

President's Installation Speech at the WRJ Southeast District Biennial, Boca Raton, Florida on October 28, 2006.

Thank you, Barbara, and thank you, Rosanne, for being here to make this weekend so special ... and a big thank you, Andrea, and your wonderful Sisterhood for all your hard work bringing us to Boca.

Many people are responsible for my standing here tonight and I want to thank just a few of them. My mother, Phyllis Shapack, who was unable to be here this weekend. She was the first Sisterhood woman I ever knew. I still remember helping her at a Chanukah Bazaar as a very young child. I am forever grateful for her love, wisdom and constant support throughout my life.

Rachel Ward, my mentor and friend, of blessed memory. Anita Rosenberg, who started me on my path on the District Board, by asking me to serve as a committee chair. One of the reasons I was asked, she joked was that I "fit the height requirement!" Other friends I want to thank who came before me: Natalie Pritikin, Susan Stahlman Bass, Ilayne Finklestone, Jo Stamler-Thompson and Barbara Shub. Every one of them has played and continues to play such an important role in my life

My sons, Bryan and Corey, who used to say: "Mom, if you got paid for all the volunteer work you did, we'd be rich."

And finally, my wonderful husband, Pat, without whose support I could not have accomplished all that I have during our 30 years of marriage. He's always there for me no matter what, making it possible for me to be part of this amazing group of women and more.

Tonight, we celebrate the Women of Reform Judaism, as "Together We Bring Promise" for the future. Not just the future of Reform Judaism, but the future of our District - the WRJ Southeast District. We honor our past and the history of our sisterhoods that brought us to where we are today. I need you to join me in building our future - a future where we are more connected to one another and providing support and encouragement that we all may grow and flourish.

Over the past two years, under the leadership of Barbara Shub, we have held six Area Days, which is a wonderful beginning to bring Sisterhoods and our District together. Over the next two years, my plan is to increase the number of Area Days to at least eight.

Now, if you are sitting here tonight, asking, "Area Days ... What are Area Days?" well, that's my point. Area Days are tools to help you as individual sisterhoods learn about the resources, programs and services of WRJ and of the District. Area Days help get the word out, not just to the two or three women who can attend an event like this District Convention, or the local President, who attends the Leadership Conference each year, but to many more involved women in each sisterhood. Area Days provide opportunities to gather together in smaller groups in a convenient location to create a sacred community of women joined together by a shared mission and common values and goals. The Union for Reform Judaism offers "The Taste of Judaism". I would like to see us develop "The Taste of the WRJ Southeast District"!

Building on the success of our past Presidents is my task. I am following some fabulous women, who held this office before me, some of whom are here this weekend, sitting on this dais tonight. Each has left her mark, and I hope to do the same.

Our District has always been at the forefront of WRJ. Many programs and resources developed in the Southeast have been used as examples of how things can be done. For example, our Treasurer's Worksheet is a form now used in many other WRJ Districts. This District developed and continues to use

“Area Director’s Reports.” These forms are used when contacting our local Sisterhood presidents, using specific questions and timely information. Other Districts are now using similar systems for establishing and maintaining connections with their local sisterhood presidents.

As a result of our focus on Leadership Development and the level of commitment within our District, many women from the Southeast have risen to higher levels of leadership, serving on the WRJ Board of Directors, as well as members of the Executive Committee and officers. Our Southeast District is well represented, primarily because YOU see the value and worth in what we do, and YOU believe in the sacred work we do as women in our communities and out in the world.

WRJ develops and makes available many tools to help our sisterhoods increase their membership rolls. “Sisterhood Sunday,” is a program developed as a Membership campaign for individual Sisterhoods. The materials and the suggested strategy are sent out to all affiliated sisterhoods, to use in their drive to increase their numbers, which in turn also grows our District. The materials for Chayei Sarah are terrific, as you saw earlier today, and offer just a taste of the soon-to-be published “Torah: A Women’s Commentary.” These are just two examples of the resources available to you, as affiliated sisterhoods.

Given today’s technology, we need to consider the best use of the tools of e-mail and voicemail. We just can’t overlook the best communication tool we have, that being one-on-one contacts. Don’t get me wrong, I thank God everyday for e-mails. They are a quick way to keep in touch, ask and answer questions, send reminder messages, and so on. BUT, if you really want to connect with someone, you must do it in a more personal way. It is more effort, yes, but in the end, it makes our sisterhoods better. No matter how we try to simplify our lives with technology, nothing can or should take the place of person-to-person contact. To quote from the report issued at the Houston Assembly: “Sisterhoods who feel connected, thrive.” And I want to add to that: “and the individual woman within those Sisterhoods also thrives.”

My vision for our District is to have each woman within our sisterhoods feel more connected: to each other, to the District, and to WRJ. We need to speak to them to share our enthusiasm and pertinent information. We need to listen to them, to their successes, and their challenges. We need to see them at our District and WRJ events, to surround them with the richness of our sacred community of women.

Our connection goes beyond just the organizational value. Because of Sisterhood, because of our District, because of WRJ, my life has been richly blessed. The connections I’ve made are invaluable and I will cherish them forever.

Coming to any District or WRJ event is one of the most important things you can do for not just yourselves, but for your Sisterhood.

What you have learned this weekend and the friends you have made will only be strengthened if you share your experience with those back home. I urge you to spread your enthusiasm of what went on here this weekend. Talk to all who will listen. Ask your Rabbi if you can tell it from the Bimah at a Shabbat service. Ask your Congregational President to let you give a report to your Board. Of course, tell your own sisterhood board about this weekend! Let them know just how important it is to make connections with not just your own sisterhood women, but with sisterhoods within your surrounding areas.

So, when you know that there is going to be an Area Day - or better yet, you volunteer to host one, please do all that you can to encourage as many women as possible to participate and share in the sacred community. It is another way to give those who haven’t experienced a convention yet, and those who want to experience it a bit more, the opportunity to come to an event to learn, to share, and to make some new friends.

I promise it will be one of the best things you do for yourself and for everyone in your sisterhoods.

Not only do the District and WRJ exist to help with our sisterhoods, Temples and communities, they help us with our day-to-day personal lives. We are “Stronger Together” and “Together we bring promise”. Thank you.