

THE JEWISH ADVOCATE®

Established 1902

Celebrating 100 Years of Service to the Jewish Community

45

www.thejewishadvocate.com

3 - 9 KISLEV 5763 — NOVEMBER 8 - 14, 2002

Boston, Mass.

One Dollar



David Gerzof

The sanctuary at Vilna Shul in Boston has become a popular spot for young adults one Friday a month.

Part religious, part social

Havurah on the Hill popular gathering place for young adults

By Logan Ritchie
Advocate Staff

BOSTON — Twentysomethings in Boston, Cambridge, Brookline and beyond have been flocking to a new gathering place on Friday nights — and it's not a bar.

Tucked into the northern slope of Beacon Hill sits a historic temple where Jews meet once a month to experience the religious camaraderie of people like them: young, hip and spiritual. Welcome to Havurah on the Hill.

Continued on Page 11

“No other group gets this many young people on a Friday night, married or single.”
— Susan Adelberg
of Brookline

Jews of all denominations part of Havurah on the Hill

Continued from Page 1

"I must have seen at least eight people here tonight who I went to high school with and never knew they still lived in Boston," said Brian Gordon of Boston. "Havurah on the Hill is a great place to run into old faces and new. This year at High Holidays, I was the youngest person at my temple. Now I can come to Havurah on the Hill and feel comfortable among my peers."

Six months ago, Andrew Perlman and Aaron Mandell of Newton were on their way to work when they passed a run-down temple at 18 Phillips St. They had been talking about putting together a minyan of close friends, and this seemed the perfect place to do it.

Perlman and Mendell told their friends about the building. After researching the property, they discovered that the building belonged to the Boston Center for Jewish Heritage (BCJH). At the time, BCJH was searching for a group of people to start up a young leaders' division.

The first meeting took place in April when about 35 friends met in the shul, conducted a service, and returned to Perlman's home to enjoy a Shabbat dinner.

For their sixth service, which was held in late October, Havurah on the Hill council members attracted 200 young adults to their monthly Friday night gathering, which featured a relaxing service, a talk by Patriots Vice Chairman Jonathan Kraft about being Jewish in the business world and refreshments.

Entering the temple, council members Rachel Glazer and David Gerzof enthusiastically greeted new and old faces. Upstairs in the sanctuary, Aaron Greenberg led the services, offering a retreat from the material world and giving congregants a chance to experience communal spirituality. While Greenberg has not been trained as a rabbi, his leadership skills and sense of direction carried the service.

The proof is not only in the growing number of attendees, but in the voices that rise in song together. Havurah on the Hill wants to attract all kinds of Jews — Reform, Orthodox and everything in between.

Susan Adelberg of Brookline has been attending Reform services for eight years, but says she is "pleased to be a part of Havurah on the Hill." She attends services at her Brookline congregation every Friday — except when Havurah on the Hill meets.

"No other group gets this many young people on a Friday night, mar-

ried or single," she said, pointing to the energy and strength of the group.

Havurah on the Hill has two goals: to create a community of young adults who are interested in Judaism and to provide a facility where people can connect to their Jewish history. Beyond reestablishing a sense of Judaism in the young Boston community, Havurah on the Hill wants to attract Jews to the historical value of the building.

threatened to destroy the building and turn the valuable Beacon Hill land into a parking lot before the Jewish community banded together to save Vilna Shul.

BCJH, a non-profit organization, decided to refurbish the building and create the first Jewish museum in the Boston area.

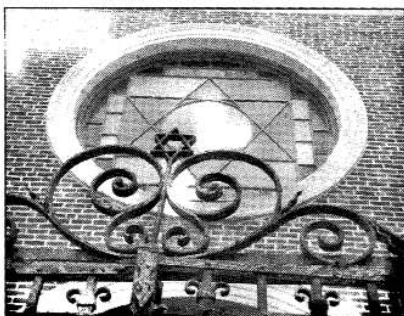
From the streets of Beacon Hill, the building is polite but dignified, and a colorful stained-glass win-

dow guards the front entrance like a mother watching her toddler. The facility is OK for Sunday tours and once-a-month services, but, Gerzof noted, "time took its toll on this building."

Layers of paint in the upstairs sanctuary have been peeled back to recall the historically accurate design. The original Vilna Shul congregation added many fine touches that BCJH wants to cultivate.

Havurah on the Hill received a \$10,000 contribution from Kraft, whose grandfathers were both involved in Vilna Shul.

"I think it's great," Gerzof said of Kraft's involvement. "He's the perfect example. He said himself that he had a connection to Vilna Shul that he never knew about until we called him."



David Gerzof
An outside view of Vilna Shul in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood.

Vilna Shul, located near the corner of Anderson and Phillip streets, was built in 1919 by a group of Orthodox Jews who immigrated to Boston from Lithuania. In 1985, the last member of the original congregation left. For years the building was unused. Developers