

September 2016/5776

## Congregation Etz Chaim

### Excerpt from Masters' Thesis "I will sing to the Lord all my life" The Life Story and Music of Dr. Morton Gold

by Beth Strassler

#### Inside this issue:

Masters' Thesis Excerpt	<b>1-3</b>
Potluck info High Holidays Schedule	<b>4</b>
Apple Picking/Hay Ride 10/9	<b>5</b>
Our Summer Trip ...to China!	<b>6</b>
Mighty Waters Cannot Extinguish	<b>7-9</b>
Hebrew School Note from the Board Samuel Osher Library	<b>10</b>
Shapiro Room Dedication	<b>11</b>
Shapiro Dedication Photo Collage	<b>12</b>
Jewish Conference at Colby College	<b>13</b>
Strategic Plan Survey	<b>14</b>
Board of Directors. Shabbat Services .Community Services	<b>15</b>
Our Synagogue Noah's Essay .Synagogue Contacts	<b>16</b>

#### The Early Formative Years: 1933-1947 on The Lower East Side of Manhattan

Morton Gold was born to Bessie and Leon Gold on the lower east side of Manhattan on June 10, 1933. When asked about his birth story, he simply says, "I was born in a hospital because I wanted to be near my mother! [joke] Sorry...my memory may be good, but it is not that good." As the son of immigrants, Morton Gold's first language was Yiddish. His father, Liebel Goldvog, was born in Belz, Bessarabia in 1900. Liebele began traveling with the local theater troupe when he was 17, making the rounds of small shtetls (Jewish neighborhoods). Two years later, he was a member of the Yiddish Theater in Zhitomir, now in Ukraine. The next two years he served as the theater department administrator during his required military service in the Red Army.

By 1922, Liebele used his brother's passport to leave his home country. According to his son: "[My father] had to get out, apparently. He figured if his superior who was a dedicated and devoted Communist was called a traitor to the revolution and shot, he figured anybody could be shot at, anytime for any reason whatsoever. He decided to hightail it out of Russia as quickly as possible. He...ran to the railroad station just as the train was leaving...There was a man [on the train] who stretched out his hands and if he didn't do that, I wouldn't be here today."

During his travels in Europe, including Paris, his father changed his name to Leon Gold. In 1924, he went to Chicago to be with his mother. He played in Chicago, Montreal and Baltimore before arriving at the Hopkinson Theater in Brooklyn, NY. He finally settled in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, performing in well known productions in the theaters of the best productions over the next eighteen years.

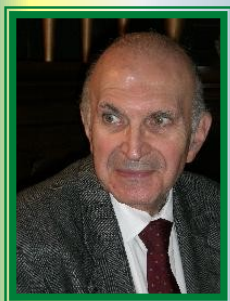
When his son was old enough, Leon Gold brought him to the theater. For as long as he can remember, Morton spent each and every Saturday afternoon at the theater, watching whichever play in which his father performed.

The music was the essence of each production. Newly composed tunes were expected and the music was dressed in some of the folk motifs of the Ukraine, Russia, Gypsy and Jewish cultures. Whenever relevant to the plot, the music used traditional synagogue music. "The songs they wrote are the equal in quality to all the songs of Hammerstein or Gershwin or Coward, or any of those other people at the time," says Dr. Gold. The music was an Americanization of the familiar folk and synagogue tunes that the audience members knew from their homelands and it was satisfying to their immigrant souls. The result was that the audience went home humming the tunes from the show.

Molly Picon, the darling of the Yiddish Theater, was often partnered with Leon Gold. In fact, Leon acted with her on Broadway in 1942 for the performance of "Oy is Dus a Leben/Oh, What a Life!," a musical comedy about her career. Leon Gold was center stage to deliver the prologue of the show. It opened October 12, 1942 and closed on February 6, 1943 after 139 shows.

