

JEWISH LIVING

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Small temple acts big in Bend

BY DEBORAH MOON

Jewish Review

During its short two-year existence, Bend's 62-family Reform congregation has used social action to make its mark in central Oregon.

"Members come to me with needs they see," said Temple Beth Tikvah Social Action Chair Rebecca Gundzik. "To me, it's important people do something they feel passionate about."

Temple Beth Tikvah began with a group of about 18 interested families in May 2008. Rabbi Alan Berg has traveled from Portland one weekend a month to help launch the congregation, which expects to hire a full-time rabbi soon. Late in 2009, the nascent temple affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism.

Its track toward social action was launched at its first official event—High Holiday Services in 2008, when Berg asked Gundzik to speak on the concept of tikkun olam and making the world a better place. Noting social action is an important goal of the Reform movement, Gundzik said the congregation responded enthusiastically.

"We have made it known in the community of Bend that we care and we want to help out," said Gundzik. "We've done it in a number of ways."

Temple Beth Tikvah regularly serves dinners at a homeless shelter, has participated in building projects with Habitat for Humanity, hosted presentations on global warming and Oregon's Death with Dignity law, created a fund to help needy families with babies in intensive care and is on track to be the top fundraising team for the second time in Relay for Life. Most of the projects have arisen from personal interests of congregants including a cancer survivor, ICU nurse, widow of man who used the assisted suicide law and a former homeless shelter board member.

TBT President Lisa Uri praised Gundzik for making it interesting and easy for congregants to get involved.

"Rebecca has done a phenomenal job investigating things we should be involved in and then getting people interested," said Uri. "She gets people interested and gets them to recognize the importance of it (each issue) and she makes it fun. She gets kids involved."

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TIKKUN OLAM—Cancer survivor Lauren Olander, with her husband Jeff Olander, show off the Temple Beth Tikvah team banner and campsite at last year's Relay for Life in central Oregon. Olander named the team Heal the World, the English translation of tikkun olam. In its first year in the relay, the approximately 50 TBT team members were the top fundraisers bringing in nearly \$10,000. They are again on track to take top honors in that category this year.

TBT: Social action big part of new congregation



TEAM HEAL THE WORLD fielded about 10 cancer survivors, including the oldest survivor in the entire relay, Ceil Hermann, age 91 and a 42-year survivor of cancer. Hermann was joined on the track at last year's Relay for Life by fellow Temple Beth Tikvah member and cancer survivor Lawrence Schechter, left.

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"It feels different doing social action as a family and a community," said Uri. "And I know we are making a difference in the community."

Gundzik estimates about a third of the congregation has been very active in social action with another third participating in at least one event. Last year's Relay for Life team fielded more than 50 members ranging in age from 3 to 91. As in many of the congregation's projects, a member with a personal interest aroused the interest of other congregants.

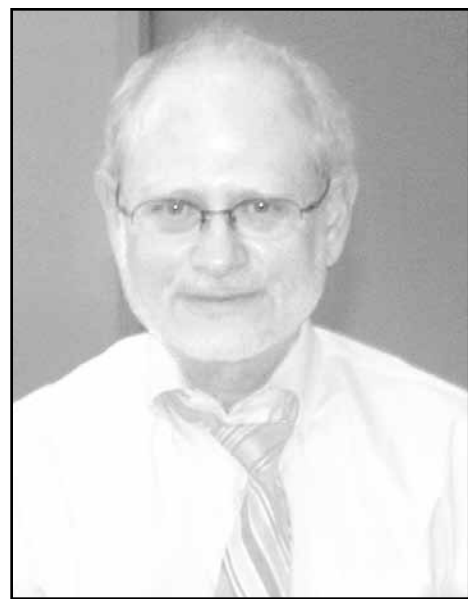
When cancer survivor Lauren Olander moved to Bend shortly after Beth Tikvah formed, she soon met other cancer survivors in the congregation and was surprised to learn they had never heard of the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life (see box). So when Berg asked her to speak at a Havdallah service at the home of then-TBT President Terry Reynolds, she explained how the 24-hour relay not only raised funds for cancer research but also helped survivors see they are not alone. Afterwards, Berg asked the 30-some people at the service to introduce themselves.

