

## NEWS &gt; TECHNOLOGY

# Site gives family, friends information on death of loved ones

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TORONTO – Imagine, it is mid-winter, and in an effort to escape Canada's brutal climate, you head to sunny Florida.

Fortunately, even while getting away from it all, you keep abreast of the news – even Canadian news, even local news – thanks to the Internet. But a friend's father passes away and news like that goes way beyond what local news provides.

Bottom line: you don't hear about the death until you return, thus missing an opportunity to pay your respects in a timely manner.

That's what happened to Marlene Kohn last December and she has put her frustrating experience to use by finding a solution, JewishPassings.com.

Started in June, the free service provides an e-mailed newsletter listing deaths of Jews in the Greater Toronto Area and details such as funeral, shiva and basic obituary information. The daily newsletter, which is divided into that day's notices and past notices, also mentions deaths of Jewish non-Torontonians, if their immediate relatives live in Toronto, an aspect of the service that caters to the city's large ex-pat community, espe-

cially from Montreal and Winnipeg.

Kohn said there are five sources for death listings: Benjamin's Park Memorial Chapel; Steeles Memorial Chapel; *Globe and Mail*; *Toronto Star*; and *National Post*. But picking through the available sources takes time and effort. Kohn estimates she spends two hours a day on her newsletter.

"The advantage is that it culls and puts it all together for you ... and it gets sent to you," said Kohn.

The e-mail blasts include deaths from the previous seven days, the crucial shiva period,

because according to Kohn, "the service we offer is about current information." Within the first seven days, though, information is added to listings as it becomes available.

While the web site lacks an archive, it does provide the opportunity to subscribe to the newsletter. As well, those who want to report a death may submit a notice on the site. Kohn will then verify the information and add it to the newsletter, although this avenue currently produces less than 5 per cent of the listings.

Growing "daily," JewishPassings.com now boasts more than 400 subscribers. And while it is

still a money-losing venture, according to Kohn, she plans in the future to sell advertising on the newsletter and is tracking her readers' behaviour by using her third-party vendor's statistics.

For example, she said, her "open rate" (the percentage of subscribers who open the newsletter) is robust, at more than 70 per cent.

Even as she hopes the business becomes profitable, Kohn's goal is "reaching out to honour lives," as her tagline reads.

For a taste of how meaningful this reaching out can be, she need look no further than her father-in-law's death two years ago, when

her family was especially touched by gestures from those outside their inner circle.

"I remember the people if they went out of their way," she said. "It's something that stays with you."

In fact, Kohn sees her service as being valuable also for mere acquaintances of the deceased or their family, who may want to pay their respects but aren't on intimate enough terms to hear about the death.

And that broken link in the Jewish communication chain can plague not only winter refugees, but also anyone who simply missed the news.