Friday-night dinners.

"Our biggest event is our Shabbas dinners," said Lubavitch House executive director Rabbi Ephraim Levin. "Our current facility was able to fit only about 30 people comfortably, and on average we have sixty guests. It was cramped and crowded. Now we'll be able to fit 150 people."

The overall project began in 2003, when a group of alumni, led by Eric Gribetz, approached Levin about expanding the Lubavitch program on campus; they subsequently raised



\$500,000 toward that goal. The funds enabled them to buy the



adjoining house on Spruce Street in 2005 (Lubavitch only owned one side at the time) and, thus, have the space to expand a bit and consider how to grow in the future.

About the same time, Ronald Perelman, the multibillionaire Philadelphia native, decided to offer a \$1 million donation for the cause.

"The Perelman name is well-known, and that's been able to give us some notoriety in the community," said Levin.

After four years of planning, the construction process is set to commence.

Stated the rabbi: "We felt we needed a place that would portray what we're trying to do for the community. We wanted to have an area where people could meet en masse. The Perelman Center is going to give us more of a presence, and it's going to accentuate our goals."

The Lubavitch House is one of many such community centers worldwide. Acting as gathering places for worship and socialization, the centers are fashioned to attract all Jewish students, regardless of their level of observance or background.

The Penn chapter houses not only Lubavitch, but the Jewish Heritage Program as well.

The Perelman Center will also be home to a brand-new entity, the Jewish Women's Resource Center, and the existing Healthy Living Task Force.

The new structure, which Levin hopes will open by next fall, was designed by Polatnick Zacharjasz Architecture in Roxborough.

The new-and-improved building will consist of a basement-level student-activities center, complete with a conference room, lounge and kosher kitchen. The first floor will host a dining hall, library and the Beit Yacov synagogue. The second floor will contain organizational offices.

There also will be dormitory space on the upper two floors.