

President's Message October 2007

L'Shana Tova.

What follows is very difficult for me to express as the New Year begins. After The Jewish Center was vandalized last month, the board discussed several plans of action. The main consensus was that we should address the issue and work to prevent such obscene anti-Semitism in the future. To that end, we are planning to work with the Warren County Human Relations Commission, a quasi-public non-profit organization that works closely with the schools and the Warren County prosecutor's office.

Our crime was reported to the local Washington Police, and by them to the Warren County prosecutor's office. I will be working with the Commission over the next several months to formulate a plan of action. One possibility would be to work with them in the schools on a proactive basis. Please let me know your thoughts, either by email at arvesen@att.net, or on my cell phone at 917-941-4332.

The Commission recommended that we have a document prepared for the press in the event we want to go that route. What follows is my first effort in that direction.

POSSIBLE DOCUMENT FOR COMMISSION OR PRESS

Our religious institution, The Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey, has been a neighbor in Washington Boro for over 60 years. For much of that time, we have been well-received by this "Hometown Friendly" community. We have been active cleaning up debris on Route 57, sponsored food drives for Norwescap in Phillipsburg and are planning a blood drive for the community.

Consequently, the following incident upsets our congregation. After dark, on August 30, 2007, a swastika was spray-painted on our House of Worship. We reported it the next day to the Washington Boro Police Department. They have been very helpful in giving us direction in how to minimize these events in the future. In the State of New Jersey, this type of crime is labeled "criminal mischief," a prosecutable offense.

But our goal is not to put the perpetrators in jail, but rather to attempt to work positively to minimize such events in Washington, and elsewhere in the state. The Anti-Defamation League reports that there were four anti-Semitic bias crimes committed in Warren County in last year. In our opinion, that is too many. As a consequence, we have decided to partner with the Warren County Human Relations Commission.

The Commission works with the schools, and other local institutions, to educate our neighbors as to the harm committed when members of the community are marginalized, threatened or become victims of criminal mischief. It is through such efforts that Washington Boro can live up to its hope of being a Hometown Friendly community.

Signed by
James N. Arvesen, President