Community culture

By David A. Schwartz
Staff Writer

Retirement in Palm Beach County hasn’t meant a life of leisure for four former educators from New York. Dottie Pierce, Bobby Starkey, Charlotte Schiff and Joan Roude are keeping busy with the Jewish Cultural Society at Florida Atlantic University, the organization they founded six months ago to help the university provide entertainment and education programs to the Jewish community.

“FAU and other schools are cutting their budgets and we want to make sure that the programs are continued,” said Pierce, who lives in Boca Raton and was an assistant superintendent of schools for a Long Island suburb.

Many of the programs are live performances or educational events that involve the FAU library’s extensive Jewish cultural and music collections.

The Jewish Cultural Society, which has about 130 members, raises money from annual fees ($25 for an individual, $40 for a couple) and a small charge (typically $15 for members, $20 for non-members) for cultural and educational events on the Boca Raton campus and in members’ homes.

In November the organization kicked off its membership drive with a concert by Aaron Kula’s Klezmer Company Orchestra on the Boca Raton campus. The Klezmer Company performed in early December at FAU’s Jupiter campus.

Kula, director of music collections and performance at the library, takes archived scores written for Jewish audiences by late 19th and early 20th century Jewish composers and arranges and orchestrates them for live performance.

In February, the Cultural Society held “KULTUR Festival 2009, a Celebration of Jewish Music and the Arts” in Boca Raton.

So far, the organization has raised about $10,000, Terri Burns, director of communication, cultural affairs and donor relations for the library, said. The money will be used for programs, with about $5,000 probably going to the 2010 Kultur Festival, she said.

The $10,000 is a “modest” amount, William Miller, dean of FAU Libraries, said. But Miller said he hopes a “much more substantial” amount will be raised in the future. “It’s getting harder and harder and harder to maintain the initiatives we have,” he said, adding the libraries might have to cut back the number of programs offered. “The efforts of the JCS may be key,” Miller said.

Cultural society co-founder Starkey said the women had gone to Jewish programs at FAU for years and wanted to do something for the library and university. “We bring a lot to it. We have a lot to give. We’re very energetic,” said Starkey.

Roude, a former community college business manager and business professor from Forest Hills, Queens, said the economic downturn has made it difficult for people to come to programs. “Most of our donors are retired people and they have been hit very hard by the economy,” she said.

Robe said she expects the economy and donations to pick up by the fourth quarter of this year.

For information about the Jewish Cultural Society, call Dottie Pierce at 561-852-9720 or e-mail her at dottie-pierce@comcast.net.