

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Jane Glaubman

Director of Communications and Information Management

The Covenant Foundation

(212) 245-3500

jane@covenantfn.org

Handsome Rewards to Jewish Educators:

**Ms. Jane Taubefeld Cohen, Dr. Marc Kramer, and Rabbi Loren Sykes to Receive
2006 Covenant Awards**

New York, NY, 5/17/06- Continuing a fifteen-year tradition, The Covenant Foundation announced today that it would bestow its prestigious annual Awards on three pioneering Jewish educators for 2006. The Covenant Award, which carries a prize of \$25,000 for the recipient and an additional \$5,000 for his or her institution, is considered the premier honor in the world of Jewish education.

The 2006 Covenant Award recipients are Ms. Jane Taubefeld Cohen, Head of School at the South Area Solomon Schechter Day School in Stoughton, MA; Dr. Marc Kramer, Executive Director of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network in New York, NY; and Rabbi Loren Sykes, Executive Director of Camp Ramah Darom in Atlanta, GA. All three are known for their personal devotion and generosity as well as for innovations that are changing the face of Jewish education in North America.

"Shining a Bright Light" on Jewish Education

Established by the Crown Family Foundation in 1991, the Covenant Awards honor outstanding achievement in a field that usually offers relatively little remuneration or public recognition.

"From the beginning, the idea was to shine a bright light on those in the trenches, people whose work isn't usually acknowledged," says the Foundation's Executive Director, Harlene Winnick Appelman. "This work comes from the heart and soul. You have people doing exceptional things, transforming the way we preserve Jewish heritage and values in a changing world—truly inspired educators—and they get very little in return. The Awards are a way to say 'thank you' and to give these educators a platform."

This year's honorees were chosen after in-depth consideration of over ninety dedicated and talented nominees.

Making a National Impact at a Jewish Day School: Jane Taubenfeld Cohen

Most readers may not know her name, but experts say that Ms. Jane Taubenfeld Cohen is making a national impact with her pioneering use of “differentiated instruction” to include all students equally at the South Area Solomon Schechter Day School (SASSDS) in Stoughton, Massachusetts, which she co-founded in 1989. Differentiated instruction recognizes that no one method will be successful with all learners; it helps every student reach his or her potential and is particularly valuable for extending educational opportunities to students with special needs.

In accordance with Ms. Cohen’s vision, SASSDS seeks to admit students regardless of financial means and to provide an excellent education to all, including those with diagnosed learning disabilities. “Jane would not accept a situation wherein members of the same family were forced to make the traumatic choice of sending some children to Jewish day schools and others to public or special private schools,” says one supporter of her nomination.

She “has created a place which helps ensure the survival of the Jewish people, a place to prepare children to live a Jewish life in the future but also a place where Judaism is alive every single day,” says another. “She built SASSDS by being a creator, an optimist, a thinker, a peacemaker, a good listener, a visionary, a teacher, an administrator, a fundraiser, a mentor, a guide, a leader, and a friend.”

Leadership and Innovation: RAVSAK’s Dr. Marc Kramer

Dr. Marc Kramer is currently completing his fifth year as executive director of RAVSAK, an organization that represents community day schools throughout the country. RAVSAK provides consultation and direct services to member schools that include professional development, conference planning and coordination, long-range planning, program development, and board development.

As executive director, Dr. Kramer has transitioned the organization from a grassroots initiative into a leading professional organization and expanded its network to over 100 member schools. Like Ms. Cohen, he is committed to the ideal of inclusion and to the understanding that one size does not fit all. Professionals throughout the field testify to the humanity and skill that he brings to this work.

“Marc's transformational leadership has allowed RAVSAK to evolve from a loose affiliation of schools into the central address for community day school education. He has crafted a vision that ensures that children from across the spectrum of Jewish practice are able to flourish in rich, pluralistic settings,” writes a colleague. “Because of Marc, RAVSAK is able to offer its member schools the support and resources to meet the increased demands for excellence in Judaic and secular education.”

Jewish Camping Transformed: Rabbi Loren Sykes

The Covenant Award touches the world of Jewish camping this year in honoring Rabbi Loren Sykes, a thirty-year veteran of Camp Ramah and the founding Executive Director of Camp Ramah Darom in Atlanta, Georgia. Rabbi Sykes is a passionate, committed, and inspirational religious educator who has a deep impact both on the families who attend the camp and on the young people who are employed there, whose Jewish life he nurtures not only in their summers at camp but as they go to college and beyond.

“Each year, Rabbi Sykes builds a 24-7 Jewish community that is inseparable from the ancient Torah text,” says one supporter. “As the first and only executive director of Camp Ramah Darom,” writes another, “he has created from scratch an environment that is safe, inviting, and warm, and transmits Jewish knowledge, values, and identity in everything that exists. He always finds new, creative ways of teaching the key principles of Jewish education and leadership in unique ways so that everyone from a camp veteran to a Ramah novice never gets bored and continually is motivated to work for and with him.”

Not only has Rabbi Sykes been honored with a Covenant Award this year, Camp Ramah Darom has also recently received a three-year Covenant Grant to support Camp Yofi, their groundbreaking summer program for children with autism and their families. Unique in the Jewish world, Camp Yofi provides a meaningful Jewish experience for children and families who have found themselves turned away from other venues; as such, the project has received coverage from regional and national media outlets including *The Jewish Week*.

If a single theme runs through the work of all three Award recipients this year, it is inclusiveness, as demonstrated in the devotion of Jane Taubenfeld Cohen to equal learning opportunities for all interested students, to the pluralistic vision for Jewish day schools that Marc Kramer supports at RAVSAK, to Loren Sykes’ creation of a full Jewish experience for kids and families struggling with the demands of autism.

The Covenant Awards will be presented at the Foundation’s annual Awards Ceremony, to be held in Los Angeles at the UJC General Assembly in November. Nominations for the 2007 Awards will be accepted in the fall, with a deadline of December 1. For more information, please see the Covenant Foundation website: <http://www.covenantfn.org>.