

Bend Reform shul grows with luck, work, creativity

BY DEBORAH MOON

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Founders and board members of Bend's Temple Beth Tikvah attribute the congregation's phenomenal growth since its creation two years ago to luck, serendipity and beshert, while in almost the same breath praising motivated members for donating their skills and time to make things happen.

"We've been very, very lucky, but a lot of people are working to make that happen," said TBT president Lisa Uri. "The amount of time some people have put in is really unfathomable."

Conceived during a Shabbat dinner in May 2008, Beth Tikvah's 23 organizing families held High Holiday services that year and then launched a membership drive. By the end of that December, the congregation had 43 "Founder" families. By summer 2010, the congregation had affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism and had 62 member families.

"It was like a community waiting to happen," said board member Leslie Conley, who saw an ad for the first High Holiday services, attended and decided she wanted to get involved.

Aug. 20 Shabbat services were a huge celebration as the congregation dedicated its new Torah, experienced its first services led by new part-time Rabbi Glenn Ettman and debuted its new Reform prayerbook, Mishkan T'filah.

"I do envision and hope realistically that we are going to attract people and grow and make this an even more incredible community," said Ettman in an interview before the service, noting that Beth Tikvah means House of Hope. "There is so much hope on the horizon. We really can make it happen. ... I have been incredibly impressed with the commitment and dedication and desire to create meaningful Judaism here."

Ettman is the young congregation's only paid staff. All other roles, including administrative, financial, public relations, music and education are filled by volunteers, with occasional outside experts hired "for enrichment on a selected basis," according to Planning and Finance Chair Mark Schindel.

Describing financial decisions as values based, Schindel said the congregation has directed funds to areas it values including creating a warm, welcoming environment, respecting diversity, educating children and adults, and creating opportunities for social interactions and social action. He said his committee "is the support to make sure we can do all those good things from a monetary aspect and figure out how to do more of the activities we find enriching and important and meaningful."

Rather than purchase ceremonial items, the congregation asked members to donate items such as Kiddush cups, challah covers, seder plates, Shabbat candlesticks, tzedakah boxes etc. and then held a special Shabbat service to dedicate those items.

"So our little congregation has a lot of stuff," said Rosenfeld, adding that initially the congregation also received old Gates of Prayer prayerbooks from congregations across the country that had already adopted the Reform move-

ment's new Mishkan T'filah.

The congregation now offers Sunday School and Hebrew School for children, adult education, Shabbat services every other week, services on all the major holidays, a large social action program and a large range of social activities.

Education Director David Uri said he hopes to formalize a buddy program begun last year in which youth and adult Hebrew students study together on a regular basis.

"It's neat to see an 8-year-old teach adults," he said, adding that is just one program he hopes to use to avoid "drop-off" Judaism, where parents drop their kids at religious school. Adult education classes concurrent with children's education is another program he wants to add this year.

"We are growing and seem to have a place in central Oregon," Schindel said.

Lisa Uri said she sees the congregation's place as being one more option for Jewish residents in the area. When founders decided to create a Reform synagogue, there was only one Jewish congregation in Bend—the Jewish Community of Central Oregon. About that same time, Chabad sent Rabbi Yitzchok and Mimi Feldman to serve Jewish needs in central Oregon. Uri called the Feldmans "an amazing couple."

"(JCCO) Rabbi Jay Shupack has a very hard job," said Uri. "It was the only congregation and he had to cater to everyone. There was a need by a number of people to have a Reform congregation."

While they see TBT as their "home," Uri said she and her husband still attend some events at JCCO, as well as take their three children to some of the family events hosted by Chabad.

"I would love to see three thriving groups in one Jewish community," she said.

Ettman echoed her wish: "I look forward to working with the rabbis here and seeing how we can enhance Judaism in Central Oregon."

While the Bend congregations jointly participated in Yom Ha-Shaah services this year, Ettman said he hopes to expand that cooperation when appropriate. He said in addition to some holiday events, such as a community wide Hanukah candle-lighting, he'd also like to see community gatherings such as a Jewish heritage night at a baseball game.

When organizers of the new Reform congregation launched their membership drive, they employed a host of ideas to find Jews not already affiliated.

"We went through the phone book looking for Jewish names," said Rosenfeld, who hosted the Shabbat dinner that gave rise to Beth Tikvah. "We came up with a letter inviting people to holiday services, but we made it a point not to send letters to members of the other congregation."

The congregation's first president, Terry Reynolds, said the congregation also launched "a fabulous website," elevated the group's presence with advertising, got articles in the local press, listed services on the local paper's weekly religion page, and joined the Chamber of Commerce and Visit Bend organization.

"We are trying to be visible,"



TORAH DEDICATION—(From left) Temple Beth Tikvah President Lisa Uri and Rabbi Glenn Ettman show off the Torah on long-term loan to the congregation from Carol and Ted Rosen. The 2-year-old Reform congregation dedicated the Torah at services Aug. 20 at the First Methodist Church, where the congregation meets.



NEW AT BETH TIKVAH—Above, Jack Walhof listens to Rachel Uri read during the congregation's newly created youth programming during Erev Shabbat services. Once a month when Rabbi Glenn Ettman leads the congregation, families will be encouraged to attend services together. Younger congregants will be included in the beginning and end of the main service, but will spend the middle learning and having a snack.

said Reynolds, noting that process has been aided by members who share their talents freely. "We are blessed in this community with extremely talented people willing to give their time and energy."

Several board members also attributed the congregation's early success to the decision to aggressively pursue affiliation with the Reform movement.

"It created an identity," said board member Kathy Schindel. "Affiliation guided us and gave us resources."

Rabbi David Fine, at the time the URJ's Pacific Northwest Council regional director, provided early guidance and helped the congregation find its first Torah, a one-year loan from a congregation in Washington, and its second Torah from Temple De Hirsch Sinai in Seattle, which is on a long-term loan. Now the congregation also has another Torah on long-term loan from Ted and Carol Rosen. After the Rosen family Torah was on loan to two other congregations, Ted

Rosen said he had a scribe repair damaged letters on the scroll and rekasher it before bringing it to Bend.

Ettman said that having two Torah scrolls is a sign of strength for the young congregation.

Lisa Uri said the congregation has been very fortunate to have the leadership they needed when they needed it. After Rabbi Emanuel Rose and Rabbi Alan Berg lead High Holiday services the first year, Rabbi David Kominsky lead services in November and December of 2008 and persuaded founders they needed one rabbi to help guide the congregation in its formative process. The congregation arranged for Berg, a retired rabbi living in Portland to serve as an interim rabbi for one year. Now the congregation has hired Ettman.

"Rabbi Berg played the exact role we needed him to and then we were fortunate enough to find Rabbi Ettman," said Uri.

Mark Schindel agreed: "We were fortunate to be served by an

'unretiring' rabbi who provided the guidance, wisdom, counseling and leadership that brought us together. Now we have a rabbi just beginning his rabbinic career with a lot of energy and ideas and we are looking forward to what he will be able to bring us. Hopefully we can draw out the best in each other."

Schindel said that now that the congregation has finished the business side of creating a congregation, it can turn its attention to planning for the future. In the coming year, he said the planning and finance committee will work to: develop vision, mission and values statements and create a long-range strategic plan based on the vision and a short-term operation plan to support the future strategy. He said they will also track progress toward achieving those objectives so they can make adjustments along the way.

For more information on Temple Beth Tikvah, visit www.BethTikvahBend.org or call 541-388-8826.



RELIGION AND MUSIC CHAIR Lauren Olander sets out the congregation's new prayerbooks.