

Just Because You're Paranoid...



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We recently sponsored an event that, unfortunately, touched on several of the challenges we deal with in our community. This was an event for teens at the BlueClaws. As we know, the demographics in Ocean County have changed – and there aren't many Jewish youth or teens in our area outside of the Orthodox community.

Several of our community rabbis wanted to do something and sponsor an activity to engage this audience and hopefully attract others in our area. The Jewish Federation was happy to help and sponsor the program.

When promoted on Facebook, this provoked a nasty response from some. One example: “The Jews are discriminating

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against goy again...BlueClaws just held a free and for Jewish teens only day. When asked if non-Jews can go with a “chaperone” Jew they said absolutely not...Did you know there is a jewishoceancounty . Org... Wild”

Of course this isn't true. This was a private event that was paid for by private sponsors. Anyone in our country is free to do that – to host any sort of party or gathering for whomever they want. But here are some of the things that are true...

- There has been a significant increase in antisemitic sentiment in our society and in our community. And more people feel free to express themselves in this way.
- The Jewish Federation has invested in security preparedness and support with our partners at JFed Security, who work to ensure our local synagogues, Chabads, and other partners are as protected and safe as possible. They helped identify the potential concern with this event.
- Many in the Orthodox community in greater Lakewood don't make relations with our non-Orthodox nei-

ghbors easy. This is a largely insular community where there are some less concerned about derech erez or how you treat others from outside your particular community. This is largely due to being so inwardly focused, but it can leave a bad impression on others – even within the Jewish community.

- Additionally, many in this community look to take full advantage of “the system” – whatever that system is, be it local government, tax or welfare or education benefits. (Btw – as do many other communities and prominent individuals because, after all, that's part of the system.) Yet, while it is totally fair to have opinions about appropriateness or fairness – to be angry when people go too far or to be frustrated with trends or outcomes (like traffic in Lakewood or the school budget) – there are remedies to this. Also, this is also part of the system.
- What isn't acceptable is when one blames and labels an entire group for the bad behavior of a few or for what countless others have done before. That kind of double standard crosses a line. As it did here.
- And when it happens to a group that has been targeted and labeled an absurdly disproportionate number of times in seemingly countless instances of double standards...you can see why antisemitism provokes such concern and must be called out whenever and wherever we see it.

So, what can we learn from or do about this? What are they takeaways?

We should all be very careful about labeling someone just because they are part of a group – or labeling a group because of the behavior of a number of someones. Stereotypes, while they can be understandable, can also be dangerous.

We also should be proud of who we are and confident when we support members of our extended Jewish family. We get to have activities for our community and smaller circles of friends and family just like everybody else.

And we should be vocal and forthright about calling out those who wish to label us or throw double standards our way. Like in this case. Like what happens with much (though not all) criticism of Israel.

Additionally, our support – and, through us, your support – of security resources and programs like Heroes Against Hate are vitally important right now. We need to invest in more of these kinds of efforts.

So – let's be vigilant. Let's continue doing the important work we need to do in the community. Let's come together for support and to celebrate as a community. And thank you for being our partners.