



HISTORY OF THE SISTERHOOD OF JANINA

The Sisterhood of Janina is a living testimony to the success of the first experiment in America of an organization of Judeo/Greek women, of Janina parentage, whose sole purpose was to practice benevolence and charity to our co-religionists in the U. S., those living in Greece and other foreign lands. This group was established in 1932 under the supervision of the late Leon Colchamiro, who saw the need for this noble work as an adjunct to the Kehila Kedosha Janina. Soon, a committee was formed and that was the start of our Sisterhood.

A group of enthusiastic workers solicited membership by making personal visits, door-to-door each month, collecting the 25 cents membership dues. During this brief visit, a chat was enjoyed over the traditional serving of home-made jelly compote. A cup of Turkish coffee was always in order, after which the Sisterhood “Lady” was once again on her way. In time, the Sisterhood of Janina became a Charter Member of the Sephardic Home for the Aged, during the presidency of Ray W. Nachman.

It wasn't too long ago, 1991, that the plight of 37 Albanians (originally from Janina, Greece) seeking to flee Albania, during one of the very few times its borders were open to allow safe passage from the country came to Sisterhood's attention. We accepted the responsibility and challenge of creating a safe haven for these people. Through our members generosity, fund-raising efforts and some help from other sources, these people were brought to our shores and given asylum in Brooklyn. They are now a flourishing group whose numbers have increased due to marriage and childbirth. We share in their joys of becoming Americans, able to flourish in freedom that only our great country can provide and to look back and see what Sisterhood was able to accomplish.

More recently, Sisterhood purchased a fully, cardiac-equipped ambulance for Israel, through the auspices of ARMDI (American Red Magen David for Israel). This ambulance was dedicated on Sunday, June 22, 2003 at Kehila Kedosha Janina. Traffic was closed on Broome Street from 12:30 to 2:30 P.M. and the ambulance was in full display across Broome Street. Many photographs were taken and a beautiful service ensued within the sanctuary of the synagogue. A program of responsive readings with a theme of peace and liberty followed, with Shehehianu, Refuah Shelema, and Hashkavoth prayers read for the people of Israel who have been injured or killed by terrorist attacks were read. We hope this ambulance will be used for non-terrorist emergencies, but rather for the good things in life, such as childbirths. The dedication on the ambulance reads: “Donated with Love by the Sisterhood of Janina to our brave brethren in Israel. May we see Peace in Your Beloved Land and the World. Amen.”

Today, Sisterhood has broadened its membership scope. We no longer are purely a Greek/Judeo Sisterhood, but a amalgamation of Jewish women with one united philosophy—that of philanthropy.

Though our prime concern is to help our needy, our records indicate that financial aid has also been extended to a multitude of charitable and philanthropic organizations. We have donated generously to The Sephardic Home, Kehila Kedosha Janina, The Gift of Life, and other worthwhile charities both here and abroad, with the ambulance for Israel being our latest.

Sisterhood has given generously to a multitude of organizations, but helping people is what we are all about. Many of our members, families, friends are now residents of the Sephardic Home for the Aged and it is with great pride that we spend every Monday After Mothers' Day at The Home. Sisterhood sees to it that each female resident is given a Mother's Day gift and a generous donation is also presented to The Home. The smiles on the faces are like sunshine beaming down at us and if someone were to ask us why we do it, we would just have to point at the lovely faces and not have to say a word. One smile is worth a thousand words.

Such is the work and endeavors of our Sisterhood.

Rose Eskononts, President