

Photos by Rob Varela / Star staff

Rabbi Dov Muchnik offers the toast of "l'chaim" at the grand opening of the Chabad of Oxnard's Jewish Center. Chabad is an international organization that doesn't differentiate between Orthodox or Reform Jews.

'A Jew is a Jew' at new center

At Oxnard Chabad facility, all sects invited to learn about their faith

By Zeke Barlow

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One of the great things about being Jewish in America is that the pious can worship freely.

But sometimes in all that freedom, people can forget what it means to be a Jew, said Rabbi Dov Muchnik. They can lose touch with their roots, their heritage, the things that make them Jewish.

So Muchnik was especially happy that so many Jews from so many different walks of life came together Sunday to celebrate the opening of the Chabad of Oxnard's Jewish Center, a place where Jews of

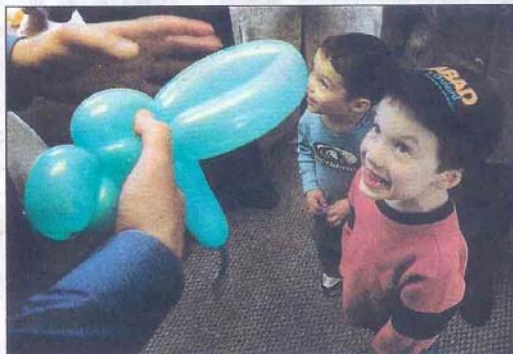
all sects can learn about their faith and heritage.

"This wakes up Jewish souls," Muchnik said after dancing to traditional music with some of the 100 people gathered at the center, which occupies part of a building at Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard.

Chabad is an international organization aimed at strengthening Jewish faith and heritage. It doesn't differentiate between Orthodox or Reform Jews, instead concentrating on the larger picture of Judaism.

"Labels are for cans, not people," said Muchnik. "A Jew

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Harrison Friedman of Camarillo, right, stands next to his brother, Cade, as he watches a balloon artist make a toy animal at Chabad of Oxnard's Jewish Center on Sunday.

participate in any downloading or
service, said Dexter Gulje, C

Rabbi welcomes all Jews

GRAND OPENING

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is a Jew."

Mark Diamond, who attended Sunday, said the center is much needed, because it is easy to lose touch with your roots. "People don't live in communities anymore," said Diamond.

Eyal Rav-Noy, director of the Jewish Learning Academy in Los Angeles, said too many Jews are out of touch with their history.

"Most Jews today are ignorant of their Jewish heritage," Rav-noy said Sunday. "They don't stand for anything specific."

He said Oxnard's Chabad was a step in the direction of "living a Jewish life."

Rabbi Zalmen Gorelik came from Israel for Sunday's opening.

"Wherever there is a Jewish soul, there is a need for nourishment," he said in Hebrew. In America, Jews can often get "lost in the crowd," he said.

Muchnik and his wife came from New York to Oxnard two years ago to start a Chabad, which they have been running out of their home before the new center opened. He has 2,000 Oxnard Jews on his mailing list and hopes the new center will attract more people to services.

The center will be open to all Jews, with services every Saturday morning. Some events will be geared toward children and others toward women, like an upcoming gathering that mixes Pilates and prayer. Many events are planned around the upcoming holy days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Muchnik raised his glass to the crowd Sunday, offering the traditional toast of "l'chaim" for the opening of the center, which was entirely locally funded.

"L'chaim," the crowd said in unison. "L'chaim."

On the Net:
<http://www.chabadofoxnard.com>