



Congregation Bet Ha'am
Annual Meeting
2019-2020
Committee Reports

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Capital Campaign

Submitted by Jeremy Moser

All our pledges are on track to be completed this year! If you are in the last stages of your pledge, thank you! It is very important to finish your commitment as funding is critical for all of the improvements we have been experiencing since the campaign's conclusion in 2016-- *and for future fiscal support and programming*. We are pleased that there have been only two minor revisions in pledge obligations since 2016, demonstrating how important our donors take their commitments to the congregation at large.

The pandemic has delayed completion of a number of our honor plaques which we had previously scheduled to have mounted before High Holy Days this year. Stay tuned for a letter from our committee to donors who qualified for various naming opportunities--from interior sanctuary bays, to classrooms, to seats in our sanctuary. As a reminder, we will be placing a number of *collective plaques* in specific areas approved by our board of directors during the campaign.*

This year, we will be revising our primary donor wall in the entry hall and will combine both *Moreshet Dorot* (From Generation to Generation), and *Atid Ha'am* (For Our Future Generations) campaigns donors' names. Our donor wall reflects the generous support by over 1,500 congregants, support which was started seventeen years ago to enhance our worship, education, community outreach, as well as house our whole congregation under one roof.

When complete, we hope our wall will honor our previous donors and demonstrate to our newer families the importance their predecessors felt to our legacy, which helped make our home warm and welcoming when new members arrive at Bet Ha'am's threshold; this is indeed *our* house of the people!

Together with our committee and the board of directors, we graciously thank all those who have completed their gifts and pledges or who will finish their commitments by this year's end.

*For more information on the placement of the plaques, contact Rachel Lefkowitz or Jeremy Moser.

Committee members: Jeremy Moser, Jay Geller, Ken Lehman.

Caring Committee

Submitted by Karen Silverman and Sylvia Most

The Caring Committee at Bet Ha'am has had an active year. We have helped at five shiva homes and made a meal of consolation and a post-funeral reception at the temple. These activities include setting up, making and donating food and supplies, and then cleaning up afterward so that our families in mourning have the support they need. At Rosh Hashanah, we created bags of local apples and honey and delivered them to twenty-four families in our congregation that had lost a loved one in the prior year. Members of our committee send cards and encouragement to other congregants during difficult times. We have over fifty members on committee, so if you would like to help out, please email the office to ensure that you are added to our email list.

Education Committee

Submitted by Samantha Johnson

The Education Committee provides support to the religious school director, serves as a sounding board, and supports the strategic goals of the school. This last encompasses everything from helping develop school programs to wrangling volunteers for events. The committee includes school parents, teachers, and parents of former students.

The 2019–2020 religious school year didn't play out as any of us expected. The school, under the amazing leadership of Sam Spinrad, was able to quickly pivot to remote learning in response to the coronavirus and COVID-19. The committee worked with the director to definite remote learning and explore the tech challenges associated with it, including how to keep students engaged, how to celebrate our teachers' hard work, how to plan for what school may look like in the fall and moving forward, and how to accomplish other administrative tasks.

This year the committee had a goal of building its ranks. As a result, the committee grew by six members and we're incredibly excited about the committee's wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm. We also celebrate our new co-chairs, Andrea Krasker Gavin and Eva Rose Balog. Andrea is the PJ Library program coordinator and volunteer coordinator at the JCA in Portland and has organized Program Shofar (youth programming at the High Holy Days) at Bet Ha'am for many years. Eva is a tenured assistant professor of chemistry at University of New England and is a relatively new member to the Bet Ha'am community. With their education and programmatic backgrounds, they will work in partnership to help elevate the work of the education committee. We're so happy they've agreed to take on the role.

When you see a teacher, thank them. They're amazing under the best of circumstances but rose to the challenge of keeping school going through very challenging circumstances. Not only has school continued on remarkably well, it's thrived; the challenge of remote learning has opened up a world of possibilities for what the religious school can look like moving forward.

Thank you to all of our committee members for their hard work and dedication! Eva Rose Balog, Rachel Beninati, Ashley DiPietro, Karli Efron, Andrea Krasker Gavin, Wendy Hayes, Samantha Johnson, Jennifer Polisner, Catherine Share, Rachel Simons.

