

Naples, Florida: The Saga of a Developing Community

M. C. GETTINGER

Director Emeritus, Atlanta Jewish Federation, Georgia

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THE City of Naples, which lies off the Gulf Coast of Southwest Florida, is one of the many southern communities which, in recent years, have attracted retirees from northern and mid-western cities. With a peak in residence for four months of the winter season, these communities inevitably confront a need for social supportive and cultural services which, therefore, also attract families with young children. As they become accustomed to the area, many of the retirees become full-time residents. And so, these sunbelt communities have become the fastest growing cities in the country.

The Jewish community of Naples has paralleled this trend. Twenty years ago, a handful of Jews lived in Naples and mainly in its immediate environs. It has been said, and this is not unusual, that they were not entirely "made welcome." Some of the older inhabitants recall the "restricted" signs which were up as late as the 60's.

Beginning with the mid-1970's Jewish people began coming here in larger numbers. While religious services were held sporadically, usually in different bank buildings, it was only in 1975 that the Jewish Community Center was built, which was really a synagogue. As one person puts it, the less specific connotation in name was picked because the low profile was preferred. A part-time Rabbi was engaged who himself

was a retiree. Seventy families, mostly retirees, were members in 1977, and synagogue activities usually closed after the winter season and before the High Holy Days. Today, membership of the Center, now called the Temple, consists of 285 families, of which thirty have children of school age, fifty of whom attend Sunday School.

The first official U.J.A. Campaign in Naples was conducted in 1976 when a small group of people organized a limited drive in behalf of U.J.A. The early Chairmen consisted of several individuals and the retired Rabbi. The early campaigns produced \$7,000 in 1976; \$11,000 in 1977; \$12,000 in 1978; \$22,440 in 1979; and \$41,725 in 1980. The number of contributors never exceeded 100, and the entire drive, the planning, solicitations and follow-up were carried out by volunteers, with little or no assistance from the national agencies.

Additional leadership appeared in the 1981 Campaign with the influx of more retirees from New Jersey and Cleveland, including several attorneys who had been active in the campaigns of their former communities, and a former executive of the New York Times. The 1981 drive raised \$80,000, shot up to \$124,000 in 1982, and more than doubled that mark in 1983 when \$252,515 was raised. The number of contributors also rose sharply to 216

in the 1983 Campaign, which included 46 gifts from a neighboring community, Marco Island, some 18 miles away, which contributed a total of \$9,380.

It became clear to the few leaders that the United Jewish Appeal of Collier County, the official name under which the organization had been incorporated several years ago, had grown significantly and now required professional guidance and assistance. The National U.J.A. was not equipped to provide the necessary assistance although it was the only beneficiary of the campaign. Nor could such aid come from the Council of Jewish Federations of which the organization was not even a member. The Chairman and another officer traveled to New York and met with both national agencies and sought their advice. As a result, a consultant was engaged, a former executive director of an intermediate size federation, to assist the community in its upcoming 1984 campaign, as well as help the leadership determine its future direction.

In the first two months of his four-month tenure, an office was rented, secretarial services were provided through a commercial firm, and the drive was organized with a working Campaign Cabinet. The main focus in the early phase was the planning for the Annual Dinner, the required minimum contribution to attend, and how the attendance was to be promoted. In previous years, the minimum gift for "eligibility" to the dinner had never exceeded \$100 per person, and calls for prospective attendees had been left to a few well-intentioned women who were otherwise not involved in any key position in the drive. The change to a \$250 per person minimum and the involvement of an enlarged campaign leadership created some questioning and tension, but several of the more assertive recent leadership, especially a

newcomer to the community from Washington, D.C. and a former Campaign Chairman, carried the changes through.

It was decided early in the Campaign that a most important ingredient for a successful drive would be participation in the UJA Presidents Mission toward the end of January. Two of the potentially largest contributors and their wives, one being the former Washington D.C. Chairman, and the recent widow of a large contributor, made the five-day mission and returned with glowing reports of the trip and, most importantly, of their own commitments. The Annual Dinner, which occurred two days after their return, revolved around their participation in the Mission, together with a stirring address by the speaker, a layman from Cleveland and a former client of one of the Mission participants.

Some 135 people attended the dinner, mostly older couples who have lived in Naples 4-5 years. The results would be considered impressive in most Jewish communities.

