

THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS

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Editorial**A Dream Becomes A Reality**

In August '79 the *CJN* announced that a "group of public-minded citizens has been working on a plan which would afford an opportunity to Temples Beth El and Israel, the Jewish Community Center, the Hebrew Academy and the Federation to relocate their facilities on a 41-acre tract of land on Providence Road."

We've come a long way since that time...acquired additional tracts of land from Beth El and adjacent land owned by others...many, many meetings held by the institutions, "wish-lists" gathered at series of meetings ("wishdays"). The Foundation of the Charlotte Jewish Community, Inc. was formed and in Feb. '81, Marvin Bienstock became its executive director.

On Labor Day Weekend '81, representatives of the five institutions had a retreat at Wildacres. This paper reported that "the retreat may one day be remembered as the real turning point in the years-long effort to establish on one tract of land the new homes for the institutions." And indeed it was!

April 24, 1982: the JCC was the first to sign the Joint Venture Agreements. Three days later, the Academy did the same and within a month the Temples also voted "YES".

By July '82, the Foundation campaign had reached \$2,774,000! The town heard the slogan: "Together we will..." Each month the pledge money escalated...and each month the *CJN* featured the "growth of bricks".

By Feb. '83, the Foundation Drive topped \$4.2 million and it was "Together we are..." In late August we were devastated by the total destruction by fire of the JCC. Now we really had to speed along! The Foundation's historic groundbreaking took place on Dec. 11, 1983.

May 18, 1986 is a proud day for the Jewish community and for the city of Charlotte. On that day, Shalom Park will become a reality..."Together we have!"

This issue is dedicated to the opening of this monumental project. As editor, I have had the opportunity of being a part of this endeavor since its beginning. Much time and effort have gone into this edition and its souvenir supplement, highlighting the development of Shalom Park and the people who made it possible. Read and enjoy!

— Rita Mond

Too Much Structure?

By Rabbi Marc Wilson
 Temple Israel

Why do so many Jews not affiliate with synagogues? The question is of great contemporary concern among rabbis and involved laypeople. Countless thousands of words have been written on the subject.

Listening to the non-affiliated themselves, one hears a myriad of answers, many of which have great validity, many of which are little more than feeble, self-perpetuating excuses.

As a "synagogue person," one of the most engaging reasons I hear for not affiliating is that our synagogues are "too structured" or "too institutionalized." It is an indictment worth examining.

Let the record show at the outset that I, personally, have never been one to blindly defend the state of the American synagogue, right-or-wrong, *uber alles*. To the contrary, it leaves much to be desired.

The more I talk with my colleagues, read synagogue bulletins, and observe the workings of my own congrega-

tion and others, however, the more convinced I am that the charge that our synagogues are a "turn off" because they are too structured and institutionalized is largely a myth, an unjustified slur.

If anything, I have found our synagogues to be overly sensitive to depersonalization and the unchecked growth of red-tape and bureaucracy. Synagogue decision-making has become increasingly democratic. Boards and committees are more and more representative of congregational cross-sections and are oriented to the fulfillment of necessary tasks, not self-proliferation. Major matters of concern are invariably brought before meetings of an entire congregation, at which point, frankly, our primary concern is not over-institutionalization, but the threat of mob rule.

Even in the better established congregations, money and "the old guard" do not speak with the arbitrary, autocratic voice that many detractors would like us to believe. And, anyone who thinks that rabbis simply railroad their agendas

through, needs only eavesdrop on our rabbinical "shoptalk" to hear us bemoaning the roadblocks our *balabatim* so often throw up in the way of our plans.

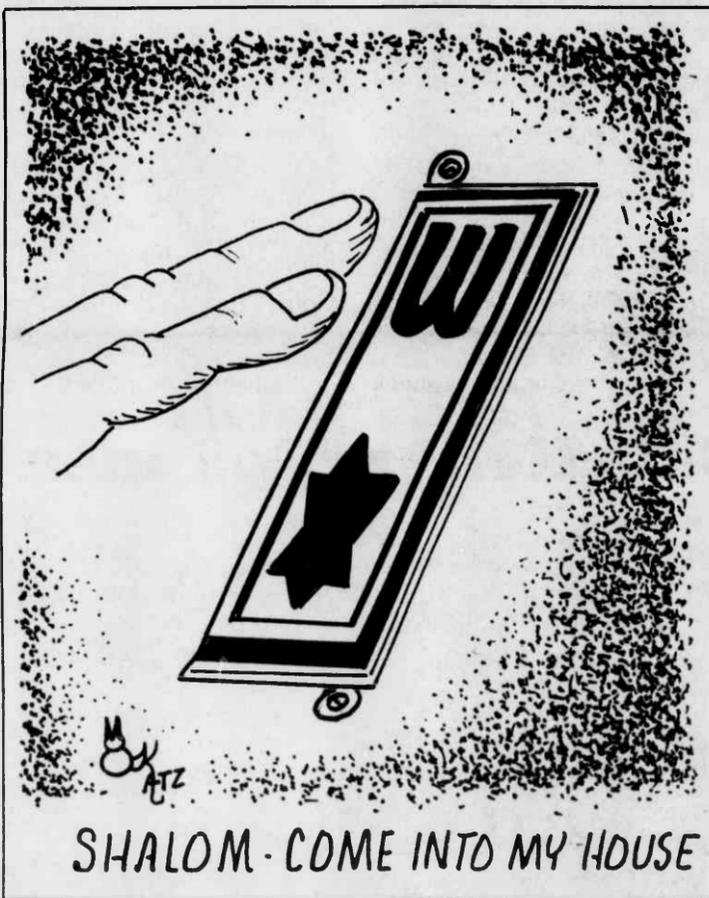
Classes, service groups and worship have become increasingly participatory. From what I observe, creating a milieu of interpersonal warmth and fellowship is a top-priority matter for our congregations.

