

JHF gives unsolicited funds to local congregations

By Barbara Bayer
Staff Writer

The Jewish Heritage Foundation, for the first time in its 13-year history, is giving unsolicited funds to Kansas City's synagogues and temples. A total of \$50,000 was allocated following its May board meeting, with varying amounts based on the size of the congregation.

Dr. Daniel Scharf, JHF's president, said the foundation had always acknowledged the "huge importance" of the congregations in the community, but had not found an appropriate way to recognize that fact monetarily. Yet the board had a strong desire to provide support for them.

"As part of the mission of the Jewish Heritage Foundation, we wanted to support all that our congregations and rabbis do to strengthen and preserve our Jewish community and our Jewish faith," Dr. Scharf said.

So the JHF board decided to make the initial congregational support grants with absolutely no strings attached.

"We simply asked that they use the money in any way they felt would best benefit their congregations and our community as a whole. We intend for this to be a one-year pilot study, and we are anxious to hear back from them as to how the money was spent and to what degree it proved helpful. We then plan to revisit the project during our 2008 Jewish

grant cycle to determine whether this type of grant merits continuation," Dr. Scharf said.

Ellen Kort, JHF's executive director, said JHF Treasurer Steve Gershon designed a mathematical formula that determined how to divide a total of \$50,000 among the congregations. Each congregation was rated as large, middle, small or very small based on its membership.

Eleven local congregations received the following grants:
\$10,500 — Beth Shalom and B'nai Jehudah
\$7,500 — Beth Torah and

Kehilath Israel
\$3,500 — Ohev Shalom and New Reform Temple

\$2,000 — BIAV and Kol Ami
\$1,000 — Or Hadash, Chabad House Center and Torah Learning Center

Kort said the unsolicited grants took the congregations by "such surprise they didn't know what to do."

"Our goal is for them not to create something. We really want this to be budget relief. We know money is difficult for everybody," Kort said.

She said some congregations might wish to add to their scholarship funds, while others might use the money for staff training.

Even though no strings are attached, Kort said, lay leaders from Beth Shalom and B'nai Jehudah have already called the JHF office to pass along their preliminary plans

to another," said Rabbi Kliel Rose, who came up with the concept with the help of two congregants who work in advertising and marketing. The auction concluded Monday morning, three days before the High Holy Days, and there were no bids. Rabbi Rose said the auction was more about gaining the attention of disconnected Jews. Temple Emanu-El, a 1,400-seat Conservative congregation, was founded in the 1940s on South Beach. It once had thousands of members but not now has about 200 families.

for using the money.

"We are not treating this like any other grant. It's unsolicited. It's 'Thank you for your

good work. We appreciate all you do,'" Kort said.

Kort said that if JHF leaders think the pilot program was a

success, they would likely continue it and "maybe even put more behind this."



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JTA News Brief

Synagogue seats up for bid on eBay

Two lifetime front-row seats to services at a Miami Beach synagogue are being auctioned off on eBay with bids starting at \$1.8 million. The winning family's name will be engraved on Seats 1 and 2 of Row 1, Section DD, at Temple Emanu-El, The Associated Press reported. The winner also will receive free parking, two custom-made tallitot and yarmulkes, as well a tax write-off. The seats can be passed down to family members. "It's a gift that goes from one generation