

On Your Doorposts Spring 1999

And Beyond Your Gates

Creating Family Traditions

Though months have passed since Sukkot, two-year-old Miranda Rubin is still talking about “the birds in the sukkah.” She is referring to the sukkah decorations her family made with foam, feathers and beads – a craft project that was delivered to the Rubin’s home last year, complete with a ten-by-twelve foot sukkah.

Theirs was one of 70 deliveries over two years by the B’nai Amoona “Sukkah Squad,” a group of volunteer builders who not only provided affordable sukkot to area families, but helped assemble them as well. And while the builders were at work, teens from United Synagogue Youth showed families how to make sukkah birds and other festive decorations.

A grant from the Jewish Federation of St. Louis’ Henry and Gladys Crown Charitable Income Trust honoring the memory of Shirlee Green enabled B’nai Amoona to offer both sukkah and service to families for just over \$100 –

one-fourth the cost of other sukkah kits. “Families had been telling me for years that the expense and hassle of building a sukkah prevented them from celebrating the festival at home,” explains Marcia Mermelstein who coordinated the project for B’nai Amoona. “The labor provided by the Sukkah Squad and the subsidy provided by the Crown Trust eliminated both of those objections.”

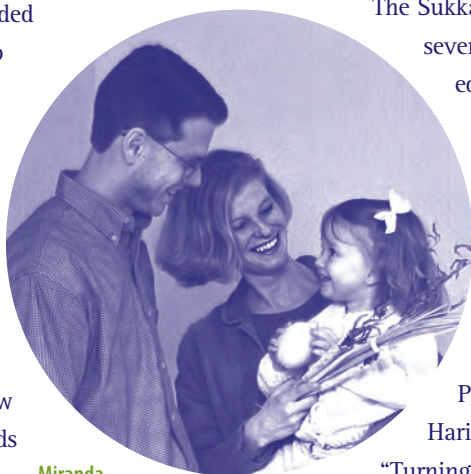
Positive Jewish Memories

The Sukkah Squad is one of several Jewish family education projects that have inspired families to create new traditions and positive Jewish memories. Memories like those Sylvia and William Poe have of Nusach Hari B’nai Zion’s

“Turning Friday Night Into Shabbos,” an evening of education and Shabbat celebration for beginners, also funded by a Crown Grant.

Judaism was not new to the Poes when they attended the program last spring. Both were raised in traditional Jewish homes and had strong Jewish identities. But, the program perfectly

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Miranda Rubin shakes the lulav with help from her parents Mark and Michelle.

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Interactions: Programs that Work

For more than 5,000 years, the Jewish family has perpetuated our traditions. And in recent years, area synagogues and temples have made Jewish family education a priority. Each issue of *Doorposts* will feature family education programs that have successfully promoted intergenerational interactions in the St. Louis Jewish community.

Tot Shabbat

Shabbat time is family time. Just ask any of the 75 children and parents who attended Tot Shabbat at B'nai El Congregation. The program – offered five times during the year – is designed to introduce families with young children to the beauty of Shabbat and to provide them with tools to celebrate Shabbat at home. The mornings begin with a unique Shabbat service, complete with warm-up exercises, a Mi Chamocha parade, singing and storytelling. Afterwards, families join together for craft projects, cooking and learning activities, each focusing on the morning's theme. The end result: an increased comfort level with celebrating Shabbat and positive Jewish memories.

Want to know how you can provide a Tot Shabbat worship and education experience for your temple or synagogue? For more information, call Rabbi Solomon Agin, (314) 432-6393.

L'Dor Vador

Though only teenagers, the seventh and eighth graders at Shaare Zedek Synagogue have already considered how they will pass their Jewish family histories to their future children. After all, they spent an entire year learning about their Jewish roots, conducting oral histories, and – together with their parents – creating an exhibit of family heirlooms that was on display at

Chicago's Spertus Museum. L'Dor Vador was so successful in helping families explore their Jewish identities, it inspired Congregation Kol Am to organize a family heritage program the following year. Help your students explore their heritage. For more information, call Rabbi Hillel Gold, (314) 727-1747.

