

On Your Doorposts Summer/Fall 09

And Beyond Your Gates

Shabbat Celebrations

As Jews we are blessed with the weekly gift of Shabbat. The prayers and rituals – from lighting the candles on Friday night to welcome the Sabbath bride, to the lighting of the braided Havdalah candle on Saturday after three stars have appeared in the evening sky – give us comfort and an opportunity to connect as a community.

Empowering Participants

Rabbi Hyim Shafner of Bais Abraham Congregation feels the more people know about Shabbat the more they can celebrate it. He said there is a tremendous wealth of knowledge associated with the traditions and rituals of the weekly celebration. The congregation created their Shabbat Lottery with a grant from the Gladys K. Crown Foundation honoring the memory of Shirlee Green and a matching grant from the Jewish Federation of St. Louis' Rich Fund. The Shabbat Lottery provides a way for members of all ages and observance levels to become more familiar with Shabbat rituals and their meanings.

“We are helping our members learn how to celebrate Shabbat,” said Shafner. “One way is to empower them to feel

comfortable hosting others in their home for a Shabbat meal.”

The program began with a day of workshops designed to accommodate Jews with little or no Shabbat education to members with advanced skills. The workshop created a bonding experience for members as they came together to knead challah, sing songs and learn about foods and rituals. Each



Chana Novack assists Shoshana and Minucha making challah covers at Bais Abraham.

participating family received a book about celebrating Shabbat at home, a CD of Shabbat meal songs and a bencher (the book used to say blessings after meals) with transliteration.

One of the most important components of the Shabbat Lottery was matching families to co-host a Shabbat meal. More observant, knowledgeable members were matched with another family with less experience. Through modeling, members are becoming more adept and confident at celebrating Shabbat.

The meals, which are still going on, receive a lot of positive feedback, said Shafner.

The Magic of Music

Whatever one's background, Jewish music connects people and helps create

(continued on back cover)

Inside this Issue

Interactions: Programs that Work

For more than 5,000 years, the Jewish family has perpetuated our traditions. With that in mind, congregations have made Jewish family education a priority. Each issue of *Doorposts* features family education programs that have successfully promoted intergenerational interactions in the St. Louis Jewish community.

Simchat HaDorot: The year-long “Celebrations of the Generations” at Congregation Shaare Emeth began with more than 300 people taking part in the World’s Fair Family Day. Personal stories were captured on video at the oral history booth. Participants learned how to begin or expand on researching their family trees. Photographs and memorabilia brought in by families helped trigger fond memories as they were put together to create a collage to take home. Families cooked up their favorite family recipe and brought in samples for tasting. Those recipes were collected and included in a souvenir cookbook for participants.

The program excitement continued with additional activities throughout the year. A bus tour explored the sites of the St. Louis Jewish community: past, present and future. The family retreat at Trout Lodge continued to build on weaving Jewish values and creating Jewish memories for families. There was a special Shabbat dinner and service at the end of the year which included a video from the family memories created at the World’s Fair Family Day. **For more information, call Ronnie Brockman, 314-569-0010.**

Judaica Family Theatre: Families came en masse when B’nai Torah in St. Peters brought their members together to present a play. The script required 25 players, and there was plenty to do for those who were uncomfortable about a role on stage. There were

sets to design, costumes, lighting and so many other behind-the-scenes jobs.

The plot of the play revolved around a traditional Jewish wedding creating many learning opportunities as well. Participants young and old learned about the many unique aspects of a Jewish wedding as they practiced the play and built the sets, including a chuppah on the bimah.

New friendships and relationships were formed between families and within families from the camaraderie built from participating together in the production of the play. It was the most participated-in event in the 25-year history of the congregation, and its success exceeded everyone’s expectations. **For more information, call Jack Cohen, 636-397-0309.**

Mishpacha 2.0: This new initiative helped galvanize and engage young families to create a community for Shabbat and holidays. The experiential programs included a learning component designed to educate the adults and the children as well as a hands-on activity. A Mommy/Baby series offered in the Spring helped create connections and will be repeated with a new group in the Fall.

The Shabbat-centered programs insured a comfortable place for children and the opportunity for families to celebrate Shabbat with the community. The congregation grew their family Shabbat morning service to two times a month, and it is now a synagogue institution. Most importantly, the series of programs for young families originally planned by the professional staff has grown into a grass roots groundswell with lay people creating their own programming. **For more information, call Hazzan Joanna S. Dulkan, 314-727-1747.**



Wedding recessional from B’nai Torah play

Jewish Connections:

Making Every Family Excursion a Jewish Experience

Often children and families tend to think about Jewish learning as something that happens only in religious school, the synagogue or during the celebration of holidays at home. Yet, there are many opportunities to weave Jewish education into our daily lives and experiences.