## Excerpt from Masters' Thesis "I will sing to the Lord all my life" The Life Story and Music of Dr. Morton Gold, cont.

by Beth Strassler



Leon Gold was a member of the Hebrew Actors Union, which was a huge accomplishment for any Yiddish Theater actor. Each candidate was required to have a sponsor. A well known composer, Sholom Secunda, served as his father's sponsor for Union admittance. Morton was there when Secunda was asked what he answered to the Union board's question: "Why should Leon Gold be admitted into the Union?" Secunda's answer was "Because he is good to his mother."

Morton remembers that his father was the first to sing composer Alexander Olshanetsky's famous song about his hometown "Belz", better known as "My Shtetele Belz". Many actors had their signature songs, and this was his father's, although he never recorded it.

Morton's own musical ability was recognized in his neighborhood. At the age of ten, he played piano accompaniment at a branch school of Temple Emanu-El across the street from his home at on 319 East Sixth Street (between 1st and 2nd Aves).

Morton studied piano at the Third Street Music School Settlement. Never considering himself to be a great student, he recalls not practicing until he became a student of Miss Maguerite Valentine, a graduate of The Julliard School of Music. "She saw something in me that I didn't know about" recalls Morton.

As a young boy, Olshanetsky had singled him out of a crowd, looked him in the eye as he walked past and handed him his first baton. "I was sitting in a theater in Brooklyn, I think it was the Hopkinson Theater, and he passed me because he was conducting the orchestra, and he

looked at me, he took his baton, and gave it to me...my first baton. [I was] 10 or 11."

Morton became bar mitzvah in 1946. His family was part of the Workmen's Circle and the Yiddish Theater social circles. They were not observant in the sense of attending synagogue regularly. Morton followed the typical procedure for such families: He studied for a year with a tutor, then became bar mitzvah in the neighborhood's "Conserva-dox" shul.

The theaters were in their heyday in the 1910's and 20's. Strange as it seems, the Yiddish Theater reached its peak between the late 1920's and the mid 1940's, meaning that it prospered during the difficult time of the Great Depression and World War II. Its downfall began when the Yiddish speaking immigrants moved out to more prosperous lives elsewhere, immigration quotas were lowered, and there were fewer and fewer Yiddish speakers moving into the Lower East Side neighborhood.

"Initially, in the 20's, it was all Yiddish. In the 30's, it was mostly Yiddish with a little smattering of English thrown in. As the 40's wore on, there was Yiddish but there was as much English as Yiddish because...half the audience didn't understand Yiddish any more. And the older generation, they were in nursing homes", recalls Dr. Gold.

He witnessed the demanding working conditions under which the composers labored and commented, "They (the composers) had to be prolific. They had to produce. And the songs they wrote are the equal in quality to all the songs of Hammerstein or Gershwin or Coward, or any of those other people at the time. People had to be humming a tune as they left the theater. If they didn't, it was not a success."





Excerpt from Masters' Thesis "I will sing to the Lord all my life"  
The Life Story and Music of Dr. Morton Gold, cont.  
by Beth Strassler

With the decline of the Yiddish Theater, Morton's father redefined himself. Leon Gold regularly traveled to Brooklyn to study with a cantor, Cantor Guzinsky, and set out on a second career as an Orthodox cantor.

At first thought, this may seem like a remarkable change. However, the Yiddish theater was a kosher entity. An article in the Chicago Daily Tribune, on May 2, 1902, tells the story of an actor who insisted on lighting a match in a scene during a Shabbat performance. The other actors advised him not to, but he insisted that it was part of the story and should be done. The audience began to hiss and boo, and the actor was forced off the stage.

A photograph from 1938 shows five year old Morton holding the candle with the entire cast on stage, ready to recite Havdalah at the end of Shabbat at the Second Avenue Theater. In the front row, from left to right are: Marty Barat; Moishe Felder, holding the winecup; Morton Gold at age 5; his father, Leon Gold. Names of those in the back row are unknown.

Several years after this photo was taken, Morton discovered his father's ambivalence between the theater and the cantorate. During a walk with his father, they ran into Mr. Guskin, President of the Hebrew Actors' Union. Mr. Guskin asked, "So, are you a cantor or an actor?" Morton's father answered, "I am that from which I can make a living." Within a year, his father would take a position in Boston. Young Morton would have just begun a new high school where he felt lost in the crowds. He was happy to leave the school, even if it meant he had to leave New York.