Mitzvah of the Month

"Let all who are hungry come and eat." Sounds pretty typical of a Super Bowl party. But the guests at Congregation Kol Am's Super Bowl party knew hunger quite profoundly. It was a Super Bowl party for the homeless – an annual religious action project that served this year as the culmination of a month-long study about the mitzvah of feeding the homeless and extending hospitality to strangers. Each month, parents are invited to study a different mitzvah with their children at Kol Am's religious school. The lessons are reinforced with hands-on learning experiences – visits to nursing homes, Shabbat dinners and biblical scavenger hunts – that teach families how to incorporate mitzvot into their lives...one month at a time. For more about Mitzvah of the Month, call Rabbi Estelle Gottman Mills, (314) 227-7574. ●



Our Jewish Home: A Family Treasure

Eight-year-old Phillip Weber led his parents and brother Ryan, 4, on a treasure hunt to find Jewish symbols throughout their home. Such a treasure was to be found in every room: a menorah in the living room, cross-stitch wall hangings in the family room, cookbooks in the kitchen, an illustration of the Hebrew alphabet in his bedroom.

The treasure hunt was part of a program that has become another Weber family treasure – Our Jewish Home. Modeled after Missouri's successful Parents as Teachers project, the program brings Jewish educators into the homes of families eager to enrich their religious practices or present them to their children for the first time.

Our Jewish Home was developed six years ago by the Central Agency for Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center to target families with children aged three through six. Last year, thanks to a grant from the Henry and Gladys Crown Charitable Income Trust honoring the memory of Shirlee Green, five St. Louis congregations adapted the program for member families with children in grades 1-3. That number increased to nine congregations in 1999, with representation from the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements.

The key to the program's success is the relationship that develops between the family and the educator during home visits. Four times a year, the educators lead 50 families in special activities – adapted to the family's level of knowledge and observance – that

teach about holidays, Jewish values, mitzvot and other Jewish practices.

The Weber's certainly have bonded with Lori Erickson, their educator from United Hebrew. "Lori is so easy to have in our home," explains Phillip's mother Fran. "She is friendly, comforting, bright and wonderful with our children. She welcomes our questions no matter how simple they are. She's everything you'd look for in an educator."

And her visits have made quite an impact on the Weber Family. They now say the motzi before family meals, make their own challah, and welcome Shabbat with celebration. With supplies provided to them through Our Jewish Home, they have made hamantaschen on Purim, planted seeds on Tu B'Shvat, and decorated birdfeeders to emphasize the mitzvah of caring for animals.

"Our Jewish Home has made learning easy and fun," says Fran. "It has been a wonderful refresher for me, and a great learning experience for my children."

For more information about Our Jewish Home, call Joan Wolchansky, (314) 432-0020. ●



Fran, Terry, Phillip and Ryan Weber celebrate Shabbat in their Jewish Home

Creating Family Traditions

(continued from cover)

complemented their personal journeys to become more observant. "The atmosphere was warm and non-threatening," says Bill. "Of the 130-plus people who attended, I can't imagine any left without feeling that the celebration of Shabbat was something they wanted to perpetuate in their own homes." In fact, the Poe's themselves have since made the observance of Shabbat part of their own family tradition.

"Turning Friday Night into Shabbos" – the replication of a successful national program – included a candle lighting by mothers and daughters, a learners' service with translated and transliterated prayers, an explanation of customs and rituals, Shabbat dinner, songs, D'var Torah, and intergenerational group discussions and learning opportunities. "The whole evening, I kept thinking, 'This is what Shabbat is all about,'" says Bill.

A Shabbat Song

That is precisely what Sue Picus was thinking when she participated with her family in "Shabbat B'Bayit," an evening of concurrent Shabbat dinners in people's homes, coordinated by Congregation Shaare Emeth. The program, another Crown Grant recipient, sought to address the challenge of making Shabbat important in the lives of liberal Jewish families.

More than 70 of the congregation's families accepted the invitation to participate in "Shabbat B'Bayit," and

on January 22 divided among 11 homes for the first of three pot-luck Shabbat celebrations. "Our intention is to show the ease and joy of celebrating Shabbat," says Ronnie Brockman, family educator at Shaare Emeth.

Although Sue regularly observes Shabbat with her husband Joel and their sons Joshua, 5, and Samuel, 3, "Shabbat B'Bayit" gave her ideas of ways her family might enhance their own Shabbat rituals. "One of the men we celebrated with had a guitar," says Sue. "My kids knew the songs he played from pre-school, and enjoyed the singing and cheerfulness. I think we'll try that at home."

