

NEW LEADERS, NEW CHALLENGES

By Stanley Schwartz and Lawrence Krause



AT BETH ISRAEL'S ANNUAL MEETING in 1976, the 860-family congregation elected assistant Rabbi Michael Sternfeld to a five-year term as senior rabbi. Rabbi Sternfeld had been ordained only about two years earlier and had spent those two years at Beth Israel. The Central Conference of American Rabbis' rules required a rabbi to have been ordained at least 10 years or to have served as an assistant rabbi for eight years to be eligible for leadership of a congregation this large.

The CCAR expelled Rabbi Sternfeld, and Beth Israel, in turn, suspended its membership in the UAHC.

Rabbi Michael Sternfeld was a dynamic leader and the longest serving rabbi in Beth Israel's 150-year history. During his tenure, recorded membership rose to more than 1,400 families. Temple activities expanded, and the staff grew. He was a strong believer in prophetic Judaism and his sermons reflected this.

In 1976, Cantor-Educator H. Richard Brown came

Beth Israel Opens a Preschool

IN JANUARY 1977, Beth Israel's board of directors approved the concept of the congregation operating a preschool. Marline Gendelman, a religious school teacher and kindergarten teacher in the San Diego school system with a degree in early childhood education, was appointed to chair an exploratory committee to report to the board.

In February, the board approved the start-up cost of \$10,000, with \$6,000 from the Rubin Family Fund, bequeathed by the late Sid Rubin, and the remainder from the capital fund. The motion was approved with the provisions that the school would be named after Sid Rubin, would open in September 1977, would provide educational experiences of the highest quality, and would operate without financial cost to the congregation. Director of Education Helene Schlafman named Marline Gendelman preschool director.

In September 1977, Sid Rubin Preschool opened its doors to 11 preschoolers. Two were the rabbi's children; the families of nine others paid tuition. The staff consisted of Gendelman and one other teacher. Gendelman also served as bookkeeper, secretary, snack provider and sometime custodian.

The preschool's philosophy was to provide the best in early childhood education with an age-appropriate



In 1977, Sid Rubin Preschool, headed by Principal Marline Gendelman (second from left), opened its doors to 11 children. When Gendelman retired in 1997, the preschool had 65 children and was operating at full capacity.

curriculum, and the focus was to help children grow socially, physically, mentally and emotionally, and offer a program rich in Jewish culture, tradition and values.

When Gendelman retired 20 years later, in 1997, the preschool was operating at a full capacity of 65 children and a staff of eight. A summer school was also offered that included outdoor activities, nature hikes and weekly field trips.

Today, when Gendelman visits or substitutes at the preschool, she often encounters former students who now are parents themselves. The preschool has continued to evolve within Beth Israel's highly successful Bill and Sid Rubin Early Childhood Education program, thanks to the leadership and creativity of Tammy Vener, who has directed the preschool since 1998.

on board, but he resigned in April the following year. *The Gates of Prayer* replaced the *Union Prayerbook* as the *siddur*. Joan Jacobs was elected the congregation's first female president. She guided the complete refurbishment of the sanctuary, social hall and school building, inside and out. In 1977, Barbara Schloss and Aviva Katzman alternated as cantorial soloists until October, when David Ben-Veniste was engaged.

In 1977, Helene Schlafman became the congregation's first female director of education. Over the years, Charlene Neely, Deborah Chester Geary and Jane Cohen served as her assistants. Together with Rabbi Sternfield, Schlafman established the Sid Rubin Preschool. Marline Gendelman was its first principal and served in that position for 20 years. Construction began on a playground. Alan Levinson was hired as executive director. Temple membership reached 1,000 families, and temple facilities were refurbished. A new group, Mixed Doubles, for intermarried couples, was formed. Elaine Springer became temple librarian.

BETH ISRAEL'S FIRST PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Beth Israel has long been a national trail blazer for synagogue transformation. The congregation hired two of the Reform Movement's first program directors, Nadine Finkel, in 1978, and Bonnie Graff, who has served the congregation as program director from 1982 to the present.

With Beth Israel's growing membership of about 1,000 families, Finkel's initial challenges were to create a welcoming, inclusive environment and develop programs to personalize the synagogue experience for members. Finkel initiated a series of neighborhood get-togethers and built the chavurah program to provide opportunities for temple members to get to know each other and to bond with clergy and staff.

Between 1978 and 1979, she formed 18 chavurot, each consisting of 8 to 10 families. Because the synagogue chavurah program was in its infancy – Beth Israel was a pioneer in its development – Finkel devoted significant attention and nurturing to it. To this day, chavurot remain central to the congregation, and the program director remains central to chavurot, maintaining and fostering ties between each chavurah and the synagogue community.

Beth Israel prides itself on its inclusivity, and intermarried couples and families were, and remain, a significant part of the congregation. Finkel started the

Mixed Doubles program in 1978 for interfaith couples to discuss and work through interfaith issues. Groups met monthly in homes, at temple, and at outside activities. Most of these couples joined chavurot or created their own groups. Many went on to become highly involved in the congregation, serving on the board and as chairs of auxiliaries and committees. In later years, Mixed Doubles evolved into the Belin Award-winning outreach program created by Program Director Bonnie Graff and the Outreach Committee.

Finkel also organized two very successful Beth Israel family camps in Cuayamaca and Palomar to promote the congregation's goal of creating connection and community. Clergy, madrichim, educators and song leaders were involved in the programming, and the cabins filled with enthusiastic families.

Under the auspices of the Fine Arts Committee – formed by Finkel and cantorial soloist Ben-Veniste – Beth Israel held a very popular outdoor festival called Sukkot Street Scene. Third Avenue was closed and the patio and street were filled with food and activity booths, highlighted with Jewish music and dancing. Hundreds attended this event.

SECOND AND BEECH TEMPLE MOVED TO HERITAGE PARK



In 1979, Beth Israel's old Beech Street Temple was moved to Heritage Park in two pieces. It was rededicated in 1989 for its 100th anniversary and is now widely visited as a historical landmark and used for weddings, b'nai mitzvah and private events.

Due to the efforts of President Jim Milch and historian Henry Schwartz, Beth Israel in 1978 purchased back its original synagogue, on Second and Beech streets, for \$10,000. Rabbi Goor had become concerned five years earlier about the temple's preservation and had worked to have it preserved. It was registered as a San Diego

Cantor Sheldon Merel's Contributions to Beth Israel

By Lawrence Krause

IN 1979, CANTOR SHELDON MEREL was a well-known musician with a large and devoted following as a cantor at the famous Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, Canada. Yet, when the call came from Rabbi Michael Sternfield, at whose wedding Cantor Merel had co-officiated, to become cantor at Beth Israel, the prospect of coming to San Diego and avoiding the harsh winters in Toronto was too tempting to turn down.