"The first person gave their name and said, 'I am a cancer survivor,'" said Olander, noting that everyone else in the room then introduced themselves and added "I am a cancer survivor, or I lost ... my husband, ... my wife, ... my mother, ... my friend to cancer."

"Of the approximately 30 people in the room, every single person had a direct connection to cancer," said Olander. "How could we not participate? It was the defining moment that gave our team a lot of power."

Team Heal the World (the translation of tikkun olam) raised nearly \$10,000 and were the top fundraising team at the Central Oregon Relay for Life. Olander raised about \$4,000 from family and friends in California and another woman who had just begun cancer treatment raised more than \$2,000 in just a couple weeks. The team had several members on the track for every hour of the 24-hour relay last year despite a torrential downpour, said Olander.

This year, the team has fielded at least



HARRET SHLIM RICHARD PHOTO

RABBI ALAN BERG spoke at May 16 standing room only presentation about Oregon's Death With Dignity law.

40 members and 26 days before the 24-hour relay walk, team members are again in the lead as the top fund-raising team with \$5,693.30.

One congregant who is a nurse in the newborn ICU told Gundzik that many families have a hard time paying for gasoline to visit their newborn or paying for food for the family during the visit. So TBT has launched a fund to buy gas and food vouchers, which will be distributed to needy families by the head of the unit.

Another TBT member brought her personal interest to the congregation resulting in a very well attended presentation on Oregon's Death With Dignity law. A standing-room only crowd of more than 60 people attended a May 16 program featuring Berg, a Unitarian minister, a physician speaking on palliative (comfort) medicine and a case worker with Compassion and Choices.

The program was organized by Harriet Shlim Richard, whose husband made use of the assisted suicide law six years ago after battling sarcoma. Richard is now one of two caseworkers in central Oregon with Compassion and Choices, which provides emotional, social and spiritual support to terminally ill Oregonians.

"I've been involved since my own husband used the law," said Richard, adding "It's a satisfying experience."

Richard, who sits on TBT's social action committee, said that she brought the idea to the committee in part because she has been so impressed with the congregation's support of social action.

"We do an enormous amount of stuff for a congregation our size," said Richard. "It's overwhelmingly wonderful."

Finding projects that interest members is a key to that success.

Gundzik said she relies on members to bring issues to her attention. And the committee is currently surveying the congregation about what projects and issues they want to pursue.

A former board member of the Bethlehem Inn, central Oregon's only non-denominational homeless shelter, Gundzik has worked hard to raise temple members' awareness of homelessness in the area. As a result of her efforts, every four to six weeks, congregants prepare dinner for the approximately 70 people at the shelter. Last year a High Holiday appeal raised more than \$1,600 for the shelter. And members volunteered to be on call during Christmas week to staff the overflow shelter if severe weather caused an overflow of the main shelter.

"I would love to do everything, but we are a small group," said Gundzik. "We want to focus on members' concerns."

Relay for Life

June 19-20, 10 a.m.-10 a.m.
High Desert Middle School

For the second year, Temple Beth Tikvah's Heal the World Team will walk in Bend's American Cancer Society Relay For Life, which raises money for cancer research while giving participants a chance to celebrate the lives of people who have battled cancer, remember loved ones lost and fight back against the disease. Because cancer never sleeps, relays are overnight events up to 24 hours in length, with teams asked to have a team member on the track for the entire relay.

To join or donate to Team Heal the World, go to www.bendrelay.com and click on Team Heal the World, which was the top team for donations as of May 24.

For more information, call Heal the World team captain Lauren Olander, 531-728-4378.



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