

Dear Friends,

This is one of my favorite times of year. A holiday season of beginnings and commitment. A Jewish Field of Dreams, if you will -- If you build it, they will come.

When it comes to building it, the it I have principally in mind is the JCNWJ community, and there's no question we have tremendous builders amongst us. For example...

So many of us had worried that for the first time in memory we entered the High Holidays without a cantor. Look at the beautiful music we made together, and the meaningful worship our community created! For fear of leaving anyone out of the long list of dedicated volunteers who lovingly contributed both in front and behind the scenes, I will keep from naming specific people. I do, however, feel the need to single out those who provided cantorial leadership. I know I speak for the entire congregation when I express our collective gratitude for Faye Fletcher, Stephanie Fletcher, Sharon Herson, Beth Lappin, Adam Tucker, and our piano player extraordinaire, Kevin Story. Frankly, I've never heard of another congregation providing its own cantorial leadership in quite the way we did. **If you build it, they will come.**

By the time you receive this newsletter, we'll be well into the festival of Sukkot, which, at its core, commemorates three things:

- The experience of the sukkah that we erect, decorate and occupy, recalls the temporary shelters built by our ancestors in the Land of Israel. During harvest season, the farmers constructed shelters to maximize their hours spent bringing in the yield.
- Another commemoration focuses on the fact that as our ancestors wandered through the desert for 40 years, they built temporary structures of protection from the elements. These shelters enabled our people to arrive finally and safely in the Land of Milk and Honey
- Finally, three times each year our people journeyed to the ancient Temple in Jerusalem for the Three Pilgrimage Holidays (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot). With so many convening at the same time, there weren't sufficient accommodations. As such, most people erected temporary sukkot for their stay.

This year, volunteers from our congregational family, led once again by Karl Gross, have built our own sukkah for all to enjoy. We invite you to come by, admire the expert decorating – courtesy of our Hebrew School children – and enjoy time in the sukkah with friends and family over the course of the holiday. **If you build it, they will come.**

Now. About our garden. It's hard to put into words how much pride our Mitzvah Garden brings to the JCNWJ. Several of us have dirtied (literally) our hands in the process, but an extra special thank you goes to Howie Hirsch and Matt Polsky for their ongoing work that has resulted in hundreds of pounds of fresh organic produce going to feed the hungry of Warren County. Just a few years ago, that miracle garden was merely an idea. Today, it brings nourishment and hope to so many. Next year, we encourage more of you to participate – it is so rewarding. **If you build it, they will come.**

On a related note, thanks to the perennial leadership of Iris Hirsch, we gathered bags (and bags and bags) of nonperishable food during the Holidays to donate to local food banks. Even though our High Holiday food appeal has concluded, people remain hungry so our collection box is in the front hall yearround. Other items the food pantries also distribute (that are always in need) are diapers, feminine hygiene products and the little unopened shampoos/soaps from hotels. **If you build it, they will come.**

In the other large box sitting in the hallway, we have begun, once again, collecting gently used winter coats. Please bring your coat donations soon, as the weather has already started to turn and we will make our first donation within the next few weeks. If more coats come in after that, we will continue to pass them on to those in need. **If you build it, they will come.**

Finally, Simchat Torah must be one of the absolute best celebrations in our community as we celebrate the gift of Torah and literally wrap our sanctuary in its holiness. Thanks to the efforts of Shira Dubin, we will introduce a new tradition at JCNWJ for Simchat Torah (Friday night, October 6), in which our congregants will not only hold the Torah as we wrap the room, but volunteers will also read snippets of their favorite verses, or parts of their b'nei mitzvah portions, as we journey through the story. If you'd like to participate in this new tradition, please contact me ASAP. If you are hesitant to read in Hebrew, have faith. I'm confident God understands English, too. And you know what? Please bring a friend – Jewish or not. What we have going on at JCNWJ is too good to keep to ourselves.

What we have learned through our work, our tzedakah, and our prayer is that for us, we are home wherever and whenever we feel the love of this remarkable congregation. Together, we have built this remarkable Jewish family – the only Jewish organization in all of Warren County. I'm glad to report that after demographic realities have shrunk the size of our membership, this year, for the first time in well over a decade, we enter the new year with more members than we had last year. There is renewed hope in a wonderful future for the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey.

We have so much to be proud of, Friends. **We are building it, and they are coming.**

Chag Sukkot & Simchat Torah Sameach,

Rabbi Dubin