

Robert Weintraub, Lev La'Am, Fall, 2017

"Till 120"

I write this article as we approach the High Holy Days, and our congregation enters its 61st year.

When I began my tenure last summer, I knew I would have to deal with the typical, annual challenges of the Bet Am presidency – balancing the budget, maintaining facilities, managing governance processes, and such. But I also wanted to do my small part to ensure we would continue to be the vibrant community we are “till 120,” as the Jewish expression goes (*biz hundert un tsvantsig*).

To that end, after the holidays last year, we commenced two strategic initiatives – one, attracting and engaging families with young children, and the other, strengthening our financial footing. I’ve spoken and written about these repeatedly; and I do so again because our Executive Committee and Board of Trustees agree that these initiatives continue to encompass two of our congregation’s most significant challenges.

I don’t need to remind you that we have a unique culture at Bet Am Shalom, one which makes us proud to be members of the community, and keeps us vigorously tied to one another, as well as earnestly tied to our Judaism. It’s not for everyone; and, when I speak to those that choose to go elsewhere, I’m glad when they find a better fit. But, as we work hard to maintain our culture – and it does take a lot of work (from the heart) – we need to attract others who will do so for decades to come. Programmatic and ritual enhancements, based on the recommendations of the young families initiative task force, are in the works. Some will be instituted by Program and Ritual Committees, and others by a part-time, family outreach professional we have hired for this year, Lily Nagy-Deak. Please see the short article about Lily, below.

Further, we will expand our marketing efforts, so that we don’t hear what too many visitors from other synagogues have said to us, “Oh, I wish I knew about you before I joined...” Most of all, though, the task force asserted that we need to improve “word-of-mouth advertising.” That’s where all of us come in. Many if not most of the significant connections in our lives are made through the recommendations of people we know and respect. **Please spread the word about who we are to those you believe would find our culture appealing and meaningful.**

Regarding our strategic financial needs, the other task force also put together forcible recommendations, which many of you heard David Levy present at our annual meeting. Underlying them is the clear understanding that relying on dues, tuition and Kol Nidre appeals continually puts us on tenuous ground. Strengthening our financial footing requires bringing in substantial long-term funding. The task force arrived at multiple ways this might be accomplished, such as planned giving, other uses of our facility, and special fundraising events. Each recommendation will take more examination and planning, and that will be the mission of a newly forming Strategic Finance Committee."

These long-term efforts will be carried on long past my tenure as president. In the meantime, I remain honored to serve in this role for another year, pushing the initiatives along as best I can while working on the daily tasks required to help maintain the vitality of what is most assuredly a special community for Marilyn and me.

The Days of Awe present a time when, perhaps, we best demonstrate both our uniqueness as a community and our commonality with our fellow Jews around the world. Year after year, we band together rather tightly under the cover of our tent, open to all who desire to join us. May we enact this tradition till 120...at least.