And what was his mother doing all this time? "She was supportive." She spoke up later on, when Morton was tempted to remain in Ellsworth, Maine, where his high school teaching was going very well. "No, no, no. You're not staying out there. I want you to have [a robe with] velvet on your sleeves," she told her son. "That was the end of the discussion... I applied to Boston University [doctoral program]. They accepted me right away."

**Next Time: The Later Formative Years: 1947-1954 in Boston**



## POTLUCK NEWS

We are looking forward to another exciting year! Please join us for great food & friendly conversation.

Our first official Potluck will be our annual Hannukah party on December 18, with delicious latkes, Hannukah cookies & games.

We will celebrate Tu B'shevat on February 10.

The Purim party will be March 12. Costumes are encouraged for adults, as well as children. Fun & games, as well as homemade Hamantaschen, will be provided. More details will be coming as the date draws closer.

Barbara & Linda

## High Holidays 5777 Fall 2016

Congregation Etz Chaim 36 Bacon Street Biddeford, ME

### Rosh Hashanah Day 1:

Evening Service: Sunday, October 2: 6:15 pm

Morning Service: Monday, October 3: 9:15 Torah Service: 10:15 Hineni: 11:15

Service ends: 12:15 Tashlich follows: 12:30

### Rosh Hashanah Day 2:

Evening Service: Monday, October 3: 6:15 pm

Morning Service: Tuesday, October 4: 9:15 Torah Service: 10:15

### Yom Kippur

Evening Service: Tuesday, October 11: Kol Nidre: 6 pm

Morning Service: Wednesday, October 12: 9:15 Yizkor: 11:15

Afternoon Service: 4:30 pm

Community Break Fast: Begins approx. 6:15

[www.etzchaimme.org](http://www.etzchaimme.org)  
Questions? Call 967-5833





## Apple Picking & Hay Ride Family High Holiday Gathering

---

**Where:** Spiller Farm in Wells

**When:** October 9th, 2016 - 10am- 12pm

Join us as we bring in the New Year.

Hear the shofar as you make new friends and meet old ones.

Some of the apples will be used to make apple pies for the  
Yom Kippur Breakfast and local shelters.

---

**No charge - RSVP to:** [strassler@roadrunner.com](mailto:strassler@roadrunner.com)



## Our Family Summer Trip ... to China!

By Austin Macomber

Over the summer, my family and I went on vacation to China. We traveled around, looking at the most famous sites, including the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the Terra-Cotta Warriors, the Shanghai skyline, and much more. And yes, we saw pandas! One of our most memorable excursions was off the beaten path in Shanghai, where we visited a small Jewish historic site called the Ohel Moshe Synagogue and Museum.

We learned that during World War II, over 20,000 Jews seeking refuge from the holocaust were welcomed by Shanghai, one of the only ports in the world that allowed Jewish refugees without visas. Between 1938-1939 the German and Austrian Jewish refugee population grew from about 1,500 to 20,000, following the violence of the Kristallnacht. Several thousand Polish Jews also came to Shanghai to escape Nazi persecution. The Jews were mostly packed into a small, one square mile area, known as the Shanghai Ghetto.

Living in Shanghai must have been a shock for European Jewish people - I know it was drastically different for me, while I was on vacation. Plus, most Jewish refugees came to Shanghai with little or no possessions. Thanks to the generosity of international charities and the Chinese government in Shanghai, these people could live and continue with their culture as best as they could, which included worshipping at the Ohel Moshe Synagogue. During the war, the Japanese took over Shanghai and stopped foreign and government aid to immigrants in China, which left the Jews unsupported. At that point, the Jews and Chinese had a common enemy and became strong allies.

Once the war ended, most Jews who had come there as refugees moved away. Some have remained in contact with Chinese people who they met in the Shanghai Ghetto, and some continue to support the beautiful Ohel Moshe Synagogue and Museum that proves their history there. Visiting this site was really special in another way - the familiarity of the sanctuary showed me that the Jewish culture thrives everywhere in the world.



