

Roving Rabbis

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ANGUS HENDERSON

Local Jewish people received a special treat this week when two rabbis came to visit for a couple of days, as part of a program aimed at providing Jewish services to smaller Alberta communities outside Calgary and Edmonton.

Rabbi Yossi Matusof of Calgary (son of Rabbi Menachem Matusof) and Rabbi Chaim Itkin of Pittsburgh, have been traveling thousands of kilometres this summer visiting communities such as Drumheller, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Banff, Lake Louise, Medicine Hat and Cypress County.

Under the leadership of Chabad Lubavitch of Alberta, Roving Rabbis is part of the worldwide Chabad Lubavitch movement. It's dedicated to increasing the awareness, knowledge and observance of Judaism in Alberta.

According to Rabbi Matusof, the worldwide program was first conceived by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson in 1943, and has been responsible for bolstering Jewish communities world-wide.

This year more than 500 young rabbis and senior rabbinical students are visiting more than 11,000 communities world-wide to bring Jewish education and learning to people of all ages. Over the past few years, Matusof has engaged more than a dozen local area families, and every year he has met more and more Jewish people. The one major obstacle he's found is that without having a local synagogue anymore, local Jewish people don't always get to know each other.

"We come and we just say hello," Matusof said in an interview his week "We meet people in their homes, at their businesses, and people have been very receptive."

From the Jewish people he's met here and elsewhere in the province, he said he's found that people have their own Jewish traditions that they hold on to and keep special.

"People are still maintaining their faith in their own way," Matusof added.

Most of Canada's estimated 350,000 Jewish people live in Ontario and Quebec, followed by British Columbia, Manitoba and Alberta.

The two largest Jewish centres in Alberta are Calgary with an estimated 7,000 Jewish people, and Edmonton with an estimated 4,000 or so.

Anyone wishing additional information regarding the Roving Rabbis can contact Rabbi Matusof at 1-587-228-0741.