Garden Committee Report

Submitted by Catherine Share and Toby Rosenberg

We have had a very successful year in the garden. With the help of the Bet Ha'am garden and grounds staff, a lot has been accomplished.

Our biggest project this past year has been the cleaning and renovation of the sanctuary reflecting pool. The committee would like to thank congregation volunteers and especially Chris Skidgel, Bet Ha'am's facilities manager. It was a big job that involved removing all the stones from the bottom, cleaning and repairing the liner, and repairing the filtration system to ensure the pool would continue to be a true reflection of our building and garden.

The following is a list of the projects that were completed:

1. Twelve bushes in the sanctuary garden were replaced due to damage in the winter of 2018–2019.
2. Three new raised beds were built for the vegetable food program with Wayside. We are grateful for the expert leadership of master gardener Rachel Stamieszkin and her dedication to this program. Over 250 pounds of food from the garden was donated to Wayside.
3. Old and damaged plants in the sign bed and the mum bed (under the fire escape) were removed and new gardens have been planted.
4. We hosted a successful volunteer cleanup workday last fall with the largest number of volunteers to date.
5. The committee and the Rabbi hosted a wonderful Tu BiSh'vat seder this past winter with the help of the evening religious school students.

Due to bad weather, the Sunday morning religious school activity day last fall was not held and because of COVID-19, the Mother's Day plant sale was cancelled. We will miss those monies that go to new plants and projects.

Finally, the committee would like to thank our retiring chair Toby Rosenberg who has led this committee for many years. She has led us from the front and pushed us from the rear to accomplish an impressive array of projects and beautification. Catherine Share will be taking

over for her and is grateful for her ongoing mentorship. The work could not be done without the dedicated committee members: Peter Burke, Joanie Caldwell, Gretchen Greenberg, Sue Howard, Laura Kittle, Lauren Lehman, Shai Levite, Karen Lukas, Toby Rosenberg, Catherine Share, Rachel Stamieszkin, Bill Welch, and Jane Weinstein.

Greater Portland Family Promise at Bet Ha'am

Submitted by Faith Moritz

Since last June, Bet Ha'am has had three successful hosting weeks welcoming Family Promise guests: August 2019, December 2019, and March 2020. We hosted a total of eight families during those weeks including thirteen adults and twenty-one children ranging from one year to seventeen years old. Many volunteers participated in order to make these weeks a success. Volunteering for Family Promise host weeks continues to bring joy to families, children, and our volunteers. Thank you so much to all who helped with time, meals, laundry, Hannaford gift cards, smiles, and hugs.

We were one of the last host weeks before COVID-19 changed everyone's plans. Family Promise has had to make some major adjustments to how we help families in order to keep everyone safe. Since mid-March, we have been sheltering-in-place two families who have stayed with the program since that time. They are currently staying at two separate locations where they are able to cook for themselves and are supported by GPF. They are assisted by a small team of volunteers who are helping to make sure the families have the food and supplies they need. These volunteers have been checking in with families, taking guests to appointments, and doing grocery shopping and contact-free deliveries. There is also a partnership with Wayside Food Programs, who is providing a box of food to each of our families on a weekly basis. Many volunteers have contributed Hannaford gift cards, which has made all the difference in allowing us to ensure that our families have enough to eat. Hannaford gift cards are ALWAYS welcome to assist these GPF and these families as are financial donations to GPF so that the work can continue.

Bet Ha'am was scheduled to host again the first week of June. Obviously, that did not happen. Here is an update as to what GPF is doing during the pandemic:

- Hopefully, the current families will be moving into their own apartments soon. Once that happens, GPF will not take new families for the time being.
- GPF has experienced a greater demand with supporting graduate families since the pandemic. People have lost jobs, had more trouble accessing support services, and are facing potential evictions in much greater numbers.
- The new families moving into their own apartments with need more than the usual supports for the same reasons.

- So, GPPF will focus resources on supporting graduate families for now and finding new ways to engage volunteers.