## Mighty Waters Cannot Extinguish.....

By Jack Schraeter

On August 26, 2012, five Torah scrolls were paraded through the streets, each one under its own Chuppah. They were carried into a new synagogue building being dedicated in Metairie, Louisiana, to the sounds of The Original Pinettes, the world's only all-female brass band and second line.

### **And now, on to the rest of the story:**

In August of 2005, an iconic picture for many Jews, during the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina, was of men waist deep in a flooded synagogue, carrying Torahs to safety. Known as 'Operation Torah Scrolls', ZAKA volunteers entered New Orleans to save the holy Torah scrolls that were left in Congregation Beth Israel's synagogue.

In a unique operation, ZAKA and Louisiana National Guard volunteers, alongside a team assigned by the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), waded through waist-deep, filthy, toxic floodwaters to retrieve the Torah scrolls from Congregation Beth Israel, an Orthodox synagogue in New Orleans. A few of the Torah scrolls were believed to be more than 250 years old.

In the flooded synagogue, thousands of holy books were ruined, along with all the furniture, the entire library, a host of other religious articles and artifacts, some going back 100+ years. Only 2 menorahs, a Hanukkah menorah (later to be used at a White House Hanukkah celebration), the eternal light that hung over the ark holding the Torahs and the Bimah (lectern), and the numerous plaques along the walls with memorial plates of deceased members and their families, along with an old wooded plaque, listing the names of the founding members. The building had to be condemned and the congregation's rabbi left the area, and on top of it all, Meyer Lachoff, Beth Israel's longtime Gabbai, died during Katrina.

Katrina occurred just weeks prior to the High Holidays, and the congregation had no useable Torahs, no prayer books, no prayer shawls, nothing.

The best they were able to do was to hold Yom Kippur services, which were held in a donated meeting room at a Comfort Suites hotel. Orange Home Depot buckets anchored posts, from which bed sheets were strung, dividing men from women in traditional worship. A Torah scroll and a Shofar, on loan from Yeshiva University, was sent down to them, along with a box of 40 high holiday prayer books, donated by a retirement home in Monsey, N.Y.

When you think that things could not get any worse, it was determined by a group of Torah scribe experts that none of the 7 Torah's rescued from the synagogue were salvageable.

On Saturday, March 18, 2006, the Torah portion of the week that was read was Ki Tisa. This Torah portion re-tells of tragic events and the sin of the Golden Calf, and of the two tablets that Moshe brought down from Mt. Sinai, then destroyed them when he saw that the nation had sinned.

On Frenchman Street in Gentilly, LA, was Beth Israel Jewish Cemetery, the same cemetery where they had buried Meyer Lachoff, the longtime Gabbai, who died during Katrina and could not be buried for weeks, until the ground had dried up enough. Next to Meyer Lachoff was an empty and unreserved grave. On Sunday morning, March 19, 2006, the gravediggers arrived to open the adjoining grave.

## Mighty Waters Cannot Extinguish, cont.

By Jack Schraeter

In the life of most Jews, one would not see a Torah scroll being buried, but here they were placing seven Torahs in a gravesite at the same time. The synagogue president at the time, Jackie Gothard, reported that “there were no land telephones working yet, people were just communicating with cellular phones. We let the word out that Beth Israel was having a burial in their cemetery for the Torah scrolls at 2:00 PM on that Sunday afternoon. People in town volunteering, Jewish people who were Uptown, in New Orleans East, in the Lower 9th Ward, helping with Habitat for Humanity. Wherever the volunteer organizations sent them, they went, just doing recovery work. There must have been 150 people at the cemetery for the burial, congregants and Jewish volunteers. I don't know how they heard about it, but they showed up to pay their respects.”

Edward Gothard, Beth Israel Rebuilding Committee Chairman, who had been in the forefront of the post-Katrina efforts to reestablish the synagogue, led the service, and Rabbi Mayer Waxman, Orthodox Union Director of Synagogue Services, participated in the burial of the seven Torah scrolls. In Rabbi Waxman's words of inspiration at the burial service for the Torah scrolls, he said, “There are several times, burial being one of them, in which a Jew is compared to a Sefer Torah and a Sefer Torah is compared to a Jew. As we bury these Sifrei Torah it is crucial that we do not bury the principles of Torah with them. It is important that the vibrancy of Torah and of the New Orleans Jewish community remain strong.”

