

PHILADELPHIA

Community Kollel Celebrates 20th Anniversary Dinner

“Please know that even greater than the support you have shown by lifting up the Torah is what you have gained by the Torah lifting you up!”

These were the words of Rabbi Yechiel Biberfeld at the Philadelphia Community Kollel’s Annual Dinner, held on Sunday, January 10.

This year’s dinner was clearly very different than any other previous dinner hosted by the kollel. Rabbi Yoel Dovid Zeffren, Associate *Rosh Kollel*, related what went into the planning. “With the world increasingly viewing curtailing activities as an acceptable strategy, we felt it was crucial to hold an in-person event. The kollel’s contribution to the community is *limud haTorah*, and we can’t forget that Torah and *tefillah* are more essential than everything. We also wanted people to be aware

that while we have adjusted, we have not ceased our activities, and all are welcome in our *beis medrash*. We felt that this event should reflect that *ruach* of the kollel, and convey the message of *lo yamushu mipicha*, that Torah has to go on.”

Nevertheless, the novelty and the unknown created a logistical mountain. Ultimately, the kollel decided to host a drive-up event, in which dinner attendees would drive up to a parking lot, receive a gourmet dinner which could be eaten in their cars, and watch the event program on large screens, while tuning in on their FM radios.

“We felt very strongly that if we brought everyone together on one lot, watching one screen, it would be an inspiring but still safety-compliant dinner, and we would succeed in inspiring attendees on the importance of continuing to learn Torah,” noted Rabbi Zeffren. “*Baruch Hashem*, the event was truly a great success and went smoothly on every level, including relatively mild

temperatures for January. I don’t think we have ever seen so much *siyatta diShmaya* in an event since our inception.”

Rabbi Menachem Friedman, emcee and beloved local *Rebbi*, introduced the evening. “We are here to celebrate 20 years of Torah study in our community ... As we navigate the current reality, let’s make a pledge to make Torah a stronger anchor in our lives. As we are living in times of change, let us remember that Torah lived through many tumultuous periods. It is our strength and will remain with us for eternity.”

Dr. Israel Pendrak, president of the kollel, recalled last year’s *Siyum HaShas*, and how 2020 began with a monumental event which celebrated the primacy of Torah learning in our lives. “With this inspiration, we began facing the spring and the challenges of the current pandemic. All of the restrictions reminded us of how important it is to maintain Torah learning, and how connection to our *chavrusos* is vital to our survival as Torah Jews.”

Rabbi Yechiel Biberfeld, *Rosh Kollel*, delivered *divrei chizuk*, encouraging all to make the effort to learn on whatever level they are able. “Looking into the future, there will be more people learning [in the kollel] with a greater depth of Torah, and we hope that you will join us on this next leg of our journey.”

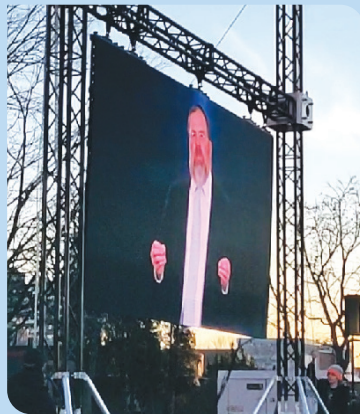
A highlight of the evening was a greeting delivered personally by Hagaon Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky, *shlita*, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva of Philadelphia, who emphasized how much the Philadelphia community has changed over the past 20 years with the presence of the kollel. “A community that has a kollel is enriched. There are people who are sitting and learning, there are more *bnei Torah* in town, the community is a different community,” the *Rosh Yeshiva* asserted.

The program continued with a feature film professionally produced by Rabbi Yosef Prupas, director of community programming, in conjunction with Mint Media, featuring Rabbi Yechiel Spero, who masterfully narrated three heartwarming stories that depicted the vital importance of living Torah, building Torah, and learning Torah.

Rabbi Biberfeld wrapped up the video with a stirring message, “We are living in such uncertain times. Only those of us who are connected to Torah learning will transcend the craziness of this world. It is the only thing that will allow us to stay safe and keep us sane ... Torah is the only hope for mankind.”

With that message, Rabbi Biberfeld introducing an extremely moving presentation of an original song produced by Rabbi Yerachmiel Begun, and sung by children of kollel families. The production illustrated activities of the kollel and emphasized the message that “Only Torah yields the hope for mankind.”

Rabbi Zeffren concluded, “It was really an extraordinary evening and true *kiddush Hashem*. Judging by the feedback, we could certainly say that this was one of the greatest moments in our 20-year history. We believe Hashem is sending us a message — be *moser nefesh lichvod haTorah*, and everything else will miraculously fall into place.”



Yoni Danielli

Right photo: View of the cars at the Philadelphia Community Kollel’s 20th Anniversary Celebration (Above, L and C): Hagaon Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky, *shlita*, and Rabbi Yechiel Biberfeld, *Rosh Kollel*, addressing the Philadelphia Community Kollel’s 20th Anniversary Celebration. (Top R): Rabbi Yechiel Spero, seen on the screen in the feature presentation.