Ways to help:

- DONATE HANNAFORD GIFT CARDS so that families are able to get food during these tough times.
- MAKE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS to Greater Portland Family Promise (donate through the website) as we are trying to build a fund to keep graduate families from being evicted.
- DONATE BABY SUPPLIES. The two current families are expecting this summer and other graduate families have young children . We need DIAPERS, WIPES, and baby clothes.
- DONATE PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS. Families need items such as feminine products (pads), toilet paper, shampoo, soap, laundry soap, etc.
- DONATE QUARTERS. For families to do laundry.
- In the near future, we will be developing ways that congregations can support specific graduate families – watch for upcoming emails.

2020 statistics:

- Families served: 8
- Individuals served: 34
- Families housed: 6

2019 statistics:

- Families served: 17
- Individuals served: 78
- Families housed: 13
- 2019 housing success rate = 93%

Totals since opening in July 2017

- 183 individuals served
- 44 families served
- 107 children under 18
- 39 children ages 5 and under
- 58% of people served are children
- 36% of children served are ages 5 and under
- 86% of families served are newly arrived immigrant families (38 out of 44)
- 36 families housed
- Overall Housing success rate is 86%, 36 out of 42)

House Committee

Submitted by Jeremy Moser

Reviewing best practices and critical facility needs is a hallmark of our committee's mission. This year, we continued to review basic maintenance, assisted in substantial upgrade in our security (new camera systems around our campus), improved wifi exponentially, and continued oversight of our wonderful facility in concert with our maintenance staff and administration.

In addition, now that we have "lived" in our spiritual home for ten years (wow!), we are also re-assessing our original thirty-year maintenance plan to address our future funding requirements in order to maintain our home. Our report was provided to the executive and finance committees for financial impact planning purposes.

For Jeremy, it was an opportunity to review how realistic our building committee's hypotheses, developed with our Architects Brigitte Shim and Howard Sutcliffe in 2006, considered our cost to operate and maintain the facility. That is, we wanted to know how the daily wear and tear, and replacement projections, turned out.

The cost to operate daily over ten years, including inflation, was within 2% of our projections. Switching from oil to gas for our energy provided a significant early savings, with labor costs of sub-contractors were the most unpredictable factor. Also our replacement/major repair costs for a 25,000 square foot facility are very low; *perhaps too low*. This lower-than-graphed expense was due in part to yearly inspections and assessments of what items we could delay without incurring significant additional costs as a result of that delay. There's an adage from one side of the ledger that *spending one dollar today saves spending ten dollars in five years*.

Along with our basic exterior and interior upkeep, and the upgrades to security and wifi we had the major project of removing 3,000 pounds (!) of stones from the water feature/reflecting pool. Chris Skidgel organized the effort along with the garden committee. The work involved shoveling the rocks into wheel barrows and transporting them by truckload to our property edge—no small feat. After the stones were removed, Chris did extensive cleaning and patching. Hopefully, all this work will bring another five years of life to our rubber lining system; these typically have a life of ten

years. Another benefit of the stone removal is a much easier ability to maintain water purity. *Our goal is to make the garden and water feature even more inviting for spiritual solace in the coming years.*

Small projects included cleaning and resealing the entry hall, social hall, and sanctuary concrete floors; buying and installing new carpeting in the adult classroom; and repainting the hall and several classrooms in the Sawyer School building. We continue to use electric battery-powered machines for our lawn care, decreasing our carbon footprint.

Our fiscal wellbeing depends in large part on how we generate income from the property without interfering with our mission. Currently, the majority of our campus may not be in use during a typical week. After the previous three years of very aggressive rentals, we think we are beginning to understand the type of rental, and frequency of rental, that helps our overall financial situation without impacting our ability to keep up with basic delivery of care/maintenance and service to Bet Ha'am's mission. That said, current COVID-19 limitations create new and unforeseen challenges for the time being. Less wear and tear on the facility may be good news for expenses related to the interior of the building, but the weather still effects our exterior envelope and requires traditional maintenance.

We are working with our Rabbi and executive committee, clarifying to what extent our facility will be used during this year's High Holy Days.

Committee: Jeremy Moser and Ben Grant.

Library Committee

Submitted by Donna Landau and Sherrie Bergman

The mission of the Congregation Bet Ha'am Library is to provide a collection of information resources and programming relating to Jews, Judaism, and Israel and to promote Jewish literacy. The collection serves the Bet Ha'am family. The library is committed to excellence in providing materials and programming to enhance educational, religious, and social activities of the congregation. Further, as mandated in the by-laws approved by the congregation board of director, the library will establish, collect, and maintain the congregational archives.