### And now things begin to get better:

Also in 2006, Congregation Gates of Prayer, the Reform congregation located in Metairie, offered Beth Israel the option to use their rear chapel for services and leased them office space. For the next 6+ years, Beth Israel held services there and mounted a campaign to rebuild their synagogue. It was clear in 2007 that the old Synagogue, wrecked by Katrina, was beyond repair, and rebuilding it as a synagogue was impossible. They sold the remnants of the building and the lot it stood on, and used the proceeds to add to what would become a \$3 million dollar capital campaign.

Beth Israel's selection of noted fundraiser and non-profit advisor Roselle Middleberg Ungar, the former acting Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans executive director following the storm, was the final significant person needed to plan and implement the \$3 million capital campaign to finance the new structure and to maintain an endowment that would generate significant monies needed for annual funding. A new dues structure was proposed and accepted by the congregation. Insurance payouts for the initial damage to the structure, as well as for later damage due to flooding caused by vandals and burglars, were received by Beth Israel. Donations from small and large donors across the nation contributed to the rebuilding fund, encouraged to do so by the OU and the congregation's own revamped website.

In April 2010, Beth Israel purchased a plot adjacent to Congregation Gates of Prayer, Metairie's only Reform congregation, which was also the place Beth Israel had called home since 2006. Two prominent families, members of Beth Israel, donated \$100,000 each, and soon after, as funds began to flow in, a ground breaking ceremony was held on the plot of what was to become the new Beth Israel Synagogue.

Also, during the years of “wandering”, the congregation acquired five Torah Scrolls. Brith Shalom Beth Israel Congregation of Charleston, SC and Congregation Shaare Zedek Sons of Abraham of Providence, RI each donated a Torah. A 14 year old teenager, Haley Fields, of Los Angeles, CA (who would, years later, attend the dedication) heard of Beth Israel's difficult circumstances, and with the support of her mother, spearheaded a fund-raising drive, selling 3,500 watches; \$18,000 was ultimately raised to buy a third Torah. The Unalov family of Maryland helped to secure a third Torah at a cost of \$20,000. A fifth was acquired through a group of donors.

### And now we come full circle:

Coming back from the brink of disaster, Congregation Beth Israel took its first tentative steps as Metairie's newest Orthodox Jewish presence in its own synagogue at 4004 West Esplanade Avenue.



## Mighty Waters Cannot Extinguish, cont.

By Jack Schraeter

Congregation members filled every available seat in the new sanctuary. Congregation Beth Israel was founded in 1904 from various smaller Ashkenazic prayer groups, in what was then the largely Jewish section around Dryades Street.

Following a video prepared by congregation president Eddie Gothard, the five Torah scrolls were escorted, under chuppahs, to their new home, accompanied by the strains of a New Orleans traditional street parade band and second line. The Torahs were passed to older congregation leaders, who then handed them to the next generation of leadership.

Once the Torah scrolls were housed inside the specially constructed wooden *Aron Hakodesh* (holy Ark), a *Chanukiah Habiya* (dedication of the house) was held when a *mezuzah* scroll was attached to the front door of the new synagogue and community center and a blessing said.

A patio behind the synagogue, near the congregation's sukkah, is embedded with bricks bearing the names of Jewish agencies and congregations across the United States and Canada, that helped Beth Israel through its wanderings.

Irwin Lachoff, Meyer Lachoff's son, who is now the congregation's Gabbai, was given "the one thing" his father had, but until now he had not: A key to the building.

