

By Terry Reynolds and Sheila Luber

You may be surprised to learn that the idyllic town of Bend has a thriving Jewish community. Jewish families, singles and retirees from around the country fall in love with Bend, discover Temple Beth Tikvah and join to make friends and connections. TBT is Central Oregon's only Reform Jewish congregation and welcomes Jews by birth and Jews by choice.

It all began in 2008 when 25 Jews came to Shabbat dinner... to explore the idea of forming a new shul in Bend. They left with a commitment to secure a Reform affiliation and a name, Temple Beth Tikvah – House of Hope.

“We were running on faith with no clue how to form a congregation but somehow we did it,” says Ann Rosenfield, the host of that pivotal meeting.

From their first High Holidays with two rabbis from Portland and a cantor from San Francisco, the scrappy founders managed to recruit rabbis throughout the year, get old prayer books for free, borrow a Torah, and locate low-cost and no-cost venues to hold services and events. In year one, thanks to donors, the temple grew to 40 charter families. Celebrating Sukkot at a member's house and Chanukah at the Environmental Center, they eventually landed at the Methodist Church, the first church, but not the last, they would call home.

Today, more than 80 families benefit from their vision. In addition to attending services for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover and other holidays, TBT members connect, learn and grow through Shabbat services, tot Shabbats, Shabbat@home dinners, adult education, Torah study, social action, Sunday school, Hebrew school, bar/bat mitzvah training, family picnics, Havdalahs with a maven and more.

Under the spiritual guidance of Rabbi Johanna Hershenson working with a focused board of directors and selfless volunteers, the temple is poised to keep growing.

On a sunny late afternoon in May 2018, a decade after TBT was formed, 94 congregants gathered to celebrate their temple's 10th anniversary. They heard about their history from founding members, shared stories and savored a tasty barbecue dinner.

Talented member musicians played instruments, posters and albums revealed meaningful moments over time, and decorations graced each table with a little garden where even more photos “grew.” Everyone departed with a tiny bundle of wildflower seeds to plant in their yards – reminding all that a beautiful temple grows in Bend for its members to enjoy.

The congregation now meets at First Presbyterian Church, 230 9th St. in Bend.  
Bethtikvahbend.org | 541-388-8826

<http://orjewishlife.com/a-temple-grows-in-bend-oregon/>