Cantor Merel was born in Chicago in 1924, and music was part of his upbringing. His father played the harmonica and mandolin and had a very pleasant voice. The family moved to New York City in 1933, and Cantor Merel became bar mitzvah in a Conservative synagogue. He entered City College of New York (CCNY) with a major in engineering, but his plans changed suddenly when the United States entered World War II. Cantor Merel applied to the New York State Maritime Academy and became a third-class engineer as an ensign in the United States Maritime Service.

After the war, Cantor Merel returned to CCNY and transferred to the business college. Soon, however, he decided to pursue his love of singing, and at the age of 21, he took his first formal musical instruction. Cantor Merel's first real job in music was in the Catskill Mountains, where he performed as a singing master of ceremonies.

In 1949, Cantor Gershon Ephros encouraged Cantor Merel to enter the newly created School of Sacred Music – the first school to train cantors in the United States – from which he graduated in 1952 as a cantor-educator. His first appointment was at Temple Beth El in



Cantor Merel worked closely with organist and choir director Ken Fall and chair of the music committee Estelle Milch.



Cantor Sheldon Merel (right) was recruited to San Diego from Toronto by Rabbi Michael Sternfield, at whose wedding the cantor had co-officiated.

South Bend, Indiana, as cantor and youth director. He went on to hold positions in Chicago and in Oakland, California, and in 1969 he became cantor and music director at Holy Blossom Temple.

During his 11 active years at Beth Israel, Cantor Merel presented an annual Friday evening orchestral Shabbat with David Amos and the Jewish Community Center Orchestra. He also arranged performances of the temple choir and a different church choir each year, featuring orchestral compositions by Jewish composers. The two choirs then performed on a Sunday morning at the church of the guest choir.

Under Cantor Merel's direction, Beth Israel held an annual Composer-in-Residence Weekend with leading Jewish composers. The composers gave lectures and presented their music with choir and instruments, together with commentary. The congregation was able to hear new and exciting music and meet the composers in person. Cantor Merel's wife, Marcie, was actively engaged in the congregation, Jewish Family Service and general Jewish community and led two Sisterhood retreats in the early 1980s.

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Cantor Merel has been recognized and honored for his contributions to music far beyond cantorial music. In 1998, his CD, *Standing Ovation*, produced and edited by Marcie Merel, was released with selected recordings captured live-in-concert over 28 years. Upon his retirement in 1991, Cantor Merel became cantor emeritus of Beth Israel. His cantorial contributions to Beth Israel's High Holy Days services and other events continue well into his retirement.

Cantor Merel and Marcie are greatly beloved by the congregation, which delighted in the celebration of his

second bar mitzvah at age 83 at a Friday night service in 2007.

In prelude to the congregation's celebration of its 150th anniversary, copies of Cantor Merel's second CD, *Chants of a Lifetime* (released in 2010), were presented as a gift to all Beth Israel members. Reflecting Cantor Merel's diverse musical talents, the CD features not only traditional music of Shabbat and the High Holy Days, but also two opera arias, Ladino and Yiddish compositions, and a unique *Kiddush* by Kurt Weill.



Planning and rehearsing for The Follies was intense, exhausting and tremendously fun.

Historic Site, and in 1978 it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Beth Israel gave the building to San Diego County as an example of 19th-century church architecture, with the condition that the county would move it to Heritage Park and restore the exterior. The structure was cut in half for this move. The congregation's first temple sat in Heritage Park for almost 10 years before it was rededicated in 1989 for its 100th anniversary.

The restored building, which had been renovated in 1938 and used as a church, is now widely visited as a historical landmark and utilized by the public for weddings, b'nai mitzvah and private events. However, because it was moved from its original site, it is no longer on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Follies

By Ruthe Rogow

THE FOLLIES, BOTH I AND II, were the greatest of all mixers, bringing together in a three-week period of time the whole temple community. No matter what your talent (or not), there was a place for anyone who wanted to be a part of the fun, fancy and glitter of dress up and pretend, brought to the temple by Cargill Productions.

Clergy, board of directors, temple staff, congregants of all ages, and enthusiastic audiences jumped on the bandwagon and made it all work. Every facet of a Broadway production was recreated, from stage hands and seamstresses to chorus line beauties and one-of-a-kind *Temple's Got Talent* singers and dancers. Even the musical score was performed by

members of the temple family. In 1977, Iris Strauss and Betty Sternfield co-chaired the Follies. In 1982, Iris Strauss and Betty Byrnes co-chaired the event, with casting by Bev Hecker and Bobbie Witte and production by Alberta Feurzeig and Marianne Adler. Arthur Rivkin played the Kimball organ.

The rehearsals were frequent, long and sometimes exhausting, especially toward opening night, when one couldn't help but wonder: Can this actually come together? But come together it did, with all the thrill and bustle of a true Broadway opening.

If truth be told, the best part of both performances was the spirit of camaraderie among those who participated in this unique fundraiser/fun raiser. New friends were made, old friendships renewed, and memories still linger for those who were part of those very special all-for-one and one-for-all events.

A TIME OF GROWTH

During Milch's presidency, work proceeded on the "shul in the sky" proposal, which, had it been completed, would have involved erecting a high-rise tower topped by a new synagogue.

In 1979, cantorial soloist Ben-Veniste left Beth

Israel, and Cantor Sheldon F. Merel arrived. Within a year, Cantor Merel formed a choir for junior high school students that sang at monthly family Shabbat services. He also formed a volunteer adult choir.

Between 1979 and 1982, the Religious School Parent Organization, Evening Sisterhood, and Fine Arts

Beth Israel Day School

IN EARLY 1981, FOUR congregant couples approached Helene Schlafman, Beth Israel's director of education, with the hope of starting a Reform Jewish day school at Beth Israel. At the time the only option for a Jewish day school education was the Orthodox Hebrew Day School. Knowing that plenty of religious school classrooms were not being utilized during weekdays, it seemed "a natural choice," according to one of the original four couples, Joani and Steven Gross.

Mary Ann Scher and Ron Lipsker brought the proposal to the congregation's board of directors in 1981, and the board authorized a modest program on the conditions that the school would be self-supporting, would grow slowly, and would complement religious school programs that were evolving at the same time. Coincidentally, the San Diego Jewish Academy also opened at this time and was housed at Congregation Beth El in La Jolla.

Beth Matez was hired as the first principal of the school. "With everyone's dedication and hard work, the school opened in September of that year," Joani Gross related.

Sharon Raffer served as the second principal, Bob Kolton was the third, and Jill Green was the fourth. Gross continued: "Even though we went through four principals in the time my kids were there – 1981–1992 – we always felt that it provided a loving and nurturing environment where children flourished and education excelled." Liz Goldstein was the librarian.

The temple's location at Third and Laurel was a prominent factor in the school's success. The day school drew students from many neighborhoods and also proved convenient for many parents who dropped off their children on their way to work in the downtown area. Consequently, the school enrolled a mix of Jewish children from all over San Diego.