Our library is an amazing resource, offering 3,000 volumes, including contemporary fiction and non-fiction works about life-cycle events, holidays, Jewish parenting, and Torah study. The library is open when the building is open; the catalog is searchable on the website. Go to [Education>Library](#) and click the "Library Catalogue" button at the bottom of the page. Remote borrowing is coming soon.

We thank committee members for their dedicated hard work. Special thanks to volunteers Evie Polisner and Garth Ebner for covering book jackets and to Rachel Posner for identifying non-current records for potential archiving.

In the past year, the Library Committee:

- Cataloged donated books.
- Replenished the used book sale cart.
- Mounted exhibits highlighting new books and life cycle events.
- Issued library cards and kept the library in tip-top shape.
- Scanned and archived board minutes.
- Enhanced scanned newsletter images.
- Inventoried non-current records for addition to the archives.

This coming year, the Library Committee will:

- Continue archiving synagogue documents, a huge, on-going project to preserve Bet Ha'am's history. We will continue to research systems to scan documents and make them searchable from the Bet Ha'am website. We are looking for volunteers to assist—setting up a database, scanning materials, and creating metadata to help make documents searchable. Assisting would be a good mitzvah project.

- Incorporate use of library resources into the religious school program, in coordination with Sam Spinrad. The library also supports research of B'nai Mitzvah and older students.

Income: We are supported by donations to the Adult Library Fund (for new purchases) and by sales from the used book cart, located in the foyer between the social hall and sanctuary. Please consider supporting the Adult Library Fund; it's a beautiful way to celebrate a simcha or remember a loved one. Donors will be recognized by bookplates in the book. You may purchase books for the library through our [Amazon.com Wish List](#). You also can support the library with a gift of your time to help archive historic documents; catalog books and maintain the collection; staff the library on Sundays during religious school. To join us, contact [Donna Landau](#) or [Sherrie Bergman](#).

Remember you can search the library catalog from home for a good read. Curbside delivery at the synagogue is coming June 22. See the weekly email for specifics. Thank you to Teri Berenson and Chris Skidgel for making it happen!

Committee: Donna Landau and Sherrie Bergman, co-chairs; Sarah Cropley, religious school librarian; Samantha Johnson, board liaison; Rachel Posner, Daria Rosen.

Nominating Committee

Submitted by Lisa Munderback and Daniel Jenkins

The committee met monthly from September through June. Our work focused on:

- Vetting possible nominees, keeping in mind that members should represent the diversity of the congregation;
- Finalizing the board member expectation document that sets out aspirational goals for the board as individuals and as a collective body;
- Creating a leadership task force to develop a workshop series to train and develop future leaders.

Committee: Lynn Urbach, Jane Snerson, Andrew Kosak, Mark Stone, Jeremy Moser, Rabbi Saks.

Security Committee

Submitted by Sylvia Most

The Security committee met over last summer to prepare for the High Holy Days. The biggest change to security for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur was that everyone who attended services wore a name tag. To be ensure compliance, everyone was greeted at the door and non-members filled out a form with their names and addresses. We also had greeters in the parking areas.

During the year, we continued to keep our doors locked throughout the work day, during religious school, and during services. Volunteers were scheduled to greet and open doors.

These arrangements went well and we plan to continue them once we return to normal operations. If you are interested in helping us provide security by being a welcoming presence, we would love your help.

In addition, to our greeters, the congregation invested in new internet access equipment and new security cameras throughout the property. We were even able to assist the police with an investigation of a local break-in unrelated to us because we had security footage of the area. Security will be among the considerations when we begin to plan our reopening strategy for the building.

Tikkun Olam Council

Submitted by Lauren Dietlin

The Tikkun Olam Council has been meeting to evaluate how we might improve the framework developed in 2017 as it has not been as effective as we hoped. We have continued to review requests for support of different causes and actions and to communicate them to the congregation. In support of our focus on racial justice, a group of interested congregants led by Rabbi Saks has read and discussed *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, and *How To Be An Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi. We are reading *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander now. Our commitment and engagement with Family Promise continues (please see the recent email update from Faith Moritz). Some of our other plans for engagement and education on racial justice issues were cancelled due to COVID-19.

