



Mark Your Calendar!

- Sunday, Jan. 4
No Sunday School
Winter break
- Friday, Jan. 9, 7:45pm
Shabbat Service welcoming
new members
Oneg: Onweller, Kaplowitz,
Dorman/Cafaro, Sonzogni
families
- Sunday, Jan. 11, 9:30am
Sunday School, (K/1) Music
10:45am Pirke Avot class
taught by Rabbi Lewis
POSTPONED Lunch in honor
of Stan and Rona Schick
- Saturday, Jan. 17, 10:30am
Torah Study
- Sunday, Jan 18. 9:30am
Sunday School
Confirmation
- Friday, Jan. 23, 7:45pm
Shabbat Service introducing our
new prayer book
Oneg: Heller, (Jeff) Berkowitz,
Diethorn families
- Sunday, Jan. 25
9:30am Sunday School (K/1),
Music, PTO Meeting
10:30am Open conversation
with Rabbi Lewis
- Sunday, Feb. 1, 9:30am
Sunday School
10:45am Pirke Avot class
taught by Rabbi Lewis

**Rabbi Lewis's sermons are
now on our Website!**
Visit us at www.jcnwj.org

Rabbi's Message

"Will you be celebrating anyone's birthday over the weekend?" the Camp Harlam staffer asked in advance of our annual Confirmation Retreat. They wanted to know if the kitchen should bake us a cake. "No, it won't be anyone's birthday," I said, "but yes, please bake us a cake. "What would you like us to write on it?" she asked. "Write: Happy 15th Anniversary," I said.

This was our fifteenth Confirmation retreat at Camp Harlam. Fifteen isn't an especially Jewish number. It isn't like 7 (as in: 7 days of creation) or 18 (as in: the Hebrew spelling of Chai for life). But it feels like a significant number to me this year. Most of the kids who went on this year's retreat weren't even born yet when we held that first Confirmation retreat fifteen years ago. When I first came to the Jewish Center in 1994, children finished their Jewish education upon becoming bar or bat mitzvah. I remember one of the first questions I was asked: "We hear there is something called Confirmation. Could we have that here?" So we sat down to think about how a Confirmation program might work in Washington, NJ. In the Reform movement, Confirmation usually occurs at the end of tenth grade. When I was confirmed in Westfield in 1968, I was one of over 60 tenth graders. We at the Jewish Center clearly didn't have those numbers of students in our tenth grade. So we decided that any Confirmation program we offered would include grades 8, 9 and 10. Any other decisions would require input from the kids themselves.

We scheduled one meeting. Two weeks prior to the meeting, my phone began to ring. It was parents asking for advice about how to convince their kids they should go to the first meeting. I remember walking into the room and being greeted by fifteen

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President's Message

As I write this I am flying from Chicago to Jackson, WY on 12/25/2008. That gave me the topic for this message: What to do on Christmas Day. For me, here are some of the things I have done on the 25th of December in years past. So actually, visiting China, Israel or Dubai may be one way to spend the day.

Go out for Chinese food, maybe even kosher Chinese food. This is easiest done if one lives in a real city, I am thinking New York, Chicago or LA. I have been fortunate enough to have done this in each of these venues. Another possibility is to go skiing. This is great early in the morning since there are very few other skiers, except for the staff dressed up in a variety of costumes. I would like to be politically correct here and will not describe the ethnicity of most of the people who are out skiing at 9AM on this day, but I will say that most are speaking a language that I cannot follow. By noon, everyone has opened their presents, and the ski slopes are back to their normal capacity of crowds.

Many couch potatoes (oops, is that politically correct?) can watch football on TV with the rest of the population. Watching Notre Dame or Brigham Young University playing football on this day makes me wonder. Maybe I saw other schools, but that event would be cause for concern. Another possibility is to go to a movie. Now does one have to be concerned about whether the movie is rated G, PG, R or something worse?

