

Pessimists have been warning for decades that as younger generations of Jews continued their acculturation into the American mainstream, those at the leading edge of the drift would float away from Jewish identity, leaving a smaller but more committed core. Optimists, if that's the right word, predicted that the younger, more acculturated Jews wouldn't disappear from the scene; rather, their Jewish identities would evolve in new and unpredictable ways, leaving the Jewish community as many small communities, with less and less identifiably in common.

This year's Forward 50 list shows what look to us, at least, like clear signs of continental drift. When we sat down to take a long look at the community, what we found was not a hardening core surrounded by an evanescent periphery, but numerous pockets of identity taking shape on the landscape, most showing clear signs of solidity, but most quite disconnected from — even unaware of — the others. The list that emerged from our efforts reflects that changing topography.

The Forward 50 is not based on a scientific study or survey. The list is compiled each year by the Forward's staff, based on what we have reported over the past year, what we have heard from community members speaking about other community members and whatever objective signposts — rising or falling budgets, book sales, published buzz, adoption of new laws or proposals — can be deemed to indicate public influence.

Membership in the 50 doesn't mean that the Forward endorses what these individuals do or say. We've chosen them because they are doing and saying things that are making a difference in the way American Jews, for better or worse, view the world and themselves. Not all these people have put their energies into the traditional frameworks of Jewish community life, but they all have embodied the spirit of Jewish action as it is emerging in America, and all of them have left a mark.

PHILANTHROPY

TAD TAUBE

They could take the boy out of Poland, but they couldn't take Poland out of the boy, and this year philanthropist Thaddeus "Tad" Taube again broke new ground in his determined effort to revive Jewish life in what was once the center of the Ashkenazic world. The 76-year-old Krakow native has been a driving force behind the Museum of the History of Polish Jews now under construction in Warsaw, a \$65 million institution that will recall a millennium of Polish Jewish history when it opens its doors in 2009. A San Francisco real-estate developer and former sportswear executive, Taube is president of the Koret Foundation, a major supporter of Jewish education and culture as well as conservative causes like Stanford University's Hoover Institution. In recent years, Taube has been outspoken in urging American Jews to think of Poland as more than just the land of Auschwitz. He has even called for a rethinking of what has become a rite of passage for many, the March of the Living, arguing that the pilgrimage for teenagers should visit not only the death camps, but also the centers of Jewish life in Poland today — and come 2009, presumably, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews.