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Renee Sauer / Staff

Ira Sheskin, a geography professor from the University of Miami who has done other such counts, will oversee the Tucson census.

Numbers can show where aid is needed

By Stephanie Innes
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

The local Jewish community has a big favor to ask of Tucson-area residents over the next two weeks: Please don't hang up on telemarketers.

The Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona, beginning today, will undertake a first-ever Jewish census of Southern Arizona, focusing on greater Tucson.

The census will be conducted by telephone, which is why federation officials are asking for a little extra compassion toward those pesky calls from marketers. They have a random sample of 10,000 phone numbers and expect to make contact with between 6,000 and 7,000 households.

"It is really very important. It is the first-ever comprehensive study of the Jewish population in this community," said Stuart Mellan, president and chief executive officer of the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona, which is sponsoring the study through

private donations.

The callers will identify themselves as part of the study and will ask questions of anyone in the household who is Jewish, even if that person is non-practicing.

"Finding people in the identified Jewish community would be easy. Part of the reason for this is to find other Jews, not just those who go to synagogue," Mellan said.

The U.S. Census doesn't ask about religion, which means anyone building Jewish community centers, schools, nursing homes and other services must rely on either private studies or pure guesswork.

Officials with the federation place the local Jewish population somewhere between 25,000 and 35,000, but they stress that such numbers are conjecture.

In addition to tallying the number of local Jews, the study is expected to give a snapshot of that population: where they live in the Tucson area, how many are winter

SEE CENSUS / B8

TUCSON / Region

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SECTION **B**

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Editor: Tim Konski | Telephone 520-573-4101 | Fax 573-4107 | Email tkonsk@azstarnews.com

CENSUS

Callers will ask about incidents of anti-Semitism

Continued from Page B1

visitors, how old they are, how many attend synagogue and how many intermarry with people of other faiths.

Roughly 2 percent of the American population is Jewish. Local officials are expecting the percentage of Jewish people living in the greater Tucson area to be higher than the national proportion, though they aren't sure by how much.

Ira Sheskin, an associate professor of geography and regional studies at the University of Miami, will be in Tucson for the next two weeks to oversee the census polling.

Sheskin has already completed Jewish population studies in 24 communities, including Atlanta, Charlotte, N.C., and Broward County, Fla.

He is a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee of United Jewish Communities, which completed the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and which is completing a comparable 2000 survey.

His polls include anti-semitism

questions such as whether people answering the survey have experienced anti-Semitism in the past year; the results can then be compared.

In the cities he has surveyed, for example, answers to the anti-Semitism question ranged from 11 percent to 31 percent of those surveyed.

Sheskin said a final report on Tucson's Jewish population should be out in the fall.

He said his survey methodology has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

In other communities the reports have helped identify when and where Jewish elder-care homes and other Jewish services are needed — and in some cases, if they are needed at all.

"It will help not only with what to do, but what not to do," Sheskin said.

John Peck, senior vice president of the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona, would say only that the study is costing "in excess of \$100,000" but stressed that the information the study will provide is invaluable research.

For more information about the community population study, contact the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona at 577-9393 or go to its Web site at jewishtucson.org

Contact Stephanie Innes at 573-4114 or at innes@azstarnet.com.