



CAMPING OUT FOR JEWISH HERITAGE
- UJA launches incentive program for first time campers -

(TORONTO –OCTOBER 16, 2008) -- When we think of heritage preservation we think of private tutors, after school programs or even a more rigorous day school environment. But an increasing amount of research shows that heritage preservation may come from only a few weeks at overnight camp, and the Toronto Jewish community is putting this idea to the test. On October 17, UJA Federation is launching TopBunk, an innovative incentive program designed to reach out to families less connected to the community and engage them through a summer of fun and a lifetime of memories.

By the program's close on February 15, 375 grants worth \$1,250 each will be awarded to first-time campers who attend one of the nine qualifying overnight camps in the program. Kids who return for a second year will receive an additional \$750.

"Currently, 12 per cent of children eligible for this grant send their children to Jewish camps," said Dr. Ron Polster, Director of UJA's Jewish Camping Initiatives. "We feel camp is an important portal to our community and a great way to inspire identity. Our goal with TopBunk is to triple the number of kids within our target market going to these camps within the first three years of the program."

UJA is not the only one who believes camp to be a critical community builder. An all-star team that includes Toronto business and philanthropic leaders Joe Lebovic, Neil Nisker, and Ab Flatt are ensuring this becomes a funding option of choice for donors, with a fundraising campaign already underway.

"The earlier you get kids connected to their heritage the better. For me, it was Jewish summer camp that gave me that connection, without it, I don't know where I'd be," said Lebovic. "This is a viable, and economically feasible, way to carry on Jewish sustainability." The funds raised in Toronto will be added to \$15 million in matching grants across North America for incentive programs like TopBunk being given by the U.S.-based Foundation for Jewish Camp.

The Foundation's goal is to energize local Jewish communities throughout the U.S. and Canada. U.S. research shows that Jewish camp alumni are 50 per cent more likely to join a synagogue, 90 per cent more likely to join a Jewish community center and twice as likely to donate \$100 or more to their local community than Jewish adults who never went to a Jewish camp. Toronto community leaders believe the percentages will be the same here.

Eighteen cities including Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Montreal all have grant programs underway. Toronto tested the program last year sending 200 first-time campers to overnight Jewish camp. A more targeted version of the program is being launched on October 17. For more information visit www.topbunkca.

For media inquiries contact:
Brown & Cohen Communications & Public Affairs Inc. 416-484-1132
Kendra Dubyk ext. 5 kendra@brown-cohen.com
Rowena Calpito ext. 4 rowena@brown-cohen.com