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Rabbi's Message, cont.

suspicious pairs of eyes. One student asked what time it was every five minutes until I finally just made her the official Timekeeper of the class. We talked about what they didn't want – they didn't want it to be just like Sunday School again. Then we talked about what kind of program they might like, how often they would want to meet and when they could meet. We settled on monthly meetings held on Sunday evenings for ninety minutes. The idea of a weekend retreat was not greeted with enthusiasm. Some had never been away for a weekend before. It was one thing to commit to meeting once a month at the Center; it was entirely different to commit to a weekend away at a place you'd never been with kids you'd barely known. They expressed their reservations. They had homework. They had marching band. They had basketball practice. They didn't want to miss the school dance. Each class member waited to see what the others would do. Okay, maybe they would go, but only if we returned early on Sunday so they could study on Sunday afternoon. The Men's Club would make us breakfast at the Center. Again my phone rang for weeks prior to that retreat. I didn't heave a sigh of relief until the bus showed up and the class clambered on.

Fifteen years later, the retreat has become a tradition. We start planning it in September. We plan everything from what snack food to bring up to what movies to watch to what games to play. The intervening years have brought changes. Fifteen years ago, I remember asking if they would put away their Walkman so they could be present to each other. In the years since, the Walkman has been supplanted by newer and better distractions, including handheld video games, CD players, computers, cell phones and texting. What hasn't changed? Someone always forgets to bring a sleeping bag (that's why I bring two). The kids always want to stay up later than I want to. We always play *Scruples* and *What Nobody Knows About You*. We always have pizza on Saturday night. We've accumulated tons of stories over the years, like the year the Havdalah candle set off the smoke alarm or the year we sledded down the hill on camp mattresses (and got in trouble).

What do we do up there? Not much. Shabbat, after all, is about being, not doing. We just enjoy being together. We do a little praying, a little studying, some meditating, plenty of eating and a lot of talking. I feel privileged to share this with them. We have a policy that once you are confirmed, you are always eligible to come on the retreat if you want. Every year, some juniors and seniors join us. Once you are out of high school, you are eligible to be an official chaperone on the retreat. Every year, we come back tired but contented. There is no substitute for that time together. It isn't just watching kids hanging out; it is witnessing a community's forming.

I just can't believe we have been doing this for fifteen years. Happy Anniversary to us. And Happy Hanukah and Happy Secular New Year to you all.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis

President's Message, cont.

Here is a good one. One can celebrate Chanukah. That is the case this year, as we will light 6 candles on the menorah that we brought from home. Now since our original plane left Newark 5 hours late on 12/24/2008, we missed all connections from Chicago to Jackson on that day. When we asked about the whereabouts of our checked luggage, the friendly American Airlines staff said that "they did not have a clue where our luggage was." Next time our menorah will be in carry-on! And we paid \$25 extra to check baggage. I believe it will be difficult to buy a menorah in Jackson, but maybe not. They have a Congregation, Jackson Hole Jewish Community, www.jhjewishcommunity.org/.

Some other possibilities include getting one's taxes ready so that they will not take up time next year. This however, can be particularly depressing when you realize that you owe money to the government. At least you know that by eating canned food between now and April 15th that you may be able to pay the taxes. Another possibility would be a work out at the Jewish Community Center. I would also assume that the usual Thursday mah-jongg game would be going at this venue. For me, it is always some type of hedonic pleasure to be swimming inside and viewing lots of ice, snow and miserable weather outside.

One could go to Atlantic City or Las Vegas. Actually, at O'Hare airport, the planes were full to Las Vegas. There were no planes going to Atlantic City. What the passengers to Las Vegas did not know is that when they get to Las Vegas, it will be like visiting a ghost town. In addition to the holiday, the country is experiencing the worst economy since the Great Depression. And there is no end in sight. In Las Vegas, most, if not all, of the high roller clubs have been closed. Perks are only provided for those whom the casinos deem the chosen few. The rest of us have to pay a lot for a little. Maybe the rooms cost less, I have not asked.

One could spend time with friends. They may even have a tree decorated for the holiday. If you have young children and they ask about the tree, make certain you have an answer ready. One could listen to the radio. There is no doubt that the most played song will be "White Christmas," written by Irving Berlin (nee Israel Baline).

Please let me know what I have missed. I am sure many of my fellow Congregants have great items to add to the above list.

