

Robuck sets sights on retreat

PETER KOHN

PICTURE the idyllic Jewish weekend conference. It's Friday night, the sun goes down, and zemirot soon reverberate through the nearby bushland. Jewish conferencing is such an art form it deserves its own "heimish" space, says a Sydney rabbi.

Rabbi Gary Robuck, who for years has envisaged a rustic Jewish retreat within easy driving distance of Sydney, wants a resource that provides access – across the spectrum of Jewish religious and cultural affiliations – and offers extensive programming for Jewish organisations.

He first envisaged a residential Australian Jewish centre more than three decades ago and has been inspired by facilities in the US. He is channelling his energies into founding a bush retreat in NSW, and perhaps later in Victoria.

His concept, named Geshet (bridge), because it would bring Jews of different outlooks closer together, is for "a holistic, immersive, experiential centre which would educate, acculturate and above all bring together Jews from across the world; a non-denominational, audaciously pluralistic centre which would invite Jews to join with fellow Jews".

Based on "a Jewish ethos ... with mezuzot on each door, a dedicated Beit Hamidrash, a kosher kitchen and a Shabbat-friendly environment", the centre could also host interfaith events with Christian and Muslim organisations, Rabbi



Rabbi Gary Robuck.

Robuck told *The AJN*.

It would make an ideal venue for Jewish conferences and simchas, far more suited than hiring hotel venues. There would be a hands-on approach from the centre itself to promote Jewish learning. Visitors to Sydney's Jewish community could find accommodation there.

With a working strategy document in hand, Rabbi Robuck has approached the JCA, which he said has shown interest in the project. But funds are needed for a suitable purchase of land and for construction.

"I've already met with school directors who indicated to me how much they look forward to hiring such a place for their school camps

and Zionist youth groups for their holiday camps.

"But what remains to be seen is how we will afford it and where will we find the land," Rabbi Robuck said.

The plan is for the centre to be self-funded and later become a constituent of the JCA, he explained.

After 13 years as the senior rabbi of North Shore Temple Emanuel, Rabbi Robuck is leaving the shul and looking ahead to new challenges.

"I want to serve the Jewish community more widely," said Rabbi Robuck. "I have a lot of Torah left to give, and I want to expand and enlarge my horizons."



Wrapped in friendship

AN upper north shore Catholic school hit hard by a family murder-suicide earlier this year was one of six Sydney schools for children with disabilities to receive the latest round of gift packs from the NSW Friendship Circle in late November.

The project saw more than 50 volunteers from South Head Synagogue, Live Love Learn, Toy Mate, Kids Giving Back and the Friendship Circle wrap 350 presents.

Schools to receive the gift packs were St Lucy's School in Wahroonga, Vaucluse Public School's support unit, Wairoa School, Gardners Road support unit, Rainbow Street support unit and Giant Steps.

St Lucy's is still coming to terms with the tragic loss of its young students Martin and Elisa, their mother Maria Lutz and father Fernando Manrique.

Rabbi Sender Kavka from the Friendship Circle said he hoped the gifts, and cards personally written by young volunteers, "will provide a sense of care for the St Lucy's community during this difficult time".

Pictured are Julie Rosenberg from the Friendship Circle (left) presenting a gift pack to St Lucy's School student Harry, alongside school staff members Julia Kickert and Carolina Darley.

בס"ד

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Applications close on Monday, 27 February 2017.

Auditions for invited applicants will take place the week commencing Monday, 13 March 2017.



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