The school's plan for moderate growth changed when, in 1983, 60 Mexican students enrolled in the day school. Jewish families from Mexico City and Guadalajara had begun arriving in 1976 due to an economic downturn in Mexico, and in 1983, Rabbi Arnold Kopikis founded Congregation Or-El, a Spanish speaking congregation, which held services at Beth Israel. The children of these families had attended Jewish day schools in Mexico, and it was natural that their parents enrolled them in Beth Israel Day School. This influx of students resulted in a significant financial boost to the school but also posed a challenge to find teachers and other resources quickly to provide quality education. With the assistance of Alan Nevin, additional space for classrooms was obtained by purchasing and remodeling a small house across the street from the temple on Second Avenue. Senior Rabbi Michael Sternfield supported the effort, and parents strongly supported the school with tuition, time and talent.

In time, however, many of the factors favorable to the school's success were reversed. The State of California reduced class size in grades K through 3 in public schools, making private school feel more like a luxury than a necessity. The Mexican families left the school abruptly to attend San Diego Jewish Academy, which by then had classes from K through 12, and where their children could be educated through high school. Principal Jill Green left and subsequently started a charter school for primary students. Several highly regarded teachers left at that same time, and some parents withdrew their children. Even the temple's relocation to the Golden Triangle proved to be a mixed blessing as it is now located near neighborhoods with high-quality school systems and closer to the San Diego Jewish Academy.

With significantly reduced enrollment and little prospect for expansion, the congregation's board of directors had to face up to the financial reality, and voted to close the day school in 2006.

Committee were started. An adult b'nai mitzvah program began. The annual congregational seder was moved from the first night of Passover to the second night. After two-and-a-half years of hard work, Sisterhood members completed their hand-made *chuppah*, or bridal canopy, which remains available to the present day for weddings at Beth Israel.

In 1977 and 1982, Beth Israel members and staff put on *The Follies* productions, which brought together the entire congregational community for two very successful and popular “fun-raisers.”

The temple board opened discussions about the

inadequacies of Beth Israel's buildings and their vulnerability to earthquakes. The board convened a future planning committee, which unveiled a plan for rebuilding the Third and Laurel site. Steve Makoff succeeded Alan Levinson as temple administrator.

In 1981, the congregation's board of directors authorized Helene Schlafman to establish the Beth Israel Day School and set tuition at \$1,650; by the next year 100 students were enrolled. Tammy Vener, now director of Bill and Sid Rubin Early Childhood Education, was one of the school's first teachers. The next year, together with Executive Director Steve Makoff, Schlafman added a

Rabbi Lenore Bohm, Beth Israel's First Female Rabbi

By Lawrence Krause

UPON HER ORDINATION in Cincinnati in 1982, Lenore Bohm became one of the first 50 women to become a Reform rabbi. In addition to serving for many years in various capacities in San Diego, Rabbi Bohm's rabbinate has taken her to such far-flung places as Adelaide, Australia, and Fairbanks, Alaska.

Rabbi Bohm was born in New York and grew up in New York and Atlanta. She earned a B.A. in English at Carnegie Mellon University, studied at INTER/MET, an interfaith seminary in Washington, D.C., and was ordained after study at the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion campuses in Cincinnati and Jerusalem.

Rabbi Bohm's first rabbinic post was at Beth Israel in 1982, immediately after ordination. She was the first female rabbi to serve at Beth Israel. Rabbi Bohm began to hone her teaching skills with the young people in the congregation and in the day school. After three years, her contract was not renewed because of the congregation's adherence at that time to a single term so as to be a training ground for young rabbis.

She quickly obtained an appointment as rabbi of the newly formed Temple Solel in Encinitas, which was not the same Temple Solel that had separated from and then merged with Beth Israel in the '60s. She was the first female rabbi to lead a congregation in San Diego County and one of only 15 female senior or solo congregational rabbis in the United States at the time. Under her leadership, Temple Solel grew from 40 to more than 450 family memberships.

Rabbi Bohm has been recognized for her work in interfaith relations, women's issues, Jewish parenting

and pastoral work. She was director of the San Diego Jewish Healing Center for several years, served as president of the San Diego Rabbinical Association, and was a founding member of the Jewish Women's Foundation of San Diego. She is also a founding board member of Waters of Eden: The San Diego Mikvah and Education Center. Currently, she serves as vice president of the Leichtag Foundation.

In July 1997, Rabbi Bohm accepted a position as rabbi of Congregation Beth Shalom of Adelaide, Australia, where she revitalized the congregation. In recent years, she has gone to Fairbanks, Alaska, for High Holy Days, to lead that small band of Jews who call themselves the “Frozen Chosen.” She also continued her studies at Claremont Graduate School in feminist theology and at the University of San Diego in spiritual direction.

In 2008, Rabbi Bohm temporarily returned to Beth Israel on a part-time basis. Her presence was greeted with joy by many members who knew her from years past, and she made many new admirers. Rabbi Bohm continues to lead Torah study monthly at Beth Israel. She is an especially popular Torah study leader, and is considering writing a book to convey the insights she obtained from preparing and leading Torah study at Beth Israel.



Rabbi Lenore Bohm was the first female rabbi to serve at Beth Israel. She joined the congregation in 1982.

Images of the '80s

By Si Coleman

IN THE MID-1980s, Beth Israel introduced to San Diego an annual speakers series whose goal was to bring speakers of high distinction to San Diego to inform members and the broader community about issues of the day and to provide intellectual and entertainment appeal.

Chairs Karen and Si Coleman worked with Program Director Bonnie Graff to hold *Images of the '80s*, the first major speakers series held in San Diego. New York City Mayor Ed Koch inaugurated the program in 1984 at the Town and Country Hotel in Mission Valley. He set a high standard, but Beth Israel rose to the challenge by presenting Phil Donahue and Henry Kissinger at the San Diego Civic Theatre later that year.

One of the highlights of Dr. Kissinger's appearance was the discovery that the powerful former Secretary of State was, indeed, a man of the people, down to earth, and someone who easily established rapport with his audience. He described the immense challenges that confronted him and his friend, Abba Eban, the Israeli diplomat and politician. These two brilliant men were at the center of international diplomacy during the '70s and early '80s, but by the time of his speech, both were out of the public limelight. Kissinger made us laugh when he questioned how the world could function without either man in charge.

The success of the first year's speakers series led to the second season, in 1985–1986, during which Beth Israel hosted United Nations Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick; Jehan Sadat, whose husband, Anwar, the third president of Egypt, had been assassinated four years earlier; and Ted Koppel, the host of ABC's *Nightline*. The first two

speakers gave the audiences great understanding of the challenges confronting those working toward peace in the Middle East. In retrospect, the problems they described in 1985 now seem so much simpler when compared to the terribly complex issues confronting the Israelis and Palestinians today. Ted Koppel described how it felt to be the only "serious" person on late night television. However, after hearing privately some of his jokes about world leaders, it seemed reasonable to believe he could

step in easily for comedians Johnny Carson or Arsenio Hall.