Over the doors to the Holy Ark is a carved inscription: "**Mighty Waters Cannot Extinguish Our Love**"

### References and Acknowledgments

Orthodox Union dept. of public relations

Institute of Southern Jewish Life

New Orleans city guide

The Times Picayune, Dec 2, 2010

Deep South Jewish Voice

Los Angeles Times, July 19, 2007

The Jewish Telegraph Agency-Ruined Synagogue in New Orleans

The Star of David Foundation, Present At The Flood

The Tablet Magazine, Dec. 13, 2013

Crescent City Jewish News, Sept. 2012

JWA.org – Burial in New Orleans, March 2006



## Hebrew School-5777

Calling all students-old and new.

Hard to believe that public school has already started and it is time to think about another exciting year at the York County Community Hebrew School at Congregation Etz Chaim. Classes will once again be held on Thursday afternoons, from 3:45-6:00.

Beth Strassler will be returning after her hiatus from teaching due to her schooling/training at Hebrew College. Rob Pierce is retiring from teaching the teen class after 13 years due to new work commitments. This year, David Strassler will be the new teen class teacher.

September 29th will be the first class, as we prepare for the High Holidays This is a good time to welcome new students and their families, and reconnect with old friends. On 9/29, school will end at 5:15.

Hope to see y'all there!

Any questions, contact Beth: [strassler@roadrunner.com](mailto:strassler@roadrunner.com)

