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Jewish Community Foundation Hosts Lunch Speaker Event for Non-Profits

In difficult economic times, it seems logical for non-profit organizations to scale back or curtail their fundraising efforts. To do so, however, is to jeopardize their long-term financial health. So preached Yoav Schlesinger of Building Blox Consulting to a rapt roomful of representatives of Jewish non-profit organizations at the first “Lunch and Learn” presented by the Jewish Community Foundation of the West. The event, held November 14, 2008 in the Jewish Federation board room, was provided at no charge by the Foundation as a community service to current and prospective organizational fund holders.

The session began with a brief introduction to the Foundation, which manages approximately \$5 million in funds for organizations and individuals, by its president Scott Shapiro and then proceeded into Schlesinger’s presentation on “Successful Fundraising in Challenging Times.” The attendees, from synagogues, social service groups, and educational organizations, had indicated at the outset that they would like a somewhat abbreviated session, but as they reached the agreed-upon ending time almost everyone chose to stay and continue the discussion, which finished almost an hour later than planned.

“The presentation was an outstanding service to the community,” said Steven Lewis, who attended in his capacity as president of the board of directors of Hillel at Davis and Sacramento. Enthused Cecily Kane, who serves as Vice President of Finance for Temple Or Rishon in Orangevale, “I’ve had many previous trainings on fund raising and fund management, and this was the most useful one I’ve attended. Yoav actually captured the essence of fund raising from the ground up, and he did it in a very succinct and professional manner. I would definitely attend another session by his group.”

Building Blox provides consulting services exclusively to non-profit organizations; more than 60 percent of its clients are Jewish organizations. During the program, Schlesinger provided an overview of historical trends in philanthropy, noting that changes in philanthropy are not directly correlated with changes in the stock market. Even in bad economic times, contributions don’t tend to decrease – rather the challenging economy tends to arrest the rate of increase, according to a study conducted by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. Furthermore, organizations that cut back fundraising efforts in a weak economy tend to experience the greatest decline in gifts. He urged his audience to focus on the things they can control and consider this as an opportunity for organizations to distinguish themselves by clearly defining and communicating their mission, core purpose, primary goals and vision to their constituents.

Because the first program was so well received, the Foundation will be pursuing further opportunities to provide education to Sacramento-area Jewish non-profit organizations.

For more information about the Foundation or about future Lunch and Learn programs,

please contact Cindy Klutznick, Director of Philanthropy for the Jewish Community Foundation of the West, at (916) 484-0954.