Under the outstanding leadership of Bob and Leah Temkin, the third season, 1986–1987, introduced to San Diego newscaster Bernard Kalb, journalist Art Buchwald, and Speaker of the House Thomas "Tip" O'Neill. Their topics were

current, made us think, and provoked discussion. It is refreshing to recall, in light of the tumultuous times in Congress today, how Tip O'Neill, notwithstanding his well known liberal views, described how he was able to make the House function rationally, civilize the dialogues, and bring about constructive and positive results for the American people.

Images of the '80s is fondly remembered for the leadership role it established for Beth Israel in San Diego. It reinforced Beth Israel's historic dedication to providing unparalleled programs that satisfy the intellectual and cultural appetites of Jewish San Diego.



Images of the '80s brought distinguished speakers to San Diego, reinforcing Beth Israel's reputation for unparalleled programming.

teen travel program to the three-week summer residential Camp Beth Israel. Louie Vener became director of Camp Beth Israel and a leader of the travel program.

Social action programs included a successful effort, in coordination with Jewish Family Service, to help with the Vietnamese “boat people” resettlement. A group of Beth Israel families helped prepare East County apartments for the refugees with basic furnishings, clothing and food, and then met with the refugees once they arrived to welcome them and help them acclimate to their new environment. Beth Israel also held community Thanksgiving dinners for needy people in the temple’s neighborhood. The congregation further provided a temporary place of worship for Jews from Mexico,

with Rabbi Arnold Kopikis presiding over auxiliary Congregation Or-El at Beth Israel’s Third and Laurel location.

In December 1982, and again in November 1983, the temple presented a well-received three-day Festival of Arts celebrating Jewish culture with music, art exhibitions, ethnic food booths, arts and crafts for children, and many other activities.

Beth Israel engaged its first female rabbi, Lenore Bohm, as assistant rabbi in 1982. In 1983, Barbara Goldman and Bonnie Graff became co-program directors, replacing Nadine Finkel, the congregation’s first program coordinator, who had left that position in 1982.

The Human Resources Program

By Gayle Wise

THE GOAL OF BETH ISRAEL’S Human Resources Program was to train a group of temple members who would act on behalf of the clergy when congregants needed support with aging parents, divorce, grief, single parenting, hospital and nursing home visits, and bar/bat mitzvah planning, especially involving blended families. A group also planned meals for families sitting shiva.

The genesis of the Human Resources Program was a “para-rabbinic” program started at a synagogue in Los Angeles. Irene Feintech Fox, a longstanding temple member, introduced the concept to Beth Israel. Rabbi Sternfield and Bonnie Graff spent six months



Professionals developed the curriculum for the Human Resources Program, which trained a group of temple members to take on positions of service to the Beth Israel community.

developing a curriculum with the advice of a group of professional therapists, and in 1985 the program began.

Members were invited to participate with the understanding that para-rabbinic volunteers would commit to completing the training program and then move into active roles that fit their interests and our congregants’ needs.

Training consisted of small group discussions led by professionals Barry Graff, Joseph Yedid, Maurice Zemlick, Susan Sincoff and Russ Gold. We practiced everything from active listening to learning about funeral procedures at Am Israel and Cypress View. We were often instructed by the clergy, culminating with a retreat in San Juan Capistrano.

Upon completing the program, we took on positions of service to our temple community. We started groups to give support to single parents and families of aging parents. We met with b’nai mitzvah parents to coach them on making their child’s life-cycle ceremony less stressful and more meaningful. We visited the sick and elderly in hospitals and nursing homes, occasionally led services at nursing homes, conducted divorce and bereavement support groups, and worked with the interfaith outreach program.

This program was life altering for many participants. It provided skills and methods of coping that one can use each day, and I am thankful for the training and experience I received in this program more than 25 years ago.

Fun and Fundraisers

By Bonnie Graff

BETH ISRAEL MEMBERS have always enjoyed putting the fun in fundraising. Creative congregants, together with the program director, enjoy the challenge of making each fundraiser unique – from colorful invitations to imaginative décor and food. Fundraising committees, sharing the responsibilities for creating attractive events, stuffing and labeling invitations, setting up stage sets and centerpieces, and enjoying food tastings, often become bonded communities, like *chavurot*. The more involved members become in planning fundraisers, the more they seem to gain, personally, from their efforts.

Mazel and Mystery Night lives on in many of our memories. One of the simplest and yet most successful fundraisers, *Mazel* was held for three years. Each participant selected a number and stood a chance of winning cash. The first year, Congregation Or-El joined us. In 1983, a gala auction was chaired by Gene and Barbara Appel.

In 1990, we teamed with Congregation Beth El for a historic fundraising event: world renowned violinist Itzhak Perlman performed to a sold-out crowd at Symphony Hall. The event, chaired by Mary Ann and George Scher and Elaine and Murray Galinson, raised more than \$100,000 for Beth Israel and fostered a great sense of community spirit and cooperation.

A Standing Ovation brought together congregants young and old in song and dance to honor Cantor Merel upon his retirement in 1991 from Beth Israel. *One Night Only*, chaired by Terri Sapp in 1995, brought Rabbi Bob Alper, the only known practicing clergy person doing intentional stand-up comedy. Chairs Bev and Ron Hecker led us in celebrating our 135th anniversary with a choreographed show featuring song, dance and costumes from our early beginnings in San Diego to the present. Attendees dressed in the style of their favorite decade from the 1850s to the 1990s.

Food Glorious Food created parties throughout the year in members' homes and other great locations around the county. Entertainment stars Mark Russell, Jay Leno, Bill Cosby, Second City and Capitol Steps made us laugh at ourselves.

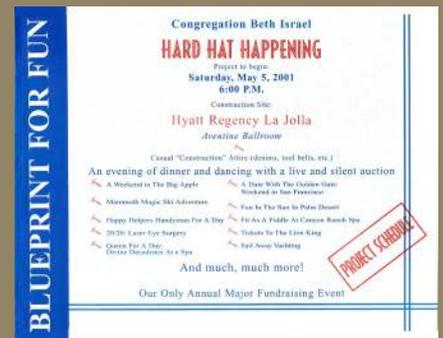
We did the Texas Two Step at *Rhinestone Round Up*, gambled on the delta at *Steamboatin' Style*, wore costume finery at *Purim Ball* and donned our best sports activity wear at *Sportsball*, chaired by Arlene Rosen and Holly

Jaffe. Mayor Rudy Giuliani addressed a fundraiser in 2003 that Mary Ann and George Scher co-chaired and for which Karen and Warren Kessler co-chaired the fundraising efforts. Rebecca and Larry

Newman and Berdele and Dick Katz chaired the *Capitol Steps* fundraiser in 2004.

