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Brichto's projects build understanding

By Richelle Thompson
The Cincinnati Enquirer

If more people had Dr. Mira Brichto's vision, there would be no more war, U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur says.

"She is just an incredible woman who could be sunning herself on a beach somewhere, but has chosen to take on one of the most difficult assignments in attempting to improve the lives of people in Ukraine," the Toledo-area representative says.

Dr. Brichto works "to shape a better way of life, and that is a very honorable calling," Ms. Kaptur says.

The accomplishments of Dr. Brichto and the R'fa-aye-nu Society include:

◆ In 1996, Polish Jews and Catholics carried a wedding canopy down the streets of Krakow. Inside was a Torah scroll, a sacred Jewish symbol which contains the first five books of the Bible.

A Polish foundation gave the Torah scroll to R'fa-aye-nu in thanks for the organization's donation of medical supplies. The society then returned it to a Polish synagogue in a ceremony that had not been celebrated since World War II.

- In March, Dr. Brichto attended a synagogue rededication in Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine. The Great Synagogue had been turned into a puppet theater for 66 years under the Soviet regime.

The 102-year-old synagogue was returned to the Jewish community in 1992. The plaster was falling. All the religious artifacts had been removed. The Hasidic Jewish congregation, a branch of Orthodox Judaism, met in a small room in the basement.

Dr. Brichto helped build a network of religious leaders, both Jewish and Catholic, to work together on the restoration. She also brought the project to the attention of Rep. Kaptur and other government officials, who sent letters of moral support.

An acknowledgment from the United States carries great merit in the Ukraine and other Central and Eastern European nations, Dr. Brichto says.

It encourages the countries to do interfaith work, such as preserving Torah scrolls and other Jewish and Christian documents, she says. It shows these countries "the eyes of the world are upon you."

- Dr. Brichto says she was told President Bill Clinton is



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to make a brief stop in June in the Ukraine to announce U.S. aid in agribusiness development and food donations. Dr. Brichto is petitioning this week in Washington, D.C., to have President Clinton talk about continuing interfaith work and to offer his support of the Torah restoration project.

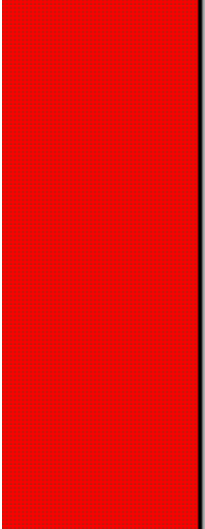
- In addition to restoring Torah scrolls, the society is working to conserve and preserve Jewish and Christian documents that date to the 11th century at three collections in Lviv, Ukraine. The government and social agencies support the project, Dr. Brichto says.

The society recently received \$100,000 from the United States Agency for International Development to start a conservation and preservation project, which would include installing new technology, fire and climate control and digitalizing the information.

This is not a reclamation project, Dr. Brichto emphasizes. The documents will remain in the Ukraine, but putting the information online or on CD-roms provides worldwide access.

To help or find out more information, contact the R'fa-aye-nu Society at 281-3783.

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