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From Midtown to Moscow

With a \$100 million expansion program under way, Touro College is poised for even more growth.

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It has a law school on Long Island, medical and health care education programs in three states, a college for Orthodox women in Manhattan and other schools in New York, California, Nevada, Jerusalem, Berlin and Moscow. And yet, it is far from a household name.

Within the next two years, Touro College, many of whose students come from a wide range of Orthodox backgrounds, hopes to change that. It is celebrating its 36th anniversary as a private, independent school with an ambitious \$100 million expansion program—opening four new schools and relocating its law school to the court complex in Central Islip, L.I., and its women’s college to a building on 60th Street near Lincoln Center.

And in the near future, the school that offers professional and graduate programs in education, law, medicine, allied health and business, is working to open schools in Italy, Israel and France.

“We’ve been talking to the leadership of the Jewish community in France about opening an American college in Paris,” said Bernard Lander, Touro’s founder and president. “So we’re not sleeping... And (a school in) Rome is another year way.” Since establishing Touro College in 1971 in Man-



Touro’s president, Bernard Lander, with Lander College for Women Dean Marian Stoltz-Loike at new Lincoln Center building.

hattan with a freshman class of 25 men, Lander has spear-headed the institution’s growth. It currently educates more than 23,000 students—an almost equal number of undergraduate and graduate students—at 29 locations primarily in New York City. The four new schools

slated to open within the next two years are medical schools in Harlem and New Jersey (pending certification); an undergraduate women’s college and a graduate school of education in Miami Beach, Florida; a graduate school of social work with divisions in Brooklyn and Manhattan; and a high school of Judaic and general studies in Kew Gardens, Queens.

“We’re doing meaningful things, moving ahead instead of plodding ahead,” said Lander, who is 91. “As we get older, we move faster.” “We’re committed to building Jewish life wherever we can,” he

added while sitting at the head of a long table in his Manhattan office. Despite his age, Lander could recite from memory many facts and figures about his institution. But he confided that he does not have a successor and that he has quietly launched a search outside of his own institutions. “I’m seriously looking,” he said. “I’m looking for somebody who combines knowledge of both the Jewish and the general world. He has to be an educator.” Point out that the majority of American colleges were established by Catholic and Protestant groups, Lander said the only difference between them and his institution is that they were “set up under the control of the local leadership.”

“Touro takes the position that the Jewish community has neglected Jewish education and supported synagogues and hospitals but no higher education for Jewish boys and girls. If we are going to be integrated into society, we have to serve everyone. We have a responsibility to the needs of the world...to serve humanity and society. And so as we build Jewish institutions, we are also building general institutions irrespective of the background (of the student).”

That is a philosophy Lander has had all his life. In the 1940’s, he served as New York City’s first Commissioner



Touro’s new Lander College of Women building near Lincoln Center.

of Human Rights. As a leader in the civil rights movement, he also prepared the first civil rights legislation for the State of New York. Lander, who holds a doctorate in sociology from Columbia University and served as a professor of sociology at the City University of New York before starting Touro College, noted that one of the first schools he started (the School of General Studies) was moved to 122nd Street in Harlem about 20 years ago. And he is finalizing plans to open the Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine in Harlem, which would be the institution’s third medical school and the first medical school in Harlem. (Touro plans to open a fourth medical school in New Jersey in 2008.) It is scheduled to be located in a building on 125th Street, across from the Apollo Theater, that would also house Touro’s planned College of Pharmacy.

“The medical school would be open to all, but we want to encourage great interest in the black and Hispanic communities in medical education,” Lander said. “Everybody would have to pass an entrance exam.” The school’s dean, Mr. Martin Diamond, said that when he heard of the plan to locate the school in Harlem it “lighted my fire because I am interested in serving the underserved.”

“I grew up in the only white family on a block in Brooklyn,” he explained. Diamond said accrediting officials are still reviewing Touro’s proposal and visiting the site. He said he expects to know soon if the school can seek provisional approval.

If all of the approvals are forthcoming, he said the first class could start in September 2007.

“I’ve gotten dozen of calls already,” he said. “the mission of the school is not that much different from Touro College—to service the whole community. And since there is a paucity of African Americans and Hispanics in medicine, one of our main efforts will be to recruit more minorities who want to serve minorities.”

To help increase the pool of qualified minority applicants, Rabbi Lander said he plans to have a specialized, one-year preparatory program at Touro College to help borderline students. Asked how the school would treat applications from two equally qualified students, one who is black and one who is Jewish, Rabbi Lander said: “If one wants to go to Great Neck and practice plastic surgery and the other doesn’t mind serving minority communities,” the latter would be chosen.

“We’re going to try to give scholarships, too,” he added. “Once we get established, we’ll go to the public

schools and get (minority students) interested in science.”

There is also excitement at Touro over the opening of the new building for the Lander College for Women near Lincoln Center. Marian Stoltz-Loike, the school’s dean, said the classrooms will be equipped with the most up-to-date technology so that the “faculty can deliver information in a way that is exciting.”

“It’s what students expect,” she said. “They come to us because they want a high level of Jewish education and we have small classes and a wide swath of the Orthodox community.” Stoltz-Loike said she hopes to double the student body to a minimum of 250 students over the next five to seven years. And she said she is looking for space to build additional dormitories. Looking at the deans of several of his schools who were seated around the table in his office, Rabbi Lander said with obvious pride: “I appoint outstanding people. They run the schools. They deans are encouraged to experiment, innovate and create. We don’t control their ability to grow...Budget and policy are done centrally.”

Touro’s operating budget is \$175 million. Its income is primarily through tuition, with averages \$12,000 per year for undergraduate students. It also dispenses \$26 million in scholarships and grants. Much of its money comes from an online university that began in 1999 in Los Angeles. But because of the school’s rapid growth, Lander is now planning for the first time to launch a major fundraising campaign.

Despite its size, Touro has been overshadowed by the city’s older and more established Orthodox school, Yeshiva University. It might not have been that way had Yeshiva’s former president, Rabbi Norman Lamm, entertained a suggestion that the two intuitions pool their resources.

“In the early days of Touro, I met with the president of Yeshiva University and we talked about a merger,” Lander recalled. “The discussion broke down because (I believe) Touro has an obligation to help Jews wherever they live and Yeshiva said they had to come to New York.”

Lander said he also told Rabbi Lamm that he wanted to pen a school in Israel because Israel is central to Jewish life. He said Rabbi Lamm opposed the idea. “I said (Jews) go to yeshiva and then live off welfare and that we must serve them,” he said. “I’m a terrible person because I am brining a college education and ...adding) social and economic purpose to a person’s life? Thousands have accepted it.” ■