

## State of the Jewish Community Center of Paramus/Congregation Beth Tikvah

By Wayne Zeiler

As is our custom – I humbly ask for your forgiveness if I have purposely or unintentionally hurt you, harmed you or demeaned you, whether in action or word, I ask for your forgiveness.

Tonight, I will use this opportunity to bring you up to speed with the state of the Jewish Community Center of Paramus / Congregation Beth Tikvah. I am here to talk about the good, the bad and the ugly – I know that sounds like a Clint Eastwood spaghetti western. Maybe, that just means that it is time to stand tall and target long standing obstacles. We are still here as a strong and viable organization, though there are challenges ahead. Last year, I talked about change, the book “Who Moved My Cheese” and our future. Those overriding themes are still in place. Because someone moved our cheese, we need to change to be relevant to the future.

Last year, I made it clear that I cannot take on all of the challenges myself. And that is still true. Before I get into the body of my speech, I want to take a few minutes to thank some people, first my officers:

- First Vice President: Jerry Menter,
- Second Vice President: Rob Chananie,
- Third Vice President: Harriett Kugler,
- Treasurer: Stu Smith,
- Financial Secretary: Paul Duboff,
- Recording Secretary: Lana Brach;

In addition, I also want to thank the people that round out my Executive Board – Alan Jay, Jeff Friedlander, Lori Cohen, Laurie Rosman and Rita Miller-Greenberg. These are the people that keep me focused, on track and provide the important sounding board for new and on-going thoughts, ideas and actions. Next are the various chairs of all of our committees and the constant involvement of our many volunteers. These are the people that I rely on, the people that work behind the scenes, the people that ensure the smooth running of our beloved Jewish Community Center of Paramus / Congregation Beth Tikvah. I also want to thank our clergy, and all of the staff that are always here and help to make things run smoothly. And of course, the most important ones to thank are the three people that support me, provide insight, an ear and occasionally a shoulder to lean on – Debbie, Gabrielle and Rebecca.

Do not get me wrong, we are still looking for volunteers! Compared to the size of our congregation and the number of offerings we have, whether religious or social, there is a relatively small group of volunteers that work tirelessly towards pointing us towards a brighter future. I often joke that changing the direction of the JCCP/CBT is like using a toothpick to turn a battleship. That is because in reality, we are a population that has grown comfortable, making us change-averse and clouding how we look into the future. We fall into the practice of making

changes when we are left with no other choices. Being comfortable, and staying where we are, is a hard momentum to overcome.

As promised, here are some of the things I have to report from when I took office July 1, 2018...

#### Challenges and obstacles:

- Membership has continued to drop – While part of this is due to a factor of an aging congregation, we are not attracting enough new members to counter act this. I have asked Jerry to revive and rebuild the Membership Committee. This is an initiative that will serve him well when he becomes President
- Hebrew School Enrollment is down significantly – I have created a special committee that will explore various options and future potentials. Including the vision to create a regional Hebrew School. We cannot operate under the same thinking as in the past where the school will bring in new members; that trend, my friends, ended many years ago.
- No rental for our downstairs school space – A rental / tenant committee was created last year that has been working towards getting us a tenant. We had two very strong possibilities that backed out at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Currently, we are having discussions with two opportunities and have a realtor lined up if these do not pan out. Truth is we have an old, cinder block facility that is not handicap accessible and we know that at some point we will have to make changes / spend money in the future to rectify that situation.
- Operating at a significant deficit – This was discussed in detail at our budget presentation in a general membership meeting before the summer. Bottom line - We are operating where if we cut any more expenses, we will begin to cut services and programs, which is something we are looking to avoid. That leaves increasing income by attracting new members through a revived Membership Committee, getting a new tenant and fund-raising initiatives.

While the challenges are significant, let us not lose sight of the accomplishments we have had since I became President:

- Facility improvements – In time for Rosh Hashana last year, we had a much needed repavement of our parking lot. This year, our lobby floor and hallway, whose carpeting was not aging well, has had a much-needed face-lift
- Security enhancements – There has been an on-going effort to improve the security of our building, including some enhancements such as improved Exit Signs, securing our office, drafting a preliminary evacuation plan to be tested in the near future, designating lock down locations with clearly assigned room identification stickers, and an increased security presence during these High Holidays
- Religious – We have held three highly successful Friday night services at the home of Fran and Richard Winters, two of which included music; we have also revamped and improved Friday night services by having it in the round and almost doubling attendance from the prior year, and we have introduced New Machzors and new Chumashim to modernize and enhance our services

- Social Events – This past year, we had a Battle of the Bands, Talent Show, Ambassador Dennis Roth spoke as part of our annual Harold Lehman Fund for Israel Education and Engagement, Herb Keinon of the Jerusalem Post spoke, our recently well attended Sisterhood event on the four female Justices of the Supreme Court, and, our continued growth in our Canasta, Mahjong, exercise classes and other on-going social activities
- Inter-synagogue activities – Last year, we were able to pull together an inter-shul event to show solidarity after the horrible shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. In the spring, for the first time, we had a joint Lag B’Omer event which included all of our neighboring synagogues. And now we have, in the works, other events we are planning jointly that will be announced after the Holidays, that I am excited to attend. This is the way to broaden our community by building relations with our neighboring synagogues
- Initiation of a Planned Giving / Legacy Society called Guardians of the Future - With the New Year, today is the start of this new program that has been put into place with the goal to help provide us with Financial sustainability into the future. You will be hearing and receiving more information before the end of the calendar year. This is an approach where we will start planning for our longer-term financial future, beyond the horizon of the next years – a mindset that has been plaguing us in the past. It is our responsibility to ensure that this religious institution survives into the future, as a place of worship, as a place of education and a place to gather. As with many things that we hold dear, I would hope that when there is a tap on your shoulder to help out, you will gladly remember the JCCP/CBT and help add to your legacy, the legacy of our beloved shul and provide a guiding light for generations to come.

I have had the opportunity to speak many of you over the past year. I feel like when I am here, I am happy that there is the feeling that my “office door” is always open. I have worked towards being available to listen to you during Shabbat, Holidays and other opportunities. I am here to serve you and your voices are important to me. As you can see from the items that I discussed, we have accomplished many good, positive things this past year to start moving us towards the future. Our real challenges are human nature – we do not like change, we resist change and we ultimately can be our own worst enemies.

So, what can you do? There are a few options:

- Option 1 – provide a suggestion. Believe it or not, we do listen. I am the first one that will let you know that I do not know everything. Your ideas and suggestions are welcome to help point us towards our future.
- Option 2 – provide your time and get involved. This is an opportunity to make an impact. As we start to attract like-minded individuals, we can begin to “move the needle” towards our tomorrows.
- Option 3 – provide financial support. Tomorrow you will be asked to help with the High Holiday appeal. Your financial support helps keep the JCCP/CBT running and provides needed funds for our many programs and future needed initiatives

I believe that we can still be a relevant synagogue and community. I believe that have within our abilities to survive into the future and become that bright shining example. But we can only accomplish this together as a community, by reaching out to our neighbors to broaden our definition of community and build the relationships that will attract others. Sometimes, we will need to do something that might seem out of character, but has the opportunity to propel us forth into tomorrow. Like the gunslinger image mentioned earlier, we can stand tall, face our obstacles and overcome adversity to survive another day.

On behalf of my family, the officers and the board of trustees, I want to wish each and every one of you a meaningful, happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.