

Star-K Hosts AKO Vaadim Conference

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On November 2-4, the Star-K/Vaad Hakashrus of Baltimore hosted the annual Associated Kashrus Organizations' Vaadim Conference, at the Capital Retreat Center in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. The conference featured a packed program of enlightening workshops and lectures, as well as opportunities for *limud haTorah* and *pilpul chaverim*. An exciting new feature at this year's convention was a daily *yarchei kallah*-type session, including *beis medrash* learning followed by a *shiur*.

Welcoming remarks on Monday morning were delivered by Dr. Avrom Pollak, president of the Star-K, and Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, Chicago Rabbinical Council Kashrus administrator and AKO executive director.

Rabbi Asher Anshel Eckstein, *Dayan* of Belz Kashrus, then delivered a *shiur* on the practical aspects of *Shemitah* and covered a plethora of relevant issues even for those in *chutz laAretz*.

Star-K Rabbinic Administrator Harav Moshe Heinemann, Rav of Agudath Israel of Baltimore, discussed requirements to properly seal certified products.

Rabbi Yitzchak Feldman of Congregation Emek Bracha in Palo Alto, California, and the Vaad of Northern California, joined Rabbi Josh Feingold of the Vaad Ho'ir



A view of some of the many participants and presenters at the AKO Vaadim Conference.

of Columbus, Ohio, in leading "Running a Local Vaad - Costs, Fees, and Strategies," a discussion designed to help local *vaadim* sustain and increase their presence in the field of local *kashrus*. Rabbi Tsvi Heber and Rabbi Chaim Ribiat, both of Toronto's COR, led "Caterers Can Pick Any Lock - Here's How to Outsmart Them."

After lunch, Rabbi Dovid Heber, STAR-K Kashrus administrator and Rav of Khal Ahavas Yisrael of Baltimore, presented a session on, "Factory Inspections: What Large Agencies Expect From You," discussing what major agencies expect when smaller agencies perform factory visitations on their behalf.

Rabbi Yosef Berger, Rav of Kehilas Kol Torah in Baltimore and member of the Vaad Harabbanim of Baltimore's *Kashrus* Committee, delivered, "The Halachic Parameters of Dealing With Common *Kashrus She'eilos*,"

a masterful discussion of various *shitto*s that *vaadim* need to take into account when dealing with practical *she'eilos* that arise.

Rabbi Yakov Vann, of the RCC in Los Angeles, delivered, "Proven Technology for a Local Vaad," explaining how small *vaadim* can harness simple, affordable technologies to improve *kashrus* management.

Rabbi Moshe Berger of Kosher Miami and Rabbi Dov Schreier of OU Kosher addressed, "Coping With Party Planners," discussing major challenges party planners present to kosher certification protocols.

Rabbi Pinchus Juravel of Kof-K gave a *shiur* on "*Hafrashas Challah*: Getting it Right," focusing on the issues presented by industrial *hafrashas challah* and solutions to ensure *challah* is taken in the halachically optimum manner.

Rabbi Sholom Tendler of Star-K presented an "Insect Update: Sifting Through Myths, Scares and Real Concerns."

During dinner, Harav Yakov Hopfer, *Nasi* of the famed Vaad Harabbanim of Baltimore and Rav of Shearith Israel Congregation, exhorted the *kashrus* administrators to take great care in exercising their power over their clients and to recognize their responsibility to not only safeguard *kashrus* but also Torah integrity and morality as well.

On Monday evening, Rabbi Kalman Weinfeld of OK Kosher and Rabbi Lenny Steinberg of OU Kosher presented, "Inspiring Cooperation Using Love," offering strategies on how to deal with challenging proprietors, upholding *kashrus* standards while building functional



AKO Vaadim 2014 Chairmen (L-R) Rabbi Avrom Pollack, Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, and Rabbi Tsvi Holland.

positive relationships at the same time.

Tuesday featured another packed day of valuable presentations. Rabbi Emmanuel Goldfeiz, Rav of Kehilat Beit Yaakov, Rav Hamachshir of Star-S, (a division of Star-K) delivered, "Accommodating the Sephardic Community," emphasizing the importance of servicing the halachic needs of the Sephardi community.

Rabbi Moshe Elefant, COO of OU Kosher and Rabbi Levi Teitelbaum of Ottawa Vaad Hakashrus squared off in a session moderated by Rabbi Zvi Holland of the STAR-K entitled, "Local Vaadim vs. Larger Agencies." The session addressed how to deal with disparate halachic opinions and how to navigate the difficulties when these opinions are not universal.

During lunch, Rabbi Jonathan Seidemann, Rav of Kehilas Bnei Torah of Baltimore, reminded the assembled *kashrus* experts of the importance of the primacy of local *kashrus*. Outside "experts," even when correct, must leave the final say to local *kashrus* and its Rabbinic

leadership.

After lunch, Rabbi Mayer Kurcfield of STAR-K brought the Rabbanim on a tour of the kitchens of the convention's host facility, Capital Camps, a complex which features a summer camp, day camp and retreat center. The STAR-K is present at this facility every day of the year in a model *kashrus*-client relationship, which maintains a high standard of *kashrus* all year round, whether or not the groups in attendance are *shomer kashrus*.

Rabbi Binyomin Taub of the Rabbinical Council of Bergen County, presented, "Encouraging Whistleblowers," discussing the need to encourage *mashgichim* to be "whistleblowers" and how to protect them even when they cannot stay in their position.

On Tuesday afternoon, Rabbi Sholem Fishbane closed the convention by discussing the AKO's plans for the upcoming year, and expressed his hopes for further growth for AKO and *kashrus* in general, in a manner of *kiddush Hashem* in every aspect of this important *avodah*.

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