

Jewish Living

What's Nu? By Carol Marlin



It was almost 6:30 last Friday night (Jan. 31) outside the old Vilna Shul on Beacon Hill, now headquarters for the Boston Center for Jewish Heritage (BCJH). The excitement mounted as a large crowd, mostly of people in their 20s, gathered for a Kabalat Shabbat learning service and kosher dinner