**Samuel Osher Memorial Library  
at Congregation Etz Chaim**

**Jewish Books, Music & Movies  
for the  
York County Community**

**To donate books call: 967-5833**

### *A Note from the Board*

President David Strassler and the Board of Directors of Congregation Etz Chaim wish you and your family a healthy, happy and peaceful New Year.

~~~~~  
You could save trees & money by  
receiving your newsletter & all Jewish  
community announcements electronically.  
Just write to our mail address & ask to

***"Go Green".***

## Shapiro Room Dedication

By Beth & David Strassler

*It is not what one says, but rather what one does, that makes all the difference in the world.*

--Pirkei Avot 1:17

On the beautiful summer evening of August 18<sup>th</sup>, fifty people came together to dedicate our downstairs function room and name it the Arnold and Barbara Shapiro Social Hall. Barbara Shapiro joined us before returning to Florida, along with Sue and Steve Masse, her daughter and son-in-law, Joshua Masse, her grandson, and a table full of their closest friends. Synagogue members joined in honoring Barbara and Arnold for their many years of selfless dedication to our synagogue community.

David Strassler served as the master of ceremonies. Beth Strassler decorated the room with the theme of "handle bar mustache" in Arnold's honor, and "gold jewelry" in Barbara's honor. Sue Masse and Stan Karlin took the microphone to reminisce about growing up Jewish in Biddeford. Destination Catering provided a delicious meal, followed by music performed by Maine Jewish singer-song writer, Sue Horowitz.

As part of the evening, Barbara presented the first annual Arnold Shapiro Community service award to Noah Scarpelli (see other article in this newsletter).

Barbara said, "It is only appropriate that this room is dedicated to us. We had many great times down here 'in the day', with community dinner parties. And Arnold was always the life of the party."

In the near future, a plaque will be placed in the room in their honor.





## Shapiro Room Dedication Photo Collage



# Jewish Conference at Colby College

By Denise Hammond

In June, my family and I were blessed with the opportunity to drive up to Waterville and stay at Colby College to attend the week-end long Maine Conference for Jewish Life. This conference was a collaboration of a reform and conservative rabbi, coming together to bring Jewish people of Maine in one place to discuss, pray, sing and play. To be honest, the main reason I made this trek was to have family time. To have all four kids and two parents in one place for a whole weekend is a rarity in my household. We are a family of commitments, activities and stuff. Our lives are full and busy, so to be together in one place felt heavenly, and to learn and meet others was a lovely bonus.

My family seemed excited when discussing this weekend; we all went up with positive attitudes and minimal expectations. We stayed in a dorm on campus, which was a first for my children. Upon arriving on campus, our excitement grew. Colby is a beautiful campus, and the building we needed to register in was quite impressive. The woman who helped us check-in was so nice and helpful, and allowed my children all the cookies and juice boxes they could hold on to; we were happy.

The schedule was a pleasant surprise, something for each age group! The littlest had the option of going to a service or playing different games with some really fun teenagers. Teenagers were able to make their own mezuzahs, and adults were ushered in to listen to a keynote speaker, Ambassador Dennis Ross, speaking about the troubles in the Middle East and how to find peace. It might have been a little over my head, but it was amazing to be in the same room with a group of somewhat like-minded Jewish people, people who understood the same history. This feeling continued for the remainder of the conference. Saturday and Sunday were filled with more workshops for all ages, such as: yoga and chanting, Shabbat in the wild (aka: walking through the paths in the woods and chanting/praying as you go), Hebrew games, intro to Hebrew, starting a Jewish bookgroup and making gardening a vital part of congregational life. These were the "lighter" workshops. There were other workshops that got you thinking more deeply, such as: "Spiritual Eldering", "Gratitude in the Jewish Tradition", "Job: The World's Greatest Coper", and "Wandering Jews Through the Centuries: It All Started With Abraham". There were many more; please go to the website if you'd like to see the entire curriculum list at: <http://web.colby.edu/mainejewishlifeconference/>.

There were many fun moments we enjoyed: they allowed us all to use the college swimming pool, made tie-dyed challah covers, dads and kids made their own tie-dyed challah, and teens got to learn how to make their own mock-tails with Vena's Fizz House, from Portland. My kids' most enjoyable moments were just being together, eating (kosher cooking, of course) in a dining room on a college campus, and seeing our own community members from Congregation Etz Chaim in this different place. To recognize familiar faces at this "huge" conference was very cool to them!

My favorite part was the deepening understanding that we are all connected, all of us Jews. When I struggle with taking my kids out of school for the high holidays, there are others who have that same struggle, that understanding of what it means to be Jewish in Maine. Being raised in a very Jewish town, I took for granted that others understood how I needed to go to Hebrew school, or study for my bat mitzvah, the special foods we ate on special occasions; we were all eating the same foods, it was the norm. That was my favorite part, the comforting, informative and validating feelings I had as I drove away from that weekend. I'm doing ok, and we are all in this together.





## Strategic Plan Survey

By Jill Bilsky

As I write this, the weather is warm, the sun is bright and yet autumn is upon us. Fall is a great time for reflection. The days are shorter, the leaves are starting to change, school is back in session, the High Holidays are approaching and I'm sure many of you are wondering, "What ever happened to that survey I filled out last winter?"

As many of you know, Congregation Etz Chaim is in the process of updating our Strategic Plan. The plan, which addresses Membership, Organizational Structure, Facilities, Volunteer Participation, Educational Programs and Finances, was originally developed in 2005. Last year, the Board of Directors decided it was time to revisit the plan, see what we have accomplished, where we need to improve and what direction C.E.C. will take going forward. As part of the process, a survey was sent out in January to both members and non-members on our mailing lists.