Libraries and Book Stores

A trip to the library or local bookstore is a great way to introduce readers to Jewish authors and Jewish books. Some books are obviously Jewish; other times Jewish values are revealed as a reader interprets a book. Create a year-round family reading club. Look for Jewish books at the Saul Brodsky Jewish Community Library, located at 12 Millstone Campus Drive, or in your congregational library.



Grocery Stores

Many Jewish lessons can be learned from a trip to the grocery store. Find the heksher (kosher symbol) on food products and have a discussion about why specific foods are kosher. Look for foods from Israel and foods associated with Jewish holidays. Interpreting nutrition labels reminds kids to take care of their bodies since we were all “created in the image of God.” Children can be taught about shopping on a budget and purchase food for an area food bank (such as the Harvey Kornblum Jewish Food Pantry, 314-993-9100).



Zoos, Animal Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Aquariums

A quick look at the laws of Kashrut identifying which animals are kosher can make a great visual learning experience. There are also lessons to be learned about the cycle of life, the importance of the order of the world and the mitzvah of *Tzaar Baalei Chayim* (Caring for Animals). Children can learn about the importance

of *Bal Tashchit* (Preserving the Earth) and how that impacts the life of animals in the wild.



Botanical Gardens, Nature Preserves and Scenic Walks

Recycling, protecting the ozone and being conscious of our carbon footprints are common knowledge for children growing up in the 21st century and important Jewish values. Walking quietly through a nature preserve attunes children to the sounds of nature. Sitting quietly and meditating offers a different prayer experience. Observing the moon at night can be a great beginning to talk about the lunar basis of the Jewish calendar.



Going to the Movies

One way to connect with middle school and high school students is through the movies. Seeing the same film, even if you don't see it together, opens the door for some great discussions. There are many wonderful ways to bring Jewish lessons to the table whether the film subject is science fiction, teenage angst, the supernatural, non-fiction or just a great story.



Garage Sales

This fun excursion is a wonderful family mitzvah project. Begin bargain hunting with a visit to the internet where many organizations post “wish lists” on their websites. Some of those items can be found at garage sales, including: outdoor play equipment, strollers, highchairs, sports equipment, board games and children's books. Organizations serving adults in transition frequently look for clothing and accessories clients can wear to job interviews, along with items for their new housing arrangements including: furniture, pots, pans, cookware and appliances.

Shabbat Celebrations (continued from front cover)

special family memories. St. Louisan Rick Recht's *Shabbat Alive* attracts and engages worshippers of all ages.

Recht started *Shabbat Alive* at United Hebrew where he is their Artist-in-Residence. The service was designed after meetings with Conservative and Reform rabbis, cantors and educators. "The service is always growing and changing," said Recht.

"The overall model, order and ritual are the same as a congregational service. With both traditional melodies and contemporary melodies, participants of all ages are able to find common ground," said Recht. "Where we go from there is magic."

And magic it is.

"Cantor Ron Eichaker and I know music is crucial to the involvement of worshippers at our services," said Rabbi Howard Kaplansky. "The *Shabbat Alive* service appeals to everyone. We have families with young children, our spectacular Teen Team and our junior and senior choirs participating."

After Tefillah

Another very successful program used by United Hebrew and Nusach Hari B'nai Zion is Synaplex Shabbat. The program is an initiative of STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal).

"If you are just measuring from the number of attendees, it is very successful," said Rabbi Ze'ev Smason. "But the true measurement is the excitement it creates."

Smason said their Synaplex Shabbat (part of which received a Crown Grant) offers a "full body experience" with prayer, learning and a luncheon.

"With prayer we are talking to God; with learning we are listening to God

talk to us; and with eating we are talking to each other," said Smason.

The diverse offerings at a Synaplex Shabbat provide meaningful Shabbat experiences for individuals and families of all ages at their own pace. The idea, said Smason, is to transform Shabbat into a "can't miss experience."

The congregation hosts the event five times a year with workshops for tots, 'twens, teens and adults. Many Jewish professionals from the community are invited to speak. Topics have included: choosing a Jewish friendly college, the genocide in Darfur, parenting tips, dealing with bullies and Jewish mysticism.

One common pleasant complaint from participants has been the need to choose from the diverse workshops. Smason came up with a wonderful solution.

"When we have a luncheon, one person who attended each class gives a short synopsis—a taste of what others missed," said Smason.

The program is very popular, and many participants come to hear specific speakers or topics. Another side benefit is that the congregation has learned about many different organizations through the guest speakers.

United Hebrew holds its Synaplex Shabbat on the last Friday evening of every month. The evening begins with wine and cheese, followed by services and then activities.

Several synagogues offer other special Shabbat worship opportunities. Outdoor services are held during the summer in synagogue gardens and at alternative locations such as Forest Park. Other worship experiences include: thematic services, healing services, learning opportunities, musical Shabbats and potluck dinners.