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JEWISH WOMEN WATCHING BREAKS GROUND WITH A CALL FOR MAJOR CHANGE

MANHATTAN, 19 Kislev 5762 --This week, many members of the Jewish community will find a program guide for a new center for MAJOR change in their mailboxes. While this program guide may look very similar to those of the JCC, the 92nd Street Y, Makor, and other American Jewish cultural institutions, this particular guide has a very different message to share with the Jewish community.

This program guide -- a satirical parody of the calendars sent out by Jewish cultural institutions around the country -- is the brainchild of the anonymous renegade group, Jewish Women Watching. The group, known for three consecutive years of High Holiday actions, has previously focused its attention on the paucity of women in the Jewish professional world. With this new endeavor, they take on the additional challenge of critiquing not only the leadership of the Jewish institutional world, but also the programming that it produces.

“When certain types of Jewish women, working class Jews, gay and lesbian Jews are systematically excluded from communal leadership, that exclusion is going to be reflected in the programs that are offered by the community,” says one member of Jewish Women Watching. “Our mission is to make sure that more people are represented in programming and leadership, which will foster a much stronger, more diverse Jewish community.” Jewish Women Watching’s goals are neatly summarized in the centerfold of the sleek, professional brochure with the tagline “Screw Continuity. Make a MAJOR Change.”

What sort of MAJOR changes would the members of Jewish Women Watching like to see in Jewish cultural institutions? One spokesperson suggests: “In addition to a cultural and communal agenda that seriously takes note of the fact that women are qualified and valuable leaders in all areas of the Jewish community, we think that Jewish programming should be financially accessible and inclusive of interfaith and queer Jews; reflect racial and economic diversity; and show commitment to non-Jewish as well as Jewish communal neighbors.”

It's clear that various Jewish cultural institutions inspired the program guide parody. Its design resembles the catalogue of MAKOR, the cultural center for Jews in the their twenties and thirties on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. “We thought that it would be particularly appropriate to do a spoof of programs for younger Jews, because programs for younger Jews are generally just thinly-veiled singles events. We want to remind the Jewish institutional world that younger members of the Jewish community are valuable as individuals, not just as wives- or husbands-to-be,” says another member of the organization. However, she insists that these issues are not unique to Makor, or to any one Jewish cultural institution.

In addition to distributing their new program guide through the mail, the group will also be distributing the brochure through street outreach at various Chanukah events around the city.

To learn more about this project, or to find out more about Jewish Women Watching, email jewishwomenwatching@hotmail.com.