Celebrating the year during the building of our new home in University City, we decorated the Hyatt to look like a construction site at *Hard Hat Happening* and later raced our very own horses at *Off to the Races*, chaired by Rusti Bartell Weiss and Terri Sapp. *L'dor Va Dor; Preserving Our Past... Building Our Future*, was the 2001 fundraiser, chaired by Marcia Hazan and Lori Singer Bolotin, along with their mothers, Pauline Foster and Sandra Levinson.

We transformed our synagogue into a very classy Israeli shuk at *A Musical Night in Jerusalem* to honor Cantor Bernstein for a decade of service, with entertainment by Danny Maseng. The event, chaired by Emily Jennewein, raised more than \$275,000 for temple programs. And several times we gave our congregants the year off with clever no-event fundraisers called *The Miracle of Mitzvah* in which congregants donated Chanukah gelt to Beth Israel one night in lieu of giving gifts to others.



A construction-themed fundraiser celebrated Beth Israel's new campus.



Creative events, such as Off to the Races, put the fun in fundraising.

Our parties have taken place at the U.S. Grant, Symphony Towers, the downtown and La Jolla Hyatts, the Prado, the Sheraton Harbor Island and at our own campus in University City with live and silent auctions, DJs and lively dance bands. Most important, each time we gather we are reminded that it is our members who provide the *ruach*, spirit, as well as the financial commitment to keep our synagogue thriving.

A Caring Community

AS A LARGE CONGREGATION, Beth Israel recognizes the value and need for creating community and a culture of caring. Early in his rabbinate at Beth Israel, Rabbi Jonathan Stein approached the program director with a vision for a synagogue-wide caring community. Psychologist Russ Gold agreed to chair a committee that became the Kehillah (Caring Community) Committee. The goal was to bring together representatives from Jewish Family Service and its Jewish Healing Center, volunteers from the earlier Beth Israel Human Resources Program, and additional volunteers to address the personal and social needs of our members. At the beginning, emphasis was directed toward seniors, single parents and those whose families were touched by illness or the death of a family member.



Kehillah callers reach out by phone to senior members of the congregation.

The committee arranged single parenting programs and groups for the bereaved in conjunction with JFS. Further connections with JFS were made following the economic crisis in 2008. For several years volunteers with the Kehillah callers program have reached out to senior members of the congregation at holiday times to check in on them and send a message

of caring. Volunteers who make these calls relay important information to the rabbis and other staff members, helping the synagogue stay more in touch with its members. Volunteers send Kehillah Caring Community cards to families experiencing illness or loss of a family member.

In his 2011 High Holy Days sermons, Rabbi Michael Berk spoke eloquently about his vision of a caring community. Response from the congregation was swift and positive, with many members volunteering to contribute their time and talents. Rabbi Berk's wife, Rabbi Aliza Berk, who directs the Jewish Healing Center, was one of two Jewish Family Service professionals who offered *Bikkur Cholim*, visiting the sick, training to congregants who want to reach out to those who are sick and in mourning.

During the early 1980s, Beth Israel acquired an electronic organ, its first computer, and air conditioning in the social hall. Fifty thousand dollars was raised to renovate, refurbish and redecorate the temple's social hall. President Robert Berton, who served on the board of directors for 25 consecutive years, arranged for the installation of the first air conditioning system at the Third and Laurel sanctuary.

In 1983, the congregation established a life membership opportunity, wherein members contribute to an endowment fund. Generous congregants who have stepped forward to enlist in this category include Deanne and Leonard Bloom, Lillie and Robert Breitbard, Arthur Brody and Phyllis Cohn, David Engel, Alberta and Charles Feurzeig, Rachel Swimmer-Flores and Armando Flores, Zena and Dr. Donn Kobernick, M. Larry Lawrence, Lisa Massry and Alexis Massry, Evelyn and Ernest Rady, Cassidy and Jeremiah Robins, Mickey Stern, Iris and Matthew Strauss, Carol and Charles Swimmer, Sandra Teel and Earl Altshuler, and Geraldine and Lt. Col. (ret.) Hubert Wolff.

In 1984, President Richard Barrett recognized that Beth Israel again was running a non-sustainable deficit. He froze all salaries in addition to suspending dues to the UAHC. That same year, on June 15, Ken Fall was honored at a Friday evening service for his 20 years of service as organist and choir director for Temple Solel and Beth Israel. Mark Greenstein came on board in 1984 as the congregation's executive director. In 1985, a new assistant rabbi, Laurie Coskey, was engaged, and she remained at Beth Israel until 1993. In 1986, Rabbi Sternfield took a five-month sabbatical.

ADULT PROGRAMMING EVOLVES

In the 1980s, Rabbi Sternfield and Program Director Graff determined that Beth Israel needed new programming that would appeal to younger adults. Graff formed committees and rapidly developed cutting-edge programming.

Career Women's Network (CWN) attracted hundreds of guests with monthly speakers, weekends honoring Jewish women in the arts, Shabbatons led by scholars, and more. Topics ranged from the political to the personal, and women in the workplace saw the synagogue as a place for them, sometimes for the first time.

Both the Young Couples Connection (YCC) and the Young Jewish Network (YJN) found immediate success



Recent Russian immigrants were honored at Beth Israel's Simchat Torah services at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion. The tradition began in the 1970s with rallies to free Soviet Jews.

bringing together young couples and singles who lived and worked in primarily non-Jewish settings and who were eager to find Jewish social connections. While YCC was oriented to social connections, YJN developed a monthly Erev Shabbat worship service, which met in the youth lounge and attracted members and non-members alike. YJN also held networking events throughout San Diego with speakers on diverse topics.

With the success of CWN, it was felt that men would be eager to network as well, and the Young Men's Business and Professional Group gained traction, holding events aboard the Midway aircraft carrier, networking over tapas at a downtown eatery, and forming new links with their synagogue.

The Continuing Education Committee held post-Holy Days Shabbatons for several years that drew dozens of members to the weekend home of Marge and Joe Rubenson in Julian. The Murray D. Goodrich Scholar-in-Residence Weekend



Show B.I.S. students performed at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion on Simchat Torah.



Show B.I.S., led by singer-songwriter Cara Freedman, involved Beth Israel students in a nationally acclaimed Jewish children's theater company.



The award-winning Show B.I.S. program ran from 1987 to 1998, and troupes performed throughout California.

Show B.I.S.

SHOW B.I.S. (Beth Israel Students), a nationally acclaimed Jewish children's theater company, originated as part of the educational program of Beth Israel. Its purpose was to encourage children to learn about the Bible, ethics and history through drama, dance and song.

Director of Education Helene Schlafman worked closely with Cara Freedman to develop the Show B.I.S. program. Schlafman provided the Jewish educational content for each show and served as production manager. Freedman wrote the original rock music and contemporary lyrics for the shows and directed and choreographed the productions.