Contrary to the well-worn canard, no congregation I know of will disenfranchise or refuse membership to a family in financial straits, nor will they publicly parade them around like circus freaks. If anything, synagogues are more adept at "let's make a deal" than Monty Hall. Synagogue insiders know how frequently we "get taken" by a less-than-honest congregant in comparison to the rare occasions when someone is unwittingly given a financial hassle.

A final thought about money: so often we speak of it like a dread disease. Properly directed, it can be our best friend. Without it, we could not cool or heat or light our place of worship, be it the sanctuary of the Temple or someone's living room. We could not buy chalk or books or desks or a roof over our heads to educate and "turn on" our young and not-so-young. We could not engage rabbis who would be on 24 hour call to affiliates and non-affiliates, who also request/demand the rabbi's service and would scream bloody murder if they were handed an invoice "for services rendered."

We speak of "structure" as though it were some sort of a superimposed boogie man rather than a blessing that enables us to realize our hopes and aspirations. It leads me to wonder what those who are turned off by synagogue structure and institutionalization would replace it with. Smaller, less formal, more intimate groups? Fine. But, beware: Every bag of beans that goes into the *cholent* costs money. Every necessary decision will force leadership to emerge. Some, if not all, demands for skilled Judaic input will require professional assistance, and the demands will escalate. The equitable apportionment of *aliyot* will ultimately become a committee decision. The education of your young will call for requirements and standards. Before you know it, you, too, will have all the institutionalization and structure you can handle. And then others will be "turned off" by you as you now are by us. Even anarchists ultimately form societies, collect dues and elect officers.

The American synagogue is far from Utopia, our local synagogues included. But, the charge that the very structure that keeps our synagogues viable is a "turn off" to Jewish life is largely unjustified. It is a feeble dodge used by those who would substitute for it commitment that might be a mile wide, but only a quarter of an inch deep. For all that is wrong, this is one guilt trip we need not buy into.

**On The Issues ---- By Ira Gissen, Va/NC Director ADL****Insults**

Following the election of Virginia's first black Lieutenant Governor and first female Attorney General, the euphoria generated by those milestones was shattered by anti-Semitic comments in the Virginia General Assembly.

The first took place during conference on a bill to require banks to notify credit-card customers that interest would be charged on purchases if the monthly bill was not paid. In discussion of what heading should be placed on the notice, Delegate George P. Beard, Jr., R-Culpeper, suggested "A Star of David" because the sponsor was Jewish.

Two days later this affront was matched and surpassed by the intemperate words of the General Assembly's most influential senator. Regarded

as the second most powerful elected official in Virginia, Senator Edward E. Willey, D-Richmond, Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, was peeved at a reporter divulging an obscenity he used in a private conversation referring to the Chairman of the House Finance Committee. Senator Willey expressed his anger to a group of reporters. To convey his wrath and dislike of the reporter who had quoted him, he characterized him as "that little Jew boy." Ironically the reporter was not Jewish.

Senator Elliot S. Schewel, D-Lynchburg, (one of four Jewish members of the Virginia General Assembly) took the floor to criticize his fellow legislators for making "derisive, vulgar, highly offensive

religious slurs." In his speech, Senator Schewel divulged that Senator William E. Fears, D-Accomack, made a remark in the Senate cloakroom that he was not going on the floor during a prayer because a rabbi might be making it.

Acting immediately upon the first report of the crack regarding the Star of David, a letter from the Anti-Defamation League was delivered to Delegate Beard which read in part: "The Star of David, which was the butt of your joke, occupies a unique position in Jewish history. It is a symbol intimately associated with our faith. It is also a symbol which Hitler decreed that all Jews must wear in all countries under Nazi control so that they could be more readily identified and persecuted." The ADL letter pointed out:

"While your intent may have been to introduce levity into a serious discussion, your choice of humor was ill advised and offensive."

ADL's letter was reported in newspapers throughout Virginia, in the *Washington Post* and on radio and TV.

In his response, Delegate Beard wrote: "The way it was reported in the press made it appear that I was insensitive and prejudiced. I want to assure you that it is not so and I apologize to all who were offended by what I intended to be a supportive friendly private remark to a colleague. My choice of words was and is certainly most unfortunate. I am attempting to inform all that I can to make this heart-

(Cont'd on page 3)