

## 'Pennies from Heaven'

### In Birnboim plan, your deal kicks back charity dollars

By EUGENE WHITE

TROY—Yosef Birnboim's tzedakah project makes perfect cents. The Troy native, a two-time Emmy winning producer at the Showtime television network before he turned 35, is the founder of Pennies At A Time, a company that helps schools, synagogues and other charitable organizations raise money.

Individuals register at the web site, [www.penniesatime.com](http://www.penniesatime.com), and shop at over 400 online retailers. They may choose a charity listed on the site or submit their own, and a portion of each sale price is donated. There is no cost to the purchaser or the benefit organization. Funds are also raised by doing Google searches through the site.

Birnboim has also developed fund-raising portal sites for 20 organizations across the country, including Camp Givah in East Berne. Consumers log in to the site and shop normally, and the organization receives a portion of each purchase.

"Pennies At A Time gives you that extra little kickback on all your purchases," said Birnboim. "It doesn't sound like a lot, but it adds up quickly." While commissions vary depending on the retailer, he offered an example. "If you assume an average commission of 3%, \$500 in annual purchases and 100 people supporting an organization, that earns them \$1,500 per year."

While he developed the idea while working as a computer engineer in Seattle

in 2000, the company didn't launch until 2007. "I had been talking about it with Rabbi Daniel Wasserman," he said. Wasserman, Birnboim's rabbi while he was a college student in Pittsburgh, encouraged Birnboim to develop a site for Shaare Torah Synagogue, Wasserman's shul. "Once I created the template, it was easy to apply it to other organizations," Birnboim said.

Birnboim handles both the technological and marketing aspects of the company.

His tech background includes a bachelor's degree in information and decision systems from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and a master's degree in interactive telecommunications from NYU. He worked in information technology and marketing before joining Showtime as a producer of interactive television and convergent media in 2004. He has patents pending for his television work.

The son of Alma and the late Meyer Birnboim, Yosef has always been involved with Judaism. He is a graduate of the Hebrew Academy of the Capital District and davened frequently as a youth with Congregation Beth Tephilah in Troy, eventually becoming gabbai. At Carnegie Mellon, he participated with campus Hillel, ran Shabbat services and was a Torah reader at Shaare Torah. He now attends Ohav Zedek Synagogue and other shuls in the New York City area.

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The biggest challenge to success is reminding people to use the site for their shopping, Birnboim said. To that end, he is developing software to make the process easier and more transparent for consumers. He aims to create programs so that "even when the people forget, the computers remember," to donate through Pennies At A Time.

While plans include expanding the business model to small private organizations looking to raise funds, the roots of

the company remain in Birnboim's faith and upbringing. "Pennies At A Time gave me a way to give back to organizations that have given so much to me," he said. "I've been involved in everything, from writing code to sales and marketing, and I have been proud of every milestone and achievement that is reached."

For information on donating or to become a partner organization, contact Birnboim at [info@penniesatime.com](mailto:info@penniesatime.com).