Shalom,
Jim Arvesen

POSTPONED: Schick Luncheon

The luncheon in honor of Stan and Rona Schick is being postponed. More information will follow when we have a new date.

Give a friend FREE Membership!

As a membership drive, the JCNWJ is offering free membership from January to June, 2009. Be sure to send the gift certificate (found at the end of the newsletter) to anyone you know who may be looking for their first Jewish community or looking to join a new one. Go ahead and reproduce it yourself in order to send it to more than one family! Any questions, contact Gwen Nagorsky

Upcoming Events

Friday night, January 9, 7:45 p.m. Shabbat service in honor of new members. Let's try again and hope that the weather cooperates this time.

Friday night, January 23, 7:45 p.m. Rabbi Lewis and Cantor Kadin will introduce the new prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah*, which has been generously given to the congregation by anonymous donors. Though all Shabbat services are important, this one is especially so. Make every effort to come.

Sunday morning, January 25, 10:30 a.m. Open conversation with Rabbi Lewis. This is the first of several planned conversations. Come and talk about whatever is on your mind. Try to let Rabbi Lewis know in advance if you are coming.

Friday night, February 6, 7:45 p.m. Scout Shabbat. All scouts should come in uniform. A.J. Seidorf, whose Eagle Scout project has benefited the JCNWJ, will be honored. Support our scouts and demonstrate your thanks to A.J. by being there.

NOTE DATE CHANGE: Sunday, March 15, at noon. Workshop and brunch for families (adults and children) with b'nai mitzvah in 2009–2010. Invitations will go out in early February. RSVP to Sharon Herson by March 8.

Saturday, March 21, 10 a.m., Shabbat morning service to introduce the new prayerbook for Shabbat morning.

Blood Drive

Our next blood drive will be February 22. The last date one can donate blood and still be eligible to donate for us is December 28th.

Regional Biennial – a Great Event!

Call me if you want to join me, Gwen.

Don't miss the 2009 Regional Biennial at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick. We welcome you to be with us on January 31 on our mission of *Tzedek U'mishpat*-Righteousness and Justice.

Jewish Center Talent Show

The Jewish Center Talent Show is coming on March 28 at 7 pm. Start practicing your dance moves, your songs, your musical pieces, your jokes or whatever other talent you would

like to share with a very receptive audience! Auditions will take place at the beginning of March, on March 8 in the afternoon during the Purim Carnival. Come one, come all. All ages welcomed to perform. The Talent Show will be followed by a "make your own sundae" dessert.

Mrs. Mattson

Religious School/PTO Events

December was an exciting month for Sunday School. We did Chanukah Craft projects (making applesauce and making tzedakah boxes); Confirmation class went on their retreat; and we celebrated Chanukah with a party, a play, and latkes. January is more relaxed. No school on January 4 (winter break). Confirmation class meets on January 18. And our next PTO meeting is January 25. Happy New Year!
Marsha Gross & Karen Finkelstein
(Education co-chairs)

Karen and Hannah Finkelstein would like to thank all of the members who shared Chanukah gifts with all our friends at the Hunterdon Developmental Center. All the gifts were greatly appreciated.

Adult Education

Rabbi Lewis's Adult Education class, studying *Pirke Avot*, will meet Sunday mornings from 10:45 to noon on the following dates: Jan. 11, Feb. 1, March 22, and April 26. The class is open to all members. This is your opportunity to exchange ideas with other congregants under the leadership of a superb teacher. You don't have to have been in the class last year to join now. Contact Rabbi Lewis before the first class if you would like to come.

Torah Study

Torah study meets monthly on Saturday mornings for about two hours, starting at 10:30. We are a lay-led group. Discussion is always lively. Everyone is welcome: Jan. 17, Feb. 21, March 14, April 25, May 16, June 20.

Donations

Thank you from the congregation to Alison and Andrew Shelofsky for enhancing the Sukkot festivities

Irene Marinich - Thank you to Rabbi Lewis on the occasion of Scott's bar mitzvah

Edythe Herson - In honor of Charlotte Fels' birthday
Lauretta and William Koch - In memory of Judith

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