

# Group dangles \$50K for Jews who move to Ala. town

By JAY REEVES  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

DOTHAN, Ala. (AP) — Larry Blumberg is looking for a few good Jews to move to his corner of the Bible Belt.

Blumberg is chairman of an organization offering Jewish families as much as \$50,000 to relocate to Dothan, an overwhelmingly Christian town of 58,000 that calls itself the Peanut Capital of the World. Get involved at Temple Emanu-El and stay at least five years, the group's leaders say, and the money doesn't have to be repaid.

More Jews are living in the South than ever — about 386,000 at last count in 2001, according to Stuart Rockoff, a historian at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life in Jackson, Miss. But young Jews are leaving small places like Dothan in favor of cities like Atlanta and Birmingham, Rockoff said, and dozens of small-town synagogues have closed.

"A lot of the older people have died, and not many of the younger ones have stayed," said Thelma Nomberg, a member of the Dothan temple who grew up in nearby Ozark, where she was

the only Jewish student in public school in the 1940s. "We are dying."

Being outside the Christian majority was never a problem, Nomberg said, even six decades ago: She won the Miss Ozark beauty pageant at 14 and sometimes attended church with friends after sleep-overs.

Now a widow, Nomberg has watched two of her four adult children leave for Florida as Temple Emanu-El lost nearly half its membership, down to about 50 families. She can only hope the recruitment plan hatched by Blumberg Family Jewish Community Services of Dothan works for her synagogue.

Launched in June, the Blumberg program has put advertisements in Jewish newspapers in Boston, Miami, Providence, R.I., and Washington, and it plans to expand the campaign.

"I think it's important that we try to find young people that we could use in our religious school, our Sunday school and help in the way of trying to create more of a family-type atmosphere in our temple," Blumberg said.

Groups offered financial aid for Jews to return to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and Jewish organizations around the country offer moving assistance for relocating families.

A congregation has loans and other benefits for Jewish families moving into an area near Boston.

"Our program is distinctive because it's Dothan, but it's also distinctive because of the type of financial assistance," said Rob Goldsmith, executive director of Blumberg Family Jewish Community Services, which will screen applicants and administer the grant program.

Trying to lure Jewish families to a quiet Southern town in a state with a reputation for hard-right politics and racial intolerance might be difficult. About 20 Jewish families have sought information about Dothan, though none has made the move.

Rockoff credits Blumberg and the rest of the congregation with fighting to remain in Dothan, where the synagogue has a full-time rabbi and the temple, which is aligned with the reform movement, hasn't missed having a Friday night service in decades.

"It is a small community, but they have some deep pockets to be able to do this," said Rockoff. "As a historian it is fascinating to see them trying to buck this trend."

Dothan lies at the heart of the South's peanut region, in Alabama's southeastern corner

just minutes from Florida and Georgia. It's dotted with big fiberglass peanuts painted to resemble characters and people — there's even an Elvis peanut.

Little things are big here: The city boasts what it calls the world's smallest city block, a triangular traffic island near the civic center.

But Blumberg's group is selling prospective Jewish residents on Dothan's quality of life — its low cost of living, the heritage of its synagogue and its proximity to Florida beaches, about 80 miles away.

The city is the site of the down-home National Peanut Festival each fall, and it has a full schedule of community cultural events. It has two hospitals, a branch of Troy University and is just a short drive from Fort Rucker, the Army's main helicopter training base.

Downtown is filled with quaint red-brick buildings and colorful murals, and traffic never gets too bad on Ross Clark Circle, the perimeter road.

"We have Friday afternoon rush minute, and that's about it," said manufacturing executive Ed Marblestone, 69, who grew up Jewish in Texas but married a Dothan girl and has lived in the town since 1961.

Valerie Barnes grew up in

Panama and moved several times before settling 20 years ago in Dothan and becoming active at the synagogue. She's never experienced any anti-Semitism and can't imagine living anywhere else.

"The biggest thing Dothan has to offer is that it's just a very family-oriented community," said Barnes, who directs a hospital foundation. "Our congregation is very vibrant, and we have a lot of things that we get involved in."

Rabbi Lynne Goldsmith didn't know quite what to expect when she moved to Dothan a year ago to lead the congregation at Temple Emanu-El, which was founded in 1929. She came with her husband, who directs the Jewish community services group.

A Connecticut native, the rabbi halfway expected the Alabama of old with wide-open racism and dirt roads.

"The Northeast has a really warped perception of what the South is all about, and I found out it was all wrong," she said. "The South is a wonderful place to be. The people are warm and friendly. There's very little traffic. And best of all, there's no snow."

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a succession crisis in North Korea. He has three sons by two women but has not designated a successor.

Gary Samore, a former senior official with the National Security Council and now an expert with the Council on Foreign Relations, said he doesn't think Kim's absence would change North Korea's strategy in nuclear negotiations. And he discounted the theory that Kim favored a moderate approach in the talks.

"I think the strategy that Kim Jong Il is following is likely to be pursued by any collective leadership," he said. "They will try to extract as much benefit as possible in the form of money, fertilizer and oil from the west and not give up their nuclear weapons."

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**Authorities: Burglar wakes men with spice rub**

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — Authorities say they've arrested a man who broke into the home of two California farmworkers, stole money, rubbed one with spices and whacked the other with a sausage before fleeing.

Fresno County sheriff's Lt. Ian Burrimond says 22-year-old Antonio Vasquez was found hiding in a field wearing only a T-shirt, boxers and socks after the Saturday morning attack.

He says deputies arrested Vasquez after finding a wallet containing his ID in the ransacked house.

The farmworkers told deputies the suspect woke them Saturday morning by rubbing spices on one of them and smacking the other with an 8-inch sausage.

Burrimond says money allegedly stolen was recovered.