

# Doing it to save lives

## Chabad Lifeline's annual fundraising gala

By Linda Zlatkin  
The Suburban

On Wednesday, August 31, evidence of hope for people battling various substance and behavioural addictions was clearly seen at the annual fundraising/gala event held at the Chabad Lifeline Centre. The more than 130 people who attended consisted of a mix of people: some who have received help, some who are in the process, as well as friends, family members and caring members of the community.

Formerly known as Project Pride, the centre moved this past December and is now located at 4615 Côte Ste. Catherine Road into a 90-year-old two-storey house close to the Jewish General Hospital.

Chabad Lifeline does not receive any government funding and is totally dependent on the generosity of the community. Not only was a total of \$148,000 raised that evening, but the testimonials given by two former addicts, Vanessa and Michael, gave credence to the truth that Chabad Lifeline not only changes lives, it saves them.

Vanessa, 34, remembered how she felt when she had her first drink at the age of 12. "I liked the warm feeling the alcohol gave me when it went down my throat," she said. "It made me feel so free. I didn't care what anyone thought of me, I didn't care what was happening around me. I just knew I wanted that feeling again."

In high school Vanessa really didn't like herself at all. She began to skip school, drank and got high on marijuana, which escalated into selling it with her younger brother. But when he began to smoke more than they sold, they owed more money than they actually made. "After that I felt hopeless," she said. "I couldn't seem to get it together."

Vanessa finished high school and then CEGEP at 19, but soon found herself hang-



Chabad Lifeline director Rabbi Benyamin Bresinger (left) and executive director Rabbi Ronnie Fine (right) bookend Heleena and Eddie Wiltzer.

ing out in bars and clubs every night. And her then-roommates liked to party just as much as she did.

By this time she was on welfare. However, she was eventually forced to apply for work and managed to land employment as a pharmacy cashier.

This led to her introduction to heavy painkillers like OxyContin. "When I took those pills, I didn't feel anything. It did even more for me than alcohol. It felt like heaven on earth. The only problem was, I was tired."

Which led to cocaine. "When I began to take cocaine, it allowed me to do so much more. But then things went out of control. I needed more and more drugs and I couldn't seem to numb out anymore," said Vanessa.

One day, the phone rang. It was her

uncle, also an addict, who was dying of a disease that he contracted while using intravenous drugs.

"I like to think of him as my angel," she expressed. "He told me that he understood what I was going through and that there was a place that could help. At the time it was called Project Pride. I was that desperate, I decided it had to be better than what I was doing."

When she first walked in, Vanessa remembered being comforted. "For the first time in my life I felt like someone really cared and that maybe I could really be okay. And that's how it started. They got me into detox and then I was sent to rehab in Toronto. When I got back out, I managed to stay clean. A team of people worked with me. They really motivated me to stay on track."

Vanessa went back to school, got a BA from Concordia University and today works with kids in youth protection. "I can really understand and empathize with these kids I work with."

Vanessa doesn't know where she'd be without Chabad. She said they gave her hope when she didn't have any, believed in her when she didn't believe in herself and always stood behind her, showing her that she could pull herself out of her addiction.

"What we need to understand is that addiction is a disease," said Chabad Lifeline director Rabbi Benyamin Bresinger. "It is not something to be ashamed of. Addiction can be treated."

Bresinger, who works alongside executive director Rabbi Ronnie Fine, said every single person that comes in is treated with dignity and respect. "We show everyone how precious they are. The more you help people feel better about themselves, the more self-esteem they develop."

All this is done in a nonjudgmental way, using the conventional 12-step approach. Services are mostly free of charge. At meetings, people may reveal their innermost thoughts, but do not give their last name.

"A picture is worth a thousand words," adds community volunteer and retired businessman, Eddie Wiltzer, who served as MC for the event. "This place has such a feeling of love and warmth."

Anyone contemplating turning to Chabad for help should know that besides dealing with drug and alcohol addiction, there is also help for other addictions like sex, gambling, overeating, overspending and more. People from all walks of life and religions are welcome. What's more, they work with the whole family, not just the individual.

For more information, call 514-738-7700, or visit [www.chabadlifeline.com](http://www.chabadlifeline.com)  
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# My little whine about wine drinkers



**Bernard Mendelman**  
Write Where I Belong

On a pleasant summer day, who can ask for a more scrumptious meal than a hot baguette, a platter of cheese, local grown veggies and fruits — accompanied by a carafe of wine.

When it comes to wine I enjoy almost any kind and I can't really tell the difference

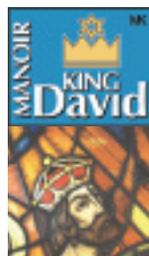
between an expensive and cheap one. To illustrate, recently a dinner guest brought a gift of wine, a trend that seems to be replacing chocolates and flowers. It was a Canadian ice wine from the Niagara region. It came in a thin, elongated bottle. I had never tasted this wine before. I served it with dessert and I found it very refreshing. During my next visit to the SAQ I thought I would get another bottle, until I found out it cost \$50. At that price I'm afraid ice wine leaves me cold.

I usually limit my wine purchases to the \$15 range. Not so my friend, who considers himself a wine connoisseur. He knows squat about literature, theatre, opera, ballet or art, but when it comes to wine, he professes to be a maven. He subscribes to the wine magazine *Decanter*, attends wine-tasting events, brags of an elaborate cellar and bids at wine auctions, where vintage bottles have fetched over \$100,000.

Whereas he deems me to be a wine slob, I think of him as a wine snob.

That's why I cringe whenever I go out dining with him. The routine seldom varies. He studies the wine list, taking his sweet time to make a selection while I starve. When the server brings the bottle to the table, he puts on a pompous display. He smells the cork while suspiciously holding his glass up to the light to check for spots. After he clears his throat — making some ugly noises — he pours about two inches of

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