

# Local teens join N.J. peers to help with flood cleanup

AJW Staff Report

Fifteen Jewish teens from New Jersey **NCSY** (National Conference of Synagogue Youth) volunteered Oct. 20-24 to work with Nechama – Jewish Response to Disaster, which was deployed to help with sandbagging and cleanup after flooding along the Zumbro River in southern Minnesota (10-15-10 AJW).

The volunteers from New Jersey NCSY (part of the Orthodox Union's international youth program) are from Torah Academy of Bergen County, Teaneck; Teaneck High School; Fair Lawn High School; and Northern Highlands High School, Allendale.

The New Jersey teen group is led by Rabbi Ethan Katz, who has previously organized youth volunteers to help Nechama in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike in Texas and flooding in Atlanta, Ga.

"This was our most amazing trip yet," Katz said in a press release. "I am extremely proud of our students, who tackled any assignment they were given with tremendous spirit and eagerness to assist and improve the communities in Minnesota. They truly rose to the occasion and worked as a team to accomplish the set tasks; they were a tremendous *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of God's Name)."

Amy Cytron is the volunteer coordinator and office manager for Nechama. She was first contacted by Katz about two years ago to discuss the possibility of working with the organization for his NCSY service learning trips.

"They bring these great kids," Cytron told the AJW. "They've just been a fabulous partnership with us."

On Thursday, Oct. 21, the New Jersey students worked in the home of an elderly woman in Albert Lea, which

had been flooded by groundwater. In addition to cleaning her basement, making it free of mold and mildew, the students assembled a hospital bed for her and helped her pack and organize her belongings, which made "her quality of life much better," according to Cytron.

On Friday, 26 teens from the Twin Cities gave up one day of their MEA break to join their peers from New Jersey and help with cleanup efforts. They represented various synagogues as well as the local NCSY chapter and BBYO.

On that day, the students cleaned up the River Park in Oronoco.

"It was pretty amazing watching all these kids from all denominations, but all Jewish, work together, have fun, interact and clean up for a southern Minnesota community," Cytron said. "We worked together, we prayed

together, we ate together and we had fun together. And it was an incredible experience that day, I was really taken aback by that."

On Friday night, the students spent Shabbat at the Chabad House in Rochester, which is led by Rabbi David Greene. On Sunday, they went back to work in Hammond, where they removed damaged flooring from a restaurant, took down wall boards at City Hall, and cleaned up mud from a flooded home.

"Very, very exhausted kids got on the airplane on Sunday afternoon," Cytron said.

Nechama plans to continue its relationship with New Jersey NCSY and is exploring the possibility of a trip with the group in March. Cytron also said that Nechama has wrapped up its work in southern Minnesota.



Courtesy of Nechama

**Michael Hoenig (third from left), a first year rabbinical student from New Jersey, works with one student from Yeshiva High School of the Twin Cities, and Twin Cities students Benji Mosow and Adam Tarshish at River Park in Oronoco.**

