

JEWISH EXPONENT

— WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH IN PHILADELPHIA —

HEADLINES

NMAJH Series Speaker Kathy Fields to Give Proactive Advice on Road to Success

LOCAL

MARISSA STERN | JE STAFF

YOU'VE seen the infomercials.

Whether it's Adam Levine or Katy Perry or Justin Bieber, you've heard celebrities talking about how touring and performing has made them break out and how Proactiv Acne Treatment cleared their skin right up.

Now, you can hear the co-founder of Proactiv when Kathy Fields speaks at the National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH) on May 1 at 7 p.m. as part of its Dreamers and Doers series.

Before she became the co-founder of Proactiv, as well as the San Francisco-based Rodan + Fields skincare company, Fields grew up with three siblings in Waukegan, Ill.

Her parents seem to have hit the jackpot: All of their children became doctors.

"They had a strong preference, like all Jewish parents, that we go into medicine," said Fields, "and we did and we're all happy about it."

Fields originally had an interest in gynecology, but her mother suggested she study

dermatology instead. At that time, dermatology wasn't like what it is today, she noted.

"It was still a basically syphilis, acne and skin cancer profession that blossomed into the cosmetic world much later, after I graduated in the '80s," she said.

She went to the University of Miami School of Medicine and then headed to Stanford University for a residency in dermatology, where she met Katie Rodan — the Rodan of Rodan + Fields. The two instantly clicked.

"We were kind of two of a kind — the rest of the group was pretty nerdy," she laughed. "I was Miami Hot Pink, and she was Rhinestone Rodan from L.A., and we hit it off. But we really got going after our residency. Our chairman of our program said, 'Find a hobby, be a specialist in something ... or you'll be doomed to treating acne and warts.'"

"And, ironically, we became the experts in acne."

They noticed at one point only people with severe acne were able to meet with dermatologists because of how insurance coverage had changed. People with mild to moderate acne had

nowhere to go.

"We saw a very big need to do better, to help people live well in their skin. Why? Because acne scars, physically and emotionally," said Fields, who is also a professor of dermatology at Stanford and an assistant clinical professor emeritus of dermatology at University of California, San Francisco. "So we were on a mission to help people with acne and we created our products; it took five years, and what we created was absolutely a paradigm shift in the treatment of acne."

After five years of hard work and being turned down by brands like Neutrogena, they licensed Proactiv to direct-marketing company Guthy-Renker (now in a joint venture with Nestlé), and the Proactiv treatment — through the infomercials and retail sale — became one of Guthy-Renker's most successful products.

But the co-authors of *Unblemished* and *Write Your Skin a Prescription for Change* didn't want to stop there.

"We went on to create many more products for the other visible problems that also affect self-esteem, like sun damage, brown spots where your skin is leathery and weathered."

Because Guthy-Renker was only interested in Proactiv, they created their other products as Rodan + Fields and placed them in traditional retail. They went with Estée Lauder for their next four product lines, but Estée Lauder didn't do much marketing for the prod-



KATHY FIELDS

ter. Rodan + Fields has striven to embolden women.

"The goal was to have people have the best skin of their lives, which empowers self-esteem," Fields said. "Number two is to live well in your skin so that's not holding you back. But more importantly, we wanted to empower women to have the opportunity to sell a product. Why have Nordstrom sell it? They don't care. Let's give it to the people who love and use the product and see if we can change their lives."

There are more than 200,000 independent sales consultants for Rodan + Fields; a fraction of them are "aggressively doing it" and able to make a strong income for themselves.

"The others are there for the culture and it's a very philanthropic culture," she said. "This is a group of mostly women who are there to help their families first and their communities and the greater good."

Fields hopes that when she speaks at NMAJH, it may inspire someone else who has an idea to pursue it — even if the road to success is tough.

"It takes hard work and grit to be successful," she said. "You really have to know your vision and be compelled to see it through. We could have quit anytime along this 25-year journey, and we never did. And we're not done yet!" ●

ucts or promote the business.

In 2008, they bought their company back from Estée Lauder and relaunched. Rodan + Fields has since become one of the top skincare companies in the U.S. In fact, when their most recent product — an active hydration serum with a new molecule they created in their own labs — launched this week, there were so many people waiting to buy it that they crashed the online system.

While Fields is proud of the work, it wasn't always easy.

"There's been tremendous heartache along this road to success," Fields said, adding that after the failures, "it took resilience and grit between Katie and I together to decide to continue."

One thing that motivates Fields, though, is the principle of *tikkun olam*, and giving people the chance to make the world, and their own lives, bet-

Contact:
mstern@jewishexponent.com;
215-832-0740