Every Show B.I.S. musical had an educational theme. Each production was specifically written to incorporate Jewish ideas, concepts and values. Some musicals, such as *We Are Your Song, America*, were based on historical events. Others, such as *Esther*, *Noah's Ark*, and *The Tower*, were based on Biblical sources. *The Role Model* used Jewish heroes to teach Jewish values, and *A Higher Ground* incorporated

lessons from *Pirkei Avot* to solve contemporary problems. Cast members initially may have been captivated by the rock music and contemporary lyrics, but as the season progressed, they came to understand the Jewish themes and messages of the songs and to adopt them in their lives.

Through their participation in Show B.I.S., Beth Israel students between the ages of 8 and 18 learned theater skills in acting and dance workshops conducted by local talent. They also learned about community, mutual respect and encouragement. Older cast members became role models for younger ones, as together they developed their talents and worked to produce the rock musicals.

Show B.I.S. performed to sell-out crowds in San Diego and at various locations throughout California, including Disneyland, the national Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE) conference in Los Angeles, and the UAHC Biennial in San Francisco. The award-winning program, which ran from 1987 to 1998, also appeared on local television and radio and was featured in national publications.



Organist and choir director Bob MacLeod played at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park for Beth Israel's community Simchat Torah celebrations.

evolved into a month-long program featuring retired visiting rabbi-scholars. Lee Goldberg and her daughter, Suzi Feldman, taught women how to celebrate Shabbat at home and produced the booklet *Remember the Sabbath Day*, which they filled with prayers, blessings, songs and recipes.

FROM SIMCHAT TORAH TO SHOW B.I.S.

For about two decades, until 1995, Beth Israel celebrated Simchat Torah at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park. The tradition started in the 1970s with rallies to free Soviet Jews. Hundreds from the San Diego Jewish community gathered to picnic at the park before the joyous outdoor celebration. Recent Russian Jewish immigrants were called up for an honorary *aliyah*, blessing over the Torah, entertainment was provided by troupes of Show B.I.S. students, and Israeli dancing followed after the service.

History of the Hunger Project

By Joan Kutner

IN THE EARLY 1980s, San Diego experienced a sudden and severe economic downturn that quickly turned into a recession. Suddenly, the number of homeless people grew from a few to many, and their numbers included women and children. It was not unusual to see whole families looking for shelter.

The social service agencies were overwhelmed with the demand for assistance. It became common to see families sleeping in the bushes in parks and along roadsides. Beth Israel, located at Third and Laurel, just a few short blocks from Balboa Park, was one of the many places where these individuals sought help.

At times the staff working at the temple felt like we were under siege. No matter how generous our hearts, we soon had exhausted all the resources we had available. Many were desperate for warm clothing, food, bathroom facilities, and a safe place to close their eyes and rest for even a few hours. This created security issues for the teachers and students of the day school, religious school, and for the many classes and meetings held at the temple every day of the week.

The Social Action Committee recognized that the temple needed to find a way to provide help, and decided to volunteer at existing programs to assess how they operated. The best of these programs was run by Father Joe Carroll, on behalf of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Temple leader Murray Galinson was actively working with Father Joe on the homeless problem, and he arranged a meeting between Father Joe, Rabbi Michael Sternfield, Rabbi Laurie Coskey, and members of our board of directors. At this meeting it was decided that Beth Israel would assist Father Joe by providing a morning meal on Sundays.

As there were no suitable facilities at the temple on Third and Laurel to handle the services needed, the first location was an old storefront on 16th Street in the East Village. Though the building had been neglected and empty for many months, the Catholic Workers Association had done repairs necessary to make it safe and to meet the minimal Health Department standards for serving a meal.

We decided that all food would be prepared in the temple kitchen, where all Health Department rules



Joan Kutner, whose name became synonymous with Beth Israel's Hunger Project, embraces Larry Krause. The Men's Club volunteers on a regular basis at the Hunger Project.

were observed, equipment was in place, and food preparation and proper storage would ensure quality and safety. Our meal would be a hot brunch, as nutritious as possible, and it would be served attractively. We agreed that this meal would be offered in a spirit of friendship and goodwill, with no strings attached and no religious services required of clients, as often occurred at other programs.

At this time, it was commonplace to see people in the streets shaking cans and asking for donations to help feed the hungry. There was no way to tell who these people were or how the money was spent. Our rabbis and board declared there must be no such solicitation. There would be one request made to temple members each year – during the morning service on Yom Kippur.

Since the meeting with Father Joe had occurred in January and we were anxious to start the program well before the High Holy Days, some initial private fundraising among temple members was accomplished quietly and with great results. Our members were very willing to help financially and to serve. Jerry Rosen's company, Joseph Webb, provided much of the food for many years.

We served our first meal on the first Sunday in March 1986. Our clients numbered 249 men and one woman. The servers were our rabbis, members of the board of directors and their families. Several volunteers later remarked that they had been pleasantly surprised at how friendly and appreciative our clients were. Word quickly spread on the street about the quality and quantity of the food we served and among the temple membership about the positive experience. The next Sunday morning we served 400 people. Our rabbis decided that it had

been such a positive experience, that participation in the Hunger Project would become a requirement for b'nai mitzvah students and their parents.

It quickly became apparent that our clients had many needs beyond meals, and we were soon providing warm clothing, blankets and hygiene articles. After observing a young woman trying to feed a six-week-old infant Jello because she had run out of formula, we began providing baby formula. One Sunday a family showed up with a baby about five months old wrapped in a rag found on the street. The baby had no diaper, wet clothes and a rash that made me want to cry. From that week on we had diapers and first-aid articles to provide as well.

The Hunger Project continued to grow as the demand for our services grew. The greatest number of clients served on a Sunday morning was 1,394. In fact, it became routine to serve more than 1,000 hungry individuals on a typical Sunday morning. Fortunately, with the completion of the Joan Kroc Center on August 31, 1987, we gained a much larger facility in which to serve our meals. It was beautiful, with more space to offer more services.

Word about the Hunger Project spread not only through the Jewish community, but also through the community at large. Soon people of diverse backgrounds and religions were volunteering with us on Sunday mornings. Donations came in from the community, as well.

The Hunger Project has completed more than 25 years of service and continues to this day. I am very proud to be associated with this program that attempts to heal the world, one hungry person at a time.



Young people help assemble meals at Beth Israel's Hunger Project.

Robert J. Kolton became Beth Israel Day School principal in 1985, and the day school started a pre-kindergarten program. In 1986, the Bill Rubin Hebrew Center was opened. Part of the Bill Rubin Learning Center, the Hebrew Center provided enrichment programs for the religious school's Hebrew classes, including individualized activities that allowed students to progress at their own pace.

Ruthe Rogow was a fixture at the temple for 20 years, during which time she served as assistant to Rabbi Sternfeld, as a caterer, and then as facilities coordinator for 13 years, helping congregants and committees make their events special.

