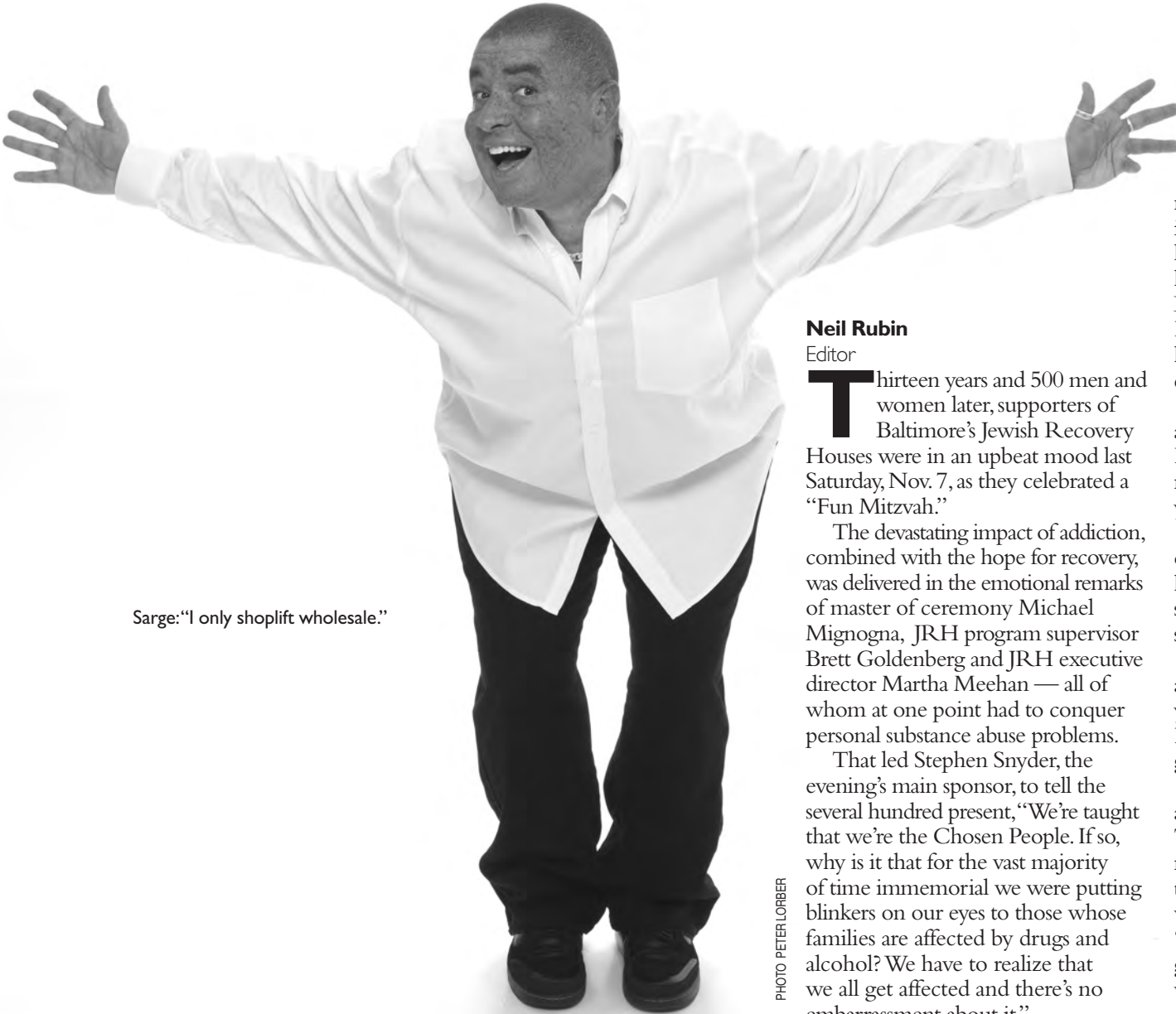


# Laughing After Addiction

'Sarge' enforces laughter at Jewish Recovery Houses anniversary.



Sarge: "I only shoplift wholesale."

## Neil Rubin

Editor

**T**hirteen years and 500 men and women later, supporters of Baltimore's Jewish Recovery Houses were in an upbeat mood last Saturday, Nov. 7, as they celebrated a "Fun Mitzvah."

The devastating impact of addiction, combined with the hope for recovery, was delivered in the emotional remarks of master of ceremony Michael Mignogna, JRH program supervisor Brett Goldenberg and JRH executive director Martha Meehan — all of whom at one point had to conquer personal substance abuse problems.

That led Stephen Snyder, the evening's main sponsor, to tell the several hundred present, "We're taught that we're the Chosen People. If so, why is it that for the vast majority of time immemorial we were putting blinkers on our eyes to those whose families are affected by drugs and alcohol? We have to realize that we all get affected and there's no embarrassment about it."

Today, with a 45 percent recovery rate — as opposed to 10 percent at similar facilities nationwide — JRH is trying to raise \$3 million for a new residence center on Glen Avenue in Upper Park Heights.

Despite such a serious kickoff for the evening event, the comedian Sarge, who said he recovered from

addiction 19 years ago, left people guffawing at his off-color humor, laced with his penetrating observations of American Jewish life.

He kicked off by thanking many people, including "Elijah if he doesn't get to join us, because he brought the centerpieces." Then he took a friendly potshot at host Beth El Congregation with, "I know I'm in a high-class place when they have cheap chandeliers and a high-definition *mitzvah* board."

Noting his change of residence a few years ago, he said, "I moved to Florida because I'm 48 and that gives me about 60 more years to be a young comic."

With one black parent (dad) and one Jewish parent (mom), he did not hesitate to take advantage of poking sides at his dual ethnicity with quips such as, "I only shoplift wholesale."

He added, "I'm black and Jewish, and my wife is Polish. If my one-year-old boy turns out to be gay and I can teach him Mandarin, he's going to Harvard!"

Not long ago, he found himself abroad performing for U.S. troops. To say he stood out is an understatement. "I'm in Iraq entertaining the troops and I'm standing on a box with a big light on me and screaming 'I'm a black Jew!' Next time I'm gong to get Target to sponsor me and wear a shirt with a red bull's eye."

His travels also recently took him to Arkansas. "After 8 o'clock, all that's open was a Denny's," he said. "I'm a Jew. I don't go to Denny's unless it's a hostage situation."

Lucky for him, it was already 9 p.m. in Baltimore and a dessert spread awaited in the lobby. □

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As a Jew, "Sarge" doesn't go to Denny's "unless it's a hostage situation."

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PHOTO: PETER LORBER