In reporting on the Mission the men mentioned their own generous contributions and brought out the fact that the five had agreed on adopting Tel Mond as Naples Project Renewal. After announcing their own contributions of almost \$250,000 payable over a five-year period, substantial contributions were announced by many of the others attending the dinner while the regular Campaign also received large increases. Incomplete campaign results for the year show a total to date of 425,000, a 70% increase over the previous year—and more to come.

The women who participated in the Mission created a new excitement when they reported on their experience and their substantial contributions, thus stimulating a number of women who had never contributed before to an-

nounce gifts and to encourage the beginning formation of a Women's Division in Naples.

Naples has not yet developed into a well organized Jewish community. Nobody is quite certain of its size and future growth. It is generally estimated that Naples has about 400 to 500 families, mostly older retired couples with a sprinkling of younger families with children of elementary school age. Marco Island may have another 200 families and is already involved in creating another synagogue. Most of these retirees live elsewhere after the winter season but more are becoming permanent residents. It is also inevitable that as more retirees settle here they will require various professional and other services and they will attract younger people to move here. Urban planners predict that before the end of the century the Naples area will double its population to 250,000 people. And probably the Jewish community will grow at an even more rapid pace.

The national agencies would do well to study this new emerging phenomenon of the sun-belt communities and determine in what ways they can be helpful. One suggestion would be to improve or develop communication between the old and the newly adopted community. Too often, the older community neglects or, worse still, avoids informing the new community of the coming of the retired new resident, in the mistaken hope that the retiree will continue his giving in the former city. More often than not, he will fail to give in either community. Perhaps some understanding could be developed between these communities in sharing the contribution of the retiree.

The Consultant's recommendation that the community engage a full time professional posed a great problem since there were some individuals who

felt this would be an unnecessary expense and the community did not require year-round attention. But the promised advantages of a broadened campaign even to include two small neighboring communities won the day.

One of the last activities of the Consultant was to circulate a questionnaire to the known mailing list of the Collier County U.J.A. to assemble some demographic data.

A total of 510 questionnaires were mailed out, 110 to residents in Marco Island and 400 to those in Naples. 106 (20.8%) of the questionnaires were returned, representing a total of 217 individuals which is considered a good sampling. As expected, the Jewish population units of Collier County are chiefly headed by fully or semi-retired (72%) individuals, and 73% of the known population are 60 years-of-age-and-over. Following are other demographic data:

I. Family Size

Of the 106 respondents, 77 were couples (13 of these reside in Marco Island), 16 are single (3 in Marco Island), and 12 are families with 23 children living at home.

II. Ages

Five of the respondents, not including the children, were under 30 years of age; 19 were between 30 years up to 40; 6 between 40-50; 20 between 50-60; 86 between 60-70; 51 between 70-80; and one was above 80.

III. Length of Residence

Twenty have lived in Collier County less than 3 years; 39 from 3-6 years; 19 from 6-10 years; 12 from 10-15 years; and 5 more than 15 years.

IV. Home Ownership

Eighty-six own their homes or condominiums and 10 rent.

V. Time Spent in County

Fifty-four, more than half of those responding to this question, indicated that they live in Collier County year-round, 12 live there 2 to 3 months of the year; 39 between 4-6 months; 6 between 6-9 months; and 3 were uncertain in their plans.

VI. Previous Residence

Eighteen listed Ohio as their former or permanent residence; 16, New York State; eight, New Jersey; seven, Massachusetts; six, Illinois and Pennsylvania; four, Michigan, Indiana and Florida; other states mentioned were New Hampshire, Tennessee, Georgia, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Washington, D. C.

VII. Occupation (Past or Present)

Six of the respondents were/are attorneys; 5, each of physicians, dentists

and educators; and 4, engineers. Other professions include rabbis, journalists, health professionals and optometrists; other occupations, executives (10); salesmen (8); wholesale (4); construction—real estate (8); manufacturing (4); store-keepers (4); finance (6).

VIII. Past Affiliations

The great majority (91) formerly belonged to a synagogue; 40 were members of fraternity groups, usually B'nai B'rith; 20 belonged to Z.O.A. or Hadassah and a small number indicated membership in American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, National Council of Jewish Women, Jewish War Veterans and ORT.

IX. Unmet Needs

Most felt that Collier County had all the necessary Jewish organizations, but a few expressed interest in the development of a community center serving the needs of younger and older residents, a Jewish nursing home, a federation and other services for oldsters.