

# Largest-ever BBYO International Convention hits Dallas; 800 teens from across the globe participate

By Rachel Gross

“Dream Bigger, Act Bigger” was the theme for the 2010 BBYO International Convention in Dallas. More than 800 teens from across the United States fulfilled that vision for four days as they bonded, shared stories of how Judaism has impacted their lives and made lifelong friends.

The convention, the largest to date, took place for the first time in the Metroplex from Thursday, Feb. 11 to Monday, Feb. 15 at the DFW Hyatt Regency. Teens from Israel, Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey joined in the festivities.

Record snowfall of more than one foot hampered some convention activities. Lynn Schusterman, co-founder of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation, was scheduled to speak prior to opening ceremonies, but her flight from Tulsa, Okla. was canceled. Friday, Feb. 12, was intended to be a day of service where the teens would travel to various nonprofit agencies in the community, but that was canceled as well. Instead, they engaged in advocacy simulation where they discussed issues that mattered to them, learned how to lobby about those issues and discussed how Jewish values play a role in their lives.

Avery Budman, BBYO marketing and communications manager, said the highlight of the weekend was uniting teens to share their visions of BBYO and teaching each other how to continue having meaningful Jewish experiences.

“Bringing everyone together was really inspiring,” she said. “The most important thing they learned was that as a movement of teens united, they can create any change they wish to see in the world. That’s what this is about — bringing them together to share best practices, and to see how powerful they are as a group united.”

Other weekend activities included honoring Dallas community leader Carol Aaron and Lee Wunsch of Houston with the Alumna of the Year Award; a Shabbat song session and more than 30 different Jewish educational workshops; an address by keynote speaker, Israeli-based communication consultant and author Neal Lazarus, who encouraged young people to visit Israel; a “Think Pink” gala to raise awareness for breast cancer; and a briefing from BBYO International Presidents Adam Bloom and Emily Trotz.

During the “Think Pink” gala, everyone wore pink and heard stories from men and women survivors. Congresswomen Debbie Wasserman



Photos: Courtesy of Avery Budman

BBYO teens celebrate Shabbat with a rousing song session.



Dallas teens show their spirit at BBYO's International Convention. Front row (l-r): Rose Pansick and Leah Press. Back row: Lauren Grossmann, Kelsey Bradshaw, Rachel Dawer, Ashley Cuevas, Tori Weinstein and Melissa Diamond.

Schultz of Florida, a breast cancer survivor, sent in a video message expressing her gratitude for BBYO's support of the Early Act, the breast cancer awareness bill that passed in the Senate last December.

“The thought of 800 BBYO teens dressed in pink is awe-inspiring. BBYO teens are some of the most inspiring young leaders, and it makes me feel good to know that we have the next generation of advocates like you ready to carry the torch for a better tomorrow,” she said in the video. “After winning my fight against breast cancer, I was determined to make sure other young men and women know their risks for breast cancer. ... The Early Act will educate them by empowering them to learn the facts, know their bodies and speak up for their health. BBYO was one of the earliest supporters of this critical legislation.”

Many of the teenagers from



Carol Aaron of Dallas (right) with BBYO International Teen President Emily Trotz after winning the BBG Alumna of the Year Award

abroad arrived before the convention and stayed with host families.

Keo and Brian Strull of Garland hosted Martin, an 18-year-old from Serbia. Keo said meeting Martin was a life-changing experience and he had a positive impact on the whole family.

She added that the BBYO convention allowed him and other foreign-

ers to experience Dallas culture and become more aware of what Jewish life is like in the United States.

“Any time you bring kids in and they get to travel and develop these relationships all over the world, it’s a growing experience,” she said. “I don’t think you can ever get too

much Judaism. As it becomes part of everyday life, I hope these kids will ... continue to be involved in Judaism and tradition. It instills in them the love of Israel and [the desire] to visit. Having these friends from all over the country is great.”

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