International Yiddish Conference coming to town

BY RANDALL P. LIEBERMAN

Rukhl "Cookie" Blattman, of Tamarac, is a popular local Yiddish entertainer and a former board member of the International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC), an organization of Yiddish clubs that have affiliated to promote Yiddish language and culture.

Blattman is excited that the IAYC’s 16th International Conference will be held this year at the Boca Raton Marriott at Boca Center (1510 Town Center Circle) from Nov. 14-17. In fact, Blattman will be the opening act for Saturday night’s entertainment.

Blattman said: “As well as the IAYC, do all we can to nurture and perpetuate the Yiddish language. With this conference, those who love the Yiddish language will be treated to a fabulous weekend of lectures and entertainment.”

The conference is a celebration for Yiddish enthusiasts of Yiddish language, culture, literature, poetry, art, history and music. The conference is packed full of rich and juicy programs, with local, national and internationally-recognized luminaries as presenters.

Said IAYC president Josef Vaisman: “For dozens and dozens of generations, our ancestors spoke Yiddish — a language that to a great degree shaped our culture, traditions, mentality and worldview. Why should it stop now? It is hard to predict the future, and we don’t know what role Yiddish will play in 50 or 100 years. But if we try to preserve what we can of this rich heritage today, it will have much better chances in the future. And that is exactly what IAYC is doing.”

The theme of the conference is “Yiddish Heroes,” which dovetails well with the theme (“Heroes, Villains, Saints and Fools: People in the Book”) of the Nov. 16, Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County “Global Day of Jewish Learning” — of which the conference is officially a part.

Troim Katz Blacher Handler, of West Palm Beach — an author of Yiddish poems and short stories, a Yiddish teacher extraordinare, a lecturer on Yiddish literature and Jewish history, and a co-author of two books in Yiddish and Japanese — will be honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Troim’s husband, Frank “Fayle” Handler, also a teacher and lecturer, will be one of the many hour-long, break-out session presenters. Frank Handler will present a session in English titled “The Holocaust of Mendel Beylis and the Jews of the Ukraine.”

Break-out sessions will include lectures, discussions and workshops and will be in either Yiddish or English or a mixture of the two.

Other break-out session presenters from Florida include Dr. Doron Abend-David, director of the Yiddish language program at the University of Florida; Riva Ginsburg, teacher, translator and speaker for NEXT GENERATIONS; Erica Gold, speaker and officer of the Association of Jewish Libraries; Ruth Glasberg Gold, Holocaust survivor and inspirational teacher and speaker; Marlis Humphreys, president of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies; Genia Kutner, Holocaust survivor and community teacher/volunteer; Carren Schairner, folklorist and storyteller; and Leon Weissberg, Jewish education leader.

Keynote speakers addressing the whole conference include Sarah Bunin Benor, Haas Diner, Gennady Estratish, Mikhail Krutikov and Maxine Schackman. Schackman, the director of Judaica Sound Archives at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, will speak about “Yiddish Music and Song: The Heartbeat of Immigrant Jews.”

Entertainers include a ventriloquist, comedians, dramatic readers, dancers and cabaret performers, as well as practitioners of Cantorial, Yiddish, Klezmer, Roma, Contemporary, Folk, Jazz and Broadway music.

Florida entertainers performing are Blattman, Alejandra Czarny, Cantor David and Shira Presler and Eddie Shraybman.

There will also be a special “Bring and Brag” program for conference attendees to display and share their own publications and works of art (not necessarily Yiddish) and a vendor area with Judaica items, books and music for sale.

Those attending the full conference will have the rare opportunity to attend dine-in discussions with a number of presenters and distinguished guests.

Summed up IAYC member Bails Pransley: “It is a labor of love to give voice to our Yiddish language and culture for the enjoyment of so many.”

Early-bird conference rates have been extended in Florida for people who mail in their registration forms and payment checks no later than Sept. 30. Payment for the conference is by check only. No credit cards accepted.

For more information about the conference, including the different registration options and costs, contact IAYC Corresponding Secretary Barbara Goldstein at iayc2014@gmail.com or 713-723-1895. Local information numbers are 561-900-0434 and 561-498-5961. Visit the IAYC website at www.yiddishclubs.org.