It was great to receive so many positive responses, but even better was the constructive criticism. While some of the suggestions will help us to create a long-term plan, other ideas can be acted upon in the near future. Respondents felt that C.E.C. was a welcoming place, but that there were things we could do to make it better: greeters, name tags, and more enthusiasm toward visitors and new members. To attract these new members, we have been increasing our advertising of services and events, along with making improvements to the website and Facebook page. We hope you will join us for future events and encourage you to bring friends!

Many of you commented on the physical appearance of the building. In the past few years, C.E.C. has made several improvements to our facilities (new flooring, pews and gas heat). We are currently looking into restoring the exterior of the building as well. Volunteers have been vital to these efforts. The survey shows that 72% of respondents said that C.E.C. provides opportunities to donate time, labor and some good old kosher elbow grease. We thank everyone who has contributed to these improvements, as well as those who have helped with the running of services, functions and Hebrew School. Volunteers are always welcome. Contact Etz Chaim to see how you can help.

The upkeep, improvement, and running of our Synagogue not only requires volunteers, it costs money. As part of the strategic plan, we are exploring a capital campaign or establishing an endowment. C.E.C. regularly applies for available grants, but donations and dues from our members keep the lights on. Several people responded positively to the membership dues questions. As a result C.E.C. has kept its dues voluntary, but has restructured the tiers and included an angel category (an opportunity for you to help support the membership of someone who cannot afford it). Members can pay online through the website, either a single payment or in smaller, recurring monthly payments. And of course, we will always accept checks!

Thank you for your feedback. We hope to keep you updated, as we continue to make improvements to Congregation Etz Chaim and our Strategic Plan.



Visit our website:

<http://etzchaimme.org>

## *Shabbat Services*

*Join us for Shabbat Services:*

*Every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month,  
beginning at 9:30 am*

## **Board of Directors at Congregation Etz Chaim**

Jill and Edward Bilsky  
Julie Campisi  
Linda and Frank Federman  
Alan Fink  
Maureen King  
Cynthia Kurtz  
Jeff Levy  
Leah Macomber  
Pamela Small Oliver  
Sue Rubin  
Jack Schraeter  
Beth & David Strassler

## **York County (YC) Jewish Community**

This newsletter is published three to four times each year. It is intended to announce and report on Jewish community events in York County, and especially at Congregation Etz Chaim in Biddeford. It offers local perspectives on historical and contemporary aspects of Jewish life.

Adrianne Levy, Editor & Layout Design Consultant:

Levy family & Board members

[mail@etzchaimme.org](mailto:mail@etzchaimme.org)

If we have your email address, you have been removed from the snail mailing list.

If you wish to continue to receive a paper newsletter, just write/email us.

## Our Synagogue

Our community programs are available to all members of the York County Jewish Community and are driven by the following mission statement:

“We promote Jewish cultural, social, educational and religious activities in southern Maine. Our primary goal is to make available a range of activities that facilitate the expression of what each individual finds valuable in the Jewish experience.

We attempt to accommodate individuals along the entire spectrum of Jewish practice and theology. We value and support the existence of a local formal congregation, but view our community programs as open to all interested people, regardless of whether or to what congregation they may be formally affiliated.”

### The following is the essay submitted by Noah Scarpelli in 2016, the first recipient of the Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award:

Congregation Etz Chaim was my first exposure to the Jewish community. My family had been searching around for a Jewish presence, and once we met the members of Etz Chaim, our choice to join was clear. Like the other children, I started out by attending Hebrew school. However, unlike most of the other children who have gone through the Congregation Etz Chaim Hebrew School, I did not start attending until I was about seven. Instead of starting out in the Aleph class like everyone else, I went straight to the Bet class. Even though I did not spend as many years in the Hebrew School and synagogue, doesn't mean that its effects on me were any less.

Growing up in the small town of Acton, I was not surrounded by very many Jewish families. My elementary school only had one other Jewish kid besides my brother and I. Congregation Etz Chaim filled that void and welcomed me into their family with open arms. I have never forgotten that moment. Since then, I have strove to give back to the congregation in any way I could. After adding my voice to the congregation at my Bar Mitzvah, I helped teach the younger students, both in the classroom and one on one in the computer room, while I waited for the teen class to begin. Also, when the synagogue was to get its new flooring, I gladly lent a hand to clean up and allow that process to unfold.

To me, Etz Chaim is a second family. There has been happiness and sadness, but everyone was

## Synagogue Contacts

Please mail Membership dues to:

*PO Box 905,  
Kennebunk, ME 04043*

**Memorial Plaques, Prayer books,  
Etz Chaim books of Torah:  
Hebrew School/Services:  
Shabbat Potlucks:  
Library  
Sunday School:**

|                                    |                                                                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>David Strassler:</i>            | <i>967-5833</i>                                                               |
| <i>Beth &amp; David Strassler:</i> | <i>967-5833</i>                                                               |
| <i>Linda Federman:</i>             | <i>661-269-1233</i>                                                           |
| <i>Beth Strassler</i>              | <u><a href="mailto:Strassler@roadrunner.com">Strassler@roadrunner.com</a></u> |
| <i>Denise Hammond:</i>             | <u><a href="mailto:DGHammond@roadrunner.com">DGHammond@roadrunner.com</a></u> |



## York County Jewish Community News



Congregation Etz Chaim  
PO Box 905  
Kennebunk, ME 04043

Address Label