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## Seniors get to meet, eat and study English

By JOYCE SHELBY

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Sixty-five years after they said "I do," Yakov Fridman and Sonya Fuksman are still going on weekend dates.

Every Sunday, the husband and wife get dressed up in their best so they can go out to eat - along with about 300 of their nearest and dearest friends.



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Everyone meets at the Haber House Senior Center, near Coney Island's famed Boardwalk, for a brunch sponsored by the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island.

**Sonya Fuksman and her  
husband, Yakov Fridman**

The Sunday meal program was set up so folks like Fridman and Fuksman, who are both 88, would not spend the weekend isolated at home eating cold meals.

"It's so important to see our friends and to be with other people," said Fuksman, through an interpreter. "If we didn't come here, we would have no other place to go."

Added Fridman, "I can't put into words all that this program means to me." The husband and wife are retired economists from Poltava, Ukraine.

Rabbi Moshe Wiener, executive director of the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island, said the Sunday program was established nine years ago through a \$50,000 challenge grant from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation in Baltimore.

"The Coney Island and Brighton Beach area has the highest concentration of seniors in the city," Wiener said. "Some are Holocaust survivors. There are Russian immigrants and many other people who desperately depend

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on this program."

Etty Friedman, who oversees the program, said that in addition to the more than 300 seniors who have brunch together, more than 150 other seniors have meals delivered to their homes.

Friedman said when the Sunday program started, exercise classes were offered, but the seniors didn't want them. Those classes are available during the week through a Haber House Senior Center program sponsored by the New York City Department of the Aging.

Instead, Friedman said, the seniors come each Sunday with notebooks and after eating, head to an English class taught by Esther Tashker

### **Polishing their English**

"Some of the seniors are already citizens, but they want to practice conversational English," said Tashker. "They discuss the news. They want to read American newspapers and watch American TV.

"And some people want to become citizens. So we have another class in which I teach them about American history, government and civics," Tashker said.

Margarita Tsepenyuk, 65, who is from Kiev, Ukraine, said, "Sunday is most special for us. People who have depression and are lonely get to come out. They feel they are part of a community."

Polliya Moyfe, 70, a Holocaust survivor, added, "I can't sit at home. If you sit at home, you die."

Leon Kern, 85, a retired restaurant employee from Coney Island, said the program has obvious, practical advantages as well: "I have a small income. This really helps."

Wiener said the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island has received numerous requests to expand the Sunday program, but some funding groups have guidelines that limit the number of years they can offer support.

"Right now, this program is in jeopardy," the rabbi said.

Hannah Cruz, 77, who goes to the center on Sundays before attending church, said she hoped the program wouldn't end.

Helen Herschkowitz, 89, of Midwood, added, "This is a temple of love, a true blessing. I hope they never stop it."

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