In March 1986, Beth Israel launched the Hunger Project, directed by Joan Kutner in association with Father Joe Carroll of St. Vincent de Paul. Its goal was to provide a hot meal for the hungry and homeless every Sunday morning. That first Sunday, Beth Israel volunteers served a hearty meal to 250 clients.

Si Coleman was president of the congregation from 1986 to 1988, during which time he cultivated the first major gift to Beth Israel's endowment. Up to that time, the temple's largest gift had been \$15,000, so the donation of \$250,000 from David Engel set a new standard and boosted the endowment fund substantially.

Jill Green was hired as Beth Israel Day School principal in 1987. Helene Schlafman and Cara Freedman developed and produced the nationally acclaimed children's musical program, Show B.I.S. (Beth Israel Students), which involved more than 100 students each year in original productions written by Freedman and incorporating Jewish ideas, concepts and values. This popular program began in 1987 and ran until 1998.

In June 1987, Schlafman was honored for 20 years of service at a gala *Hats Off to Helene* event.

The temple started a weekly bingo game in January 1988. Bingo drew about 150 people who lived in the area. Temple volunteers who ran the game and sold refreshments included Tom and Lee Henley, Anne Nemens, Mildred Newman, Art Wenner, Bertha Zmora, Susie and Alan Greenberg, Sue McCartney and Jerry Shumate.

Anticipating a move into North County, the congregation in 1988 opened a branch of its religious school that met once a week in Solana Beach. Monthly Shabbat services were also held there. Rosh Hashanah afternoon children's services were held at an outdoor amphitheater in North County as well.

During Pat Perlman's presidency, plans were discussed for establishing a permanent branch of Beth Israel in North County. The congregation passed a resolution to purchase an 8.6 acre parcel of land in Rancho Santa Fe, to build a satellite facility that would make Beth Israel one of a handful of two-site congregations. The decision was not without controversy, as some members of the congregation felt that the decision was made in haste and might be the first step in a move away from serving the entire Reform community of San Diego.

The Carl Esenoff Award for Extraordinary Community Service was instituted in 1987 as a tribute to those who had given to the synagogue as well as the Jewish and secular San Diego communities. Esenoff himself was the first recipient. Si Coleman recalls that he and Morris Wax made three trips to the Esenoff home before they were able to persuade this humble leader to accept the inaugural award. The congregation later presented the Esenoff Award to Victor Schulman in 1988, Herbert J. Solomon in 1989, Stanley and Pauline Foster in 1991, Shearn Platt in 1993, Pearl Slayen in 1995, Alberta and Charles Feurzeig in 1998, Robert



Carl Esenoff was the first recipient of the Carl Esenoff Award for Extraordinary Community Service, but it took three trips to the Esenoff home to persuade this humble man to accept the inaugural award.

Breitbard in 2000, and Mary Ann Scher in 2004. Each recipient was feted at a special event with a video of his or her life and accomplishments, and toasted by speeches highlighting their contributions to the community.

Cantor Merel was elected to the national board of the American Conference of Cantors as West Coast representative of the Reform cantorate. In 1988, Stuart Simmons became executive director. Cantor Merel took a three-month sabbatical.

In 1989, Beth Israel's High Holy Days services were televised so that those unable to attend would be able to celebrate the holidays with their temple family. Two years later, a Passover seder was televised. These televised services were underwritten by Cecile Salomon in memory of her husband, Colonel Irving Salomon.

The original Temple Beth Israel was rededicated in Heritage Park on November 27, 1989, on the occasion of its 100th anniversary. Restoration was completed shortly after this. The first home of Beth Israel remains an important symbol of California Jewish history, as it is one of the two oldest existing synagogue structures in the state.



Blended Voices brought together church and synagogue choirs for interfaith concerts more than 300 voices strong.

In 1990 and 1991, the congregation organized two interfaith concerts called *Blended Voices*. These concerts were held at Copley Symphony Hall and were underwritten by Beth Israel member Morris Wax in memory of his wife, Jeannette. The concerts played to full crowds, and income from tickets was donated to the St. Vincent de Paul Joan Kroc Center to help feed the homeless. Cantor Merel selected the guest church choirs and served as producer, director and soloist. The first concert, on May 6, 1990, featured Bayview Baptist Church Choir, First Unitarian Church Choir, Christ the

King Catholic Church Choir, First Presbyterian Church Choir and Beth Israel's Choir accompanied by the Jewish Community Center Orchestra. The concert closed with 300 voices singing *Hiney Ma Tov* and *God Bless America* accompanied by the full orchestra. *Blended Voices II*, held on November 17, 1991, featured choirs from Calvary Baptist Church, First Presbyterian Church, First United Methodist Church and Beth Israel, with the Jewish Community Center Orchestra. Again, 300 voices closed the program singing *Hiney Ma Tov* and *May the Time Not Be Distant*, accompanied by the full orchestra.

Interfaith understanding has long been a priority of the congregation. For 31 years, up through the present day, Beth Israel has partnered with First United Methodist Church for an annual Thanksgiving eve interfaith service that alternates venues between the two congregations. Beth Israel's rabbi and First United Methodist Church's minister alternate giving ecumenical sermons, the rabbi in the church and the minister in the temple.

The William and Edith Perlman Fund provided \$500,000 in 1992 to be used for Jewish education, and the school building was dedicated in memory of the Perlman. New initiatives at that time included Yasher Koach for active seniors, the Shabbat Minyan, Shabbat services for singles, and Tot Shabbat.

Helene Schlafman organized a confirmation reunion in 1990, which brought together hundreds of former confirmands to celebrate their experiences at Beth Israel. Co-chairs Joan Jacobson Jacobs, Sharon Demsey and Anne Goldberg Nagorner orchestrated the celebration of all those confirmed from 1916–1990.



Senior staff members, among others, honored Cantor Merel at Standing Ovation: A Salute to Cantor Sheldon Merel upon his retirement in 1991.

A Personal View of the Minyan, from its Beginnings Until Today

By Howard Hian

IN MAY 1991, Rabbi Sternfield approached the Continuing Education Committee, chaired by Jerry Goldberg, with the thought of creating a more traditional service focusing on Shabbat. At that time, the Saturday service held in the sanctuary focused on the bar or bat mitzvah family, and on weeks without b'nai mitzvah, there was no Saturday service. The rabbi and Continuing Education Committee decided to create a Saturday morning Minyan service, and the committee was charged with administering the Minyan by selecting *d'var Torah* presenters and providing a weekly “host” to greet participants and make them feel welcome.

Shortly after the High Holidays, in a letter to members, Rabbi Sternfield announced the creation of the Shabbat morning Minyan, a service that would “provide a much needed setting for the weekly reading of the Torah in an intimate, informal atmosphere, with emphasis on group participation in Torah study.” Fittingly, on October 5, the Torah portion for the first Minyan service was *Bereshit*, “In the beginning.”

