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Tomche Shabbos Adapts To Changing Times

By Sandy Eller

Say the words "Tomchei Shabbos" in the New York City area and the mind will likely conjure up images of rows of brown boxes being packed with food for Shabbos by volunteers before being dropped off anonymously on the doorsteps of struggling families. Multiple Tomchei Shabbos organizations operate throughout our local area, serving the residents of many Jewish communities including Boro Park, Flatbush, the Five Towns, Far Rockaway, Passaic and Bergen County, but in upstate Rockland County, Tomche Shabbos has expanded its offerings to include a full array of services, beyond the enormously helpful Shabbos boxes.

Tomche Shabbos of Rockland County (this organization spells "Tomche" differently from the others) had been serving residents of the greater Monsey area for close to 40 years when a man approached director Alan Rosenstock after davening one day to discuss a difficult situation.

"His business had failed and he knew he needed to learn more about computers but didn't know the first thing about computers," Rosenstock told The Jewish Press. "The following Shabbos I was speaking at another shul and I repeated the story. Several people in that neighborhood called a meeting and decided that if one person needs this kind of help, others do too and they launched our adult education division."

According to Rosenstock, hundreds of people have obtained valuable job skills through the program which offers free classes in Quick Books, Word and Excel. He estimated that over 150 people have been placed in new jobs through Tomche Shabbos.

"The Rambam says that the highest level of *tzedakah* is to help people with a *parnassah*," observed Rosenstock. "We do job training and job placements."

Given the particularly difficult financial climate, Tomche Shabbos continued to evolve.

"With the passage of time our focus has changed from food to anything that a struggling family might need," said Rosenstock. "We try to rise to the occasion and address those needs with whatever remedies *klal Yisrael* has to offer. Many people have come to us needing financial counseling and we now have volunteers to help us with that at no charge."

The Chodesh Food Outlet is another innovative Tomche Shabbos program, offering food at significantly discounted prices to *rabbeim*, kollel families and others who struggle to pay their food bills. Tomche Shabbos purchases food via a sealed bid system, passing the substantial savings on to consumers who place orders via phone and pick up their items at a designated time and place.

"Right now we are doing this approximately five times a year but we are slowly increasing the tempo and hope to be doing it every month," said Rosenstock.

Tomche Shabbos's communal efforts are a direct result of the generosity of others and Rosenstock noted that he often has kind-hearted individuals calling him asking what they can do to help.

"We have people who are inventive and creative in how they seek to help *klal Yisrael*," said Rosenstock. "We try to work with these generous individuals and translate that into ways to help people. We are dealing with both incredible need and incredible *baalei tzedakah* and we view ourselves as *shadchanim* trying to do the maximum for those who struggle."

Other Tomche Shabbos projects include the Sharing a Simcha campaign, which enables those making a *simcha* to donate to the hungry in honor of their celebration, Adopt a Family, which allows donors to subsidize Shabbos food for a designated family for a contribution of \$50 per week and a Passover fund, which helps close to 1,000 people buy essential *Pe-*

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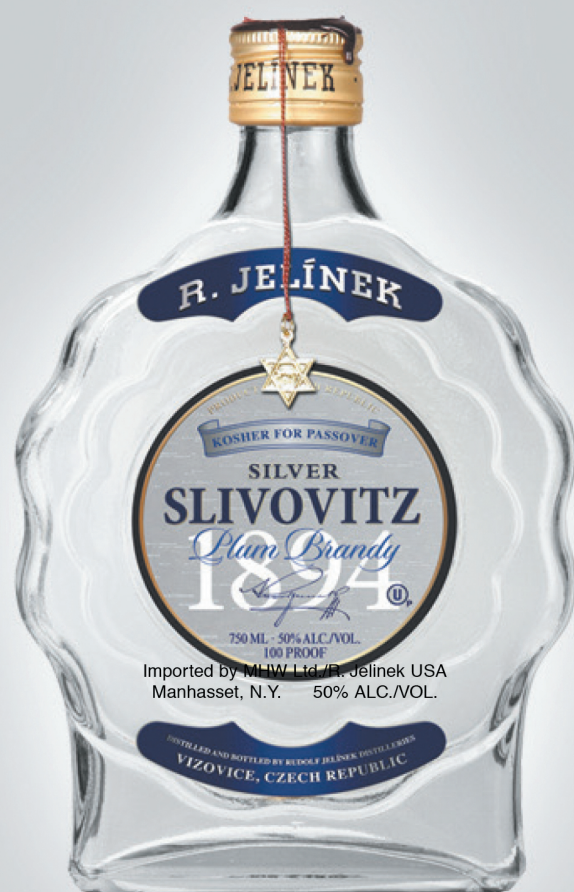
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