A number of congregants are participating in voter engagement training through the [Religious Action Center's Civic Engagement Campaign](#). We plan to discuss how best to move forward with this work in our congregation.

Requests for action, advocacy, support, partnering can be submitted to tikkunolam@bethaam.org.

Youth Group

Submitted by Andrea Levinsky

In the past year, the Bet Ha'am Youth Group participated in a variety of fun activities to help teens stay engaged with each other and with the congregation. The youth group:

- Bowled and had snacks at Easy Day
- Engaged with families with Family Promise at Bet Ha'am
- Cheered on the Red Claws at a basketball game
- Served food at Preble St Soup Kitchen
- Learned about climate change through a film screening and discussion
- Played games virtually three times
- Assisted with Bet Ha'am virtual scavenger hunt

This coming year, the Bet Ha'am Youth Group will:

- Continue to encourage a sense of connectedness and community among Bet Ha'am youth;
- Provide opportunities for teens to be leaders among their peers by planning and executing various activities;
- Execute plans that were not able to come to fruition this year due to COVID-19, such as
 - leading the congregation in a Shabbat service focused on a social justice issue
 - planning an event for the congregation about climate change, and
 - eating pizza at Ottos.
 -

Youth Group By the Numbers:

- 8 events from October to May
- Average of 6 teens per event
- 19 total teens engaged

A Different Story

Submitted by Toby Rosenberg

Under the guidance of chair Toby Rosenberg, an expanded committee successfully transformed *A Storied Affair*, Bet Ha'am's live, annual fundraising gala, into a virtual gathering called ***A Different Story***.

We put aside our original vision and invited three wonderful writers to share readings with us; the result was a shorter, varied, and uplifting program. Lisa Mayer, "The Maine Rebbitzin;" Stuart Kestenbaum, Maine's Poet Laureate; and Steve Steinbock, former Bet Ha'am member, writer, and book reviewer each read a work, and each reading was followed by a question-and-answer session moderated by Andrew Kosak. David Bass-Clark returned this year to be our MC, gracefully guiding us through the evening.

The program allowed the audience to see each other as well as the performers. This helped achieve the night's surprisingly intimate feeling. We started the evening with breakout rooms where attendees could converse in smaller groups, much like sitting at eight-person tables at *A Storied Affair*.

Over concerns that a raffle prize of travel might be less attractive during the COVID-19 pandemic, we added a new option for home/life improvement. We sold 123 raffle tickets and our winner was Amy Brusselback, congregant Donna Landau's daughter. Amy graciously donated her entire \$5,000 winnings back to Bet Ha'am--a handsome addition to our coffers. \$1,000 of that donation was put in Rabbi's discretionary fund to use for COVID-19 relief.

Our fundraising team, Tom Rosen, Sylvia Most and Catherine Share, initiated a host committee of thirty-two, including many board members. At \$250/host, we gleaned an initial \$8,250, laying the groundwork to exceed our fund raising goals. Board members also led the way on selling raffle tickets. Indeed, board involvement was key to our success this year.

One hundred twenty-six people registered for the gala. If we assume that many of these registrants were in households of more than one person, we feel confident that there were about 230 attendees. Many of these attendees were family and friends joining us from afar.

We believe that the evening raised about \$35,000 for Bet Ha'am. Thank you to everyone who helped make this possible!

Many thanks to our committee members, who often pivoted to unexpected tasks to make the transformation:

- Chair: Toby Rosenberg
- Administration: Rachel Lefkowitz
- Fundraising: Tom Rosen, Sylvia Most, Catherine Share
- Literary Coordination: Sarah Cropley
- Event Coordination/Writing: Kristin Schardt
- Tech Coordination: Wendy Hayes
- Travel Mavens: David Stein and Jeremy Stein
- MC: David Bass Clark
- Moderator: Andrew Kosak
- Advisors: Donna Landau, Michael Levine, Jane Sloven, Cindy Stein, Mark Stone, Lynn Urbach, Bill Welch
- Staff: Ivan Gonzalez, Chris Skidgel, Karen Hindall, Teri Berenson, Hannah Herbold

[Watch the video](#) on YouTube.