That first year, Rabbis Sternfield and Coskey alternated Saturdays, and Cantor Merel or Cantorial Soloist Leon Natker regularly led us in song. From the beginning, congregants delivered the Torah commentary. Early on, there was a committed group of regulars, and the service began to catch on. The story, perhaps apocryphal, is told that at least once, however, we had to count the Torah as our 10th participant to reach a *minyan*, quorum, of worshipers. Although the youth lounge was a fairly stark place, it became special to the Minyan.

The following summer marked a turning point. When Rabbi Sternfield decided that the Minyan should go on hiatus until the fall, Minyan attendees offered to take over supervision. Rabbi Sternfield agreed, and for the first time, members assumed leadership of the service.

The second year of the Minyan began with two wonderful additions: a new ark donated by the adult b'nai mitzvah class of 1991–1992 and a Torah reading table donated by immediate Past President Betty Byrnes, in honor of her presidency. Also in year two, Rabbis Sternfield and Coskey departed from Beth Israel. With approximately 25 regular attendees, Minyan coordinators Al Kohn, Sydney Wexler and Howard Hian were kept busy filling in the calendar with volunteer service leaders,



Past President Betty Byrnes recites the blessings as congregants gather for reading of the Torah at one of the first Shabbat morning Minyan services. Byrnes donated the Torah reading table in honor of her presidency.



Sydney Wexler could always be counted on to step forward as a Torah reader at the Shabbat morning Minyan.

Torah readers and d'var Torah presenters. The Minyan was confirmed as a lay-led group.

We were a haven for those wanting to say Kaddish. Students in Introduction to Judaism and b'nai mitzvah classes were encouraged to attend Minyan services; baby namings, conversion ceremonies and *aufrufs* were also part of the Minyan's growth. Picnics and the infamous Chanukah white elephant gift exchange became well-loved annual institutions. Simply put, the Minyan served as a warm, intimate setting for prayer and community.

In 1997, in *Reform Judaism* magazine, Rabbi Janet Marder featured Beth Israel's Minyan in an article entitled *Worship that Works*. That year, Howard Hian was invited to be a presenter at the workshop *Waking Up Congregational Worship: Models for Changing the Way We Pray* at the Pacific Southwest Council Biennial of the UAHC.

In 2001, when Beth Israel moved to its magnificent new campus, the Minyan moved to the beautiful Foster Family Chapel. The Chapel's layout, design and size were ideal and added greatly to the Shabbat experience.

There were challenges over the 20-year history.

Several rabbis sought to merge the Minyan into the bar/bat mitzvah service. To their credit, they wanted to bring the Minyan's *ruach*, spirit, and *kavanah*, mindset or intent, into the sanctuary. Participants felt strongly, however, that integrating and moving the Minyan into the sanctuary would destroy that special feeling, and physically and spiritually it just wouldn't work.

The Minyan celebrated its 13th anniversary in 2004 with Joe Nalven, Howard Hian, Terri Fine, Gordon Glenn, Cynthia Wexler and Betty Byrnes leading the planning. For this bar/bat mitzvah year, photographer Joe Nalven designed a beautiful tri-fold commemorative piece, *Minyan Reflection*, that conveyed the spirit of the Minyan. It included thoughts about "What the Minyan Means to Me" from dozens of attendees. The Minyan's 20th anniversary was celebrated with an art show, luncheon, acknowledgements and appreciation.

Today, in the Minyan's 21st year, 45–65 people worship in the service each Shabbat morning. Coordinators have rotated and retired over the years, but all of the weekly volunteers, coordinators and participants have kept the Minyan welcoming and vibrant.



Shirley Chisholm served as secretary to the rabbi for 26 years, retiring in 1994.

In 1992, the temple's religious school was selected as one of the outstanding schools in the country by the Best Practices Project of Hebrew Union College, the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education.

In the early 1990s, Beth Israel saw several important changes in staff. Cantor Merel announced his retirement plans in 1991 and became cantor emeritus. The congregation honored him with a tribute, *Standing Ovation*, on November 24, 1991, chaired by Susan Heiser and Gail Resnick. Cantor Deborah Bard was hired in July 1992. That same year, Ken Fall, organist and choir director for 30 years, passed away, and Robert (Bob) MacLeod became the new organist and choir director. MacLeod had begun freelance singing for Beth Israel in the High Holy Days choir at the age of 17, and since 1980 had been a member of the High Holy Days choir and a substitute for the organist. Joan Tedlow became temple librarian. Beverly Miller joined the staff in 1994. She became administrative assistant to the program director and then assistant to the executive director. After almost 11 years of service to Beth Israel, she retired at the end of 2005.

Two noteworthy real estate transactions occurred in 1992. The congregation's cemetery and mausoleum

association purchased a new burial lawn at El Camino Memorial Park in Sorrento Valley. The congregation sold its property in Rancho Santa Fe after deciding that Beth Israel should remain a single-site synagogue, although at a location more central than Third and Laurel.

In 1993, disclosure was made that Beth Israel's two rabbis, Senior Rabbi Sternfield and Associate Rabbi Coskey, had been involved in an extramarital relationship several years earlier. Both resigned on recommendation of the board of directors. Rabbi Robert Shapiro came to the congregation as interim rabbi. His gentle presence helped the congregation heal and move forward through the search process for a new senior rabbi. President Mary Ann Scher and Past President Si Coleman led the search committee.

The strength and resilience of the congregation was proven under these unfortunate circumstances as members showed their support for Beth Israel and their willingness to participate in the difficult healing process. While the congregation was shaken by these events, under Mary Ann Scher's strong leadership, the work and mission of the congregation continued. Scher was the only modern president to serve a three-year term. During her tenure, the congregation formalized plans for a new

campus, selected the campaign cabinet, purchased the land, and successfully solicited the first million-dollar gift for the building campaign. Past President Robert Berton, an attorney specializing in real estate, volunteered his legal services to negotiate and consummate the acquisition of the property where Beth Israel's magnificent campus now stands.

The congregation elected Rabbi Jonathan Stein as senior rabbi in 1994. That same year Shirley Chisholm, secretary to the rabbi for 26 years, retired, and Sheri North, who had been on the staff since 1988, replaced her. Cantor Deborah Bard resigned the next year to move to Chicago; she later married Rabbi Sternfield.

Dona Gratt assumed the presidency in 1995 and

presided over the congregation with grace and calm as it moved forward under the new stewardship of Rabbi Stein. During Gratt's tenure, Rabbi Dana Magat was engaged as assistant rabbi, the capital campaign for the new synagogue campus in University City was launched, and a number of creative new programs – such as the Senior Youth Group and the Young Jewish Network – were introduced to reach out to more of the smaller communities within the larger temple community. The congregation's 135th anniversary was celebrated with a joyous gala and further commemorated with a beautiful book filled with good wishes, a directory of members, and *A Brief History of Congregation Beth Israel 1861–1996*, a precursor to this 150th anniversary history project.



