

Book club boom

Apparently, Oprah Winfrey's television program was really onto something: The success of her book club encouraged Americans to read, prompting an increase in bookstore and public library visits. Today, people from various walks of life – although mostly women – belong to some kind of group that reviews books, from synagogue off-shoots to neighborhood friends to juvenile courts and halls. Some groups don't even require you to read the book in order to participate in a discussion.

Many bookstores and dealers now offer discounts to clubs that buy books for members, a boon to those whose libraries are in short supply of the most popular picks. The books selected depend only on the tastes and interests of the group members.

Many Women's American ORT chapters have clubs that meet monthly to discuss an assigned work. Our members are finding new dimensions to their participation in chapter life and setting an example for their children and grandchildren by demonstrating that reading is a lively and engaging pursuit. Plus, it's a great way to get on the same page with those who enjoy similar interests!

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Ask** your members if they would like to start a book club. Book lists can be found at www.booksense.com. Click on "Read Up!" for information on books and discussion questions. Other sites with information are the American Library Association, www.ala.org, and www.borders.com. Bookstores in your area may also have web sites and information that you and your members will find useful.

WOMEN'S AMERICAN



quORTerly briefing:
issues and trends

- Haya Varon, Community Chair
- Lucille Brotman, Writer/Editor



■ **Check out** www.folusa.org, the Friends of Libraries site. If your chapter has members who are young mothers, click on "Books for Babies" for information on suitable books and games and using the library.

■ **Consider** the facilities of your community and whether your chapter can help facilitate book clubs for young people in places where they need an opportunity to meet and express themselves.

■ **Discuss** with members of your chapter book club if they wish to donate the books they have already read to libraries, schools or other groups as part of WAO's Adopt-A-Shelf Campaign. For a program description, see www.waort.org/adoptashelf.html.

When seeing your shadow may clarify your future

Job shadowing is an activity that gives kids a chance to experience the world of work from the inside and see how what is learned in school relates to the job. Students shadow workplace mentors as they go through a typical day on the job.

National Job Shadowing is a coordinated effort of America's Promise, Junior Achievement, the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Education. Thanks to the generosity of 100,000

employers, more than 1 million students have experienced the world of work since January 2003.

Job shadowing complements the long-standing tradition of Women's American ORT and the global ORT program of preparing young people for careers – in business, industry and technology – that change with the needs of the world.

Thousand of professionals in a wide range of industries including government/public affairs, health-care, technology, hospitality and retail participate. Many of the best-known corporations in America provide opportunities for students, including CVS Pharmacies; hotel chains such as Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt and Starwood; Wal-Mart and well-known restaurant chains.

Next year's kickoff will be February 2 (Ground Hog Job Shadow Day), and even more students are expected to participate. Not only do students learn how to succeed in the workplace, mentors are able to recruit a new cadre of employees.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Find out** if your community participates in job shadowing. Go to www.jobshadow.org/about_program/sstories.html and select your state to see what's been done in past years. Members who work for participating businesses can

encourage involvement, and members with school-age children can encourage school participation.

■ **Check out** what sponsors such as Junior Achievement, www.ja.org, and America's Promise, www.americaspromise.org, are doing, for more ideas on how and where to participate.

■ **Learn** what the Department of Education is doing about job shadowing and other educational initiatives of the current Administration at www.ed.gov.

Is lunch the culprit?

We've all heard how Americans – children included – are becoming fatter (“obese” is the term favored by journalists) and less healthy. For many children, the less-than-healthy lunches they eat at school only compound the problem.

Public schools have become a huge market for junk food – name-brand hamburgers and fries and vending machines stocked with high-sugar drinks and salty, greasy snacks. The problem is compounded by school administrators who are desperate for the revenue generated by product sales and in-school advertising.

As members of Women's American ORT, we know the important role good nutrition plays in enabling children to learn in school. This is one of the reasons why the ORT program often provides lunch – and sometimes breakfast, too – for its students.

Politicians from both parties bemoan our sedentary lifestyles and urge parents to modify their children's eating habits. Somehow, this never really translates into legislation that can really help. The problem is that such changes are either expensive or interfere

with legislators' relationships with major campaign contributors such as mega corporations and the agriculture lobby.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Find out** what your local school system serves for lunch and how much advertising national products provide in the school. Your members have the power to raise questions with the local school boards and even at local schools. For more information, see the Center for Science in the Public Interest's site, www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy.

■ **Raise** the issue with your Congressperson. Our children's health and education are undeniably important to our country.

Support Magen David Adom

The Magen David Adom (Red Star of David), Israel's relief agency (analogous to the American Red Cross) is embroiled in an ongoing struggle for international recognition. Unlike Red Cross and Red Crescent, the Red Star of David is not a recognized symbol of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which consists of the organization of 180 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, including the American Red Cross. The Magen David Adom (MDA) is not a member of the federation and cannot vote or run for office.

The problem has been a refusal to admit MDA under its current symbol; however, a proposal (Third Protocol) is on the table that would admit MDA by creating a new symbol, a diamond, in which the Red Star of David would be placed. In order for this proposal to be adopted, the Swiss government must convene the sig-

natories to the Geneva Conventions. The United States and Israel continue to consult with other governments to convince them to take this step.

Financial leverage is one way to convince the movement to make this change. The U.S. provides \$160 million a year in funding, most of which is for humanitarian efforts overseas. Congress has linked release of the portion of these funds that goes toward headquarters costs of the International Committee of the Red Cross to a certification by the State Department that MDA is not being denied participation in the movement. In order to release more funds in FY 2004, there is a State Department bill, H.R. 1950 and S. 925, which will provide more details on how MDA is being brought into the movement.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Ask** your members to express support to their representatives and senators for the House version of the bill (H.R. 1950) that supports MDA's participation in the movement. See the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) site, www.jewishpublicaffairs.org, for more background information.

■ **Ask** your members to write letters to the American Red Cross thanking them for their efforts on behalf of MDA. Send letters to Marsha Evans, American Red Cross, National Headquarters, 2025 E Street, Washington, DC 20006.

Additional editing by Amy Fiedel

Women's American ORT
250 Park Avenue South, Suite 600
New York, NY 10003-1402

800.51.WAORT ■ 212.505.7700
Fax: 212.674.3057
Web site: www.waort.org