

Bridges of Tolerance

Written by B'nai B'rith Europe

By Erika Van Gelder, BBE Senior Vice President

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am sure that you are all aware of the fact that our brother, friend and mentor, Ralph Weill S'L, has passed away. We will all miss his wisdom, his guidance and his dedication. Br. Weill set up for BBE the cultural program "Makor" through which he hoped to strengthen Jewish identity in Central and Eastern Europe.

A few weeks ago our president, Ralph Hofmann asked me to consider taking over the Makor program since I am already involved in Central and Eastern Europe. I accepted and I feel honored to be given this important task.

This new BBE cultural project serves several purposes:

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it emphasizes the active social role that our not-for-profit organization fulfills in an inclusive society. According to the United Nations Social Policy and Development Division, non-profit organizations, NGO, the ordinary citizen need to work together towards social integration, creating an intercultural awareness, promote the necessary understanding between the various ethnic groups, nation states, an understanding that transcends frontiers, genders and religious affiliations;

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it fights against anti-Semitism and any forms of racial discrimination through education; it presents "the stranger among us" through his achievements; it is a free of charge educational tool that promotes Jewish contributions to the local culture;

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it targets the general public, adults and children alike;

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it enables local lodges to open and exchange a dialogue with government representatives and other NGOs, Jewish and non-Jewish;

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it strengthens Jewish identity;

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it makes BB visible.

This project, called "Bridges of Tolerance", is dedicated to the memory of our brother Ralph Weill.

BRIDGES OF TOLERANCE: Proposal for a Multi-National Jewish Cultural Project for Central and Eastern Europe

Coordinator: Erika van Gelder, B'nai B'rith Europe

Aim:

Jewish presence on our continent has a long and troubled history. It knows periods of tolerance and periods of extreme discrimination. Whatever the circumstances and geographical locations, the Jewish presence left an immeasurable impact on the Judeo-Christian world.

We aim to create an educational, cultural platform through which we would present the Jewish contribution to the various aspects of cultural life of each participating country.

Target Group:

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We invite the public at large, adults and children, to free of charge cultural events on topics such as Jewish literature, fine arts, music, film & theatre, etc.

Motivation:

We live in a multi-cultural society where the European citizens of different back grounds, histories, mentalities, create our common European Cultural Heritage. Jewish culture, philosophy and traditions are part of this heritage.

We believe that the best tool for combating prejudice, discrimination, racism and anti-Semitism, is education. Knowledge about your neighbor's culture would promote understanding and mutual respect. It would create Bridges of Tolerance.

General guidelines:

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This project is meant for B'nai B'rith lodges in Central & Eastern Europe. The project will need about six months of preparation. It should be operational before Pesach 2013 and the application forms for various grants should be sent by May 2013. We will start with three to five participating countries and we propose two to three events per year, be it for adults or children. The events will be free of charge, open to all citizens.

The set-up

1. Chain of communication:

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one overall coordinator together with one contact person per country, will form the management team;

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each country will have a creative team, a treasurer, a P.R. team and a fund raising team;

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in each country, the contact person together with the four team leaders will form the local management group;

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the creative team will have experts from each cultural field: music, fine arts, literature, film & theatre; each of them will be responsible for giving form and content to that specific event. The form and content is entirely flexible as long as it reflects the Jewish contribution to that country's culture. The topic of the programs will change per year: we can decide to do the first year music, the second year painting etc. The dates of the events will not be the same for all countries so that they have the possibility to visit each other's events.

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the treasurer together with the creative team, draws up the budget and is responsible for the supervision of each event's financial aspect. Each participating lodge will open a separate BB account for the project.

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the P.R. team's tasks will include: communication with government officials and institutions, municipalities, press, other Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, NGOs. They are part of the local management team since they have to be kept informed of every facet of the preparations.

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the fund raising team's responsibility is to raise funds locally. Also together with the coordinator, several applications will be submitted for international grants such as: The Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund: they give funds for projects that promote Jewish Culture and mutual respect in Central and Eastern Europe; the EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency). This agency is responsible for the management of programs in the field of education, culture, youth, citizenship and audiovisual for the EU. One of the main questions asked on all grant application is who are the co-sponsors. Therefore it is essential that local institutions, foundations, private persons get involved and become sponsors.

When the project is sufficiently developed, has a form, a content and a budget, the application for grants will be written professionally through our office in Brussels.

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Thank you for your attention. I hope you will all want to help by sponsoring this important project.