From Generation to Generation

Sukkah, Shabbat and song – three of the many ways St. Louis-area congregations have enriched lives and inspired families to augment their Jewish celebrations. In doing so, future generations will grow up with positive Jewish memories. Joshua and Samuel Picus' Shabbat memories will include joyous melodies. When the Poes start a family, their traditional Shabbat celebrations will surely ignite a strong and lasting Jewish identity. As for Miranda Rubin, "she has never had a Sukkot without a sukkah," says her mother, Michelle. "And she enjoys our family tradition so much, I can't imagine she ever will."

For more information about: "Turning Friday Night Into Shabbos," call Rabbi Zev Smason, (314) 991-2100; "Shabbat B' Bayit," call Ronnie Brockman, (314) 569-1273; the "Sukkah Squad," call Marcia Mermelstein, (314) 432-0020. ●



Welcome to Doorposts

“Inscribe them on the doorposts of thy house and upon thy gates...”

(Deuteronomy 6:9)

For thousands of years, the mezuzot on our doorposts have reminded us to perpetuate our heritage, to faithfully teach our children at home and on our way. But, say the results of recent Jewish continuity studies, the delegation of those responsibilities to weekly religious and Hebrew schools just isn't enough.

We need a new approach, one that engages the whole family in the creation of positive Jewish memories. Jewish family education has become a significant tool in promoting Jewish identity and continuity. And so, we bring to you this premiere issue of *Doorposts* – a newsletter that nourishes Jewish family education at home and beyond your gates.

So...What's It to You?

- *Doorposts* is the program resource you've been waiting for. We'll provide the complete scoop about successful Jewish family education

programs – along with names and phone numbers to call for more information – that can be replicated by your organization or congregation.

- *Doorposts* is a celebration of successes – including yours. Every issue of *Doorposts* will include a reply card so we can learn “What's New With You.” We'll print some of those success stories in future issues of *Doorposts*.
- *Doorposts* is your guide to family education – professionally and personally. Use *Doorposts* to enhance family education programming at your organization and to enhance family education in your own home.

Our wish for you...family education programs that prompt dinner conversations, create family traditions, and encourage parents, children and grandparents to learn and grow together. May the guidance you need be no further than your *Doorposts*. ●

Clip and mail to *Doorposts*, CAJE, 12 Millstone Campus Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146

What's New with

You

What innovative family education programs are taking place within your doorposts and beyond your gates? Send us your success stories, and we'll publish as many as possible in future issues of *Doorposts*.

Our family education success story...

name

organization

phone

e-mail

A Crowning Achievement

Shirlee and George Green raised their son Randy in a home rich with Jewish values and culture. Later in life, those values were reinforced through interactions between Randy and his great aunt and uncle Gladys and Henry Crown. His strong Jewish identity, Randy says, is a credit to his family and to intergenerational interactions so meaningful that he has replicated them with his own children.

It's no wonder then that Randy, a co-trustee of the Henry and Gladys Crown Charitable Income Trust, thought of such family interactions as a way to help combat the increasing assimilation of American Jewry. In 1995, Randy and co-trustee Muriel Hoffman pledged \$150,000 over three years to be used as seed money for innovative congregation-based family education programs. And last year, an additional \$50,000 was committed to continue the program for a fourth year.

Those funds – administered by the Jewish Federation of St. Louis and matched during the third and fourth years by Federation's Sam, Charles and Mamie Rich Education Fund – have

funded 32 programs at 18 St. Louis congregations. “Our intention is to inspire programming that encourages Jewish discussions and learning among families in our community,” says Randy. “Congregations seem an appropriate way to reach those families, and Jewish Federation the agency that could help us approach the issue of continuity as a community.”

Since the first year of the Crown Grants, family education in St. Louis has flourished. The grants have enabled congregations to be adventurous with their programming, to try new approaches. This year, one of the awarded grants went to nine congregations (Reform, Conservative and Orthodox) working together on one initiative. Randy hopes that the success of the Crown Grants will inspire other communities to provide similar funding for family education.

Applications for 1999 Crown Grants currently are under review. Recipients will be notified in June. For more information about Crown Grants, call Susan Witte, (314) 432-0020. To learn how you can organize a family education grant program, call Randy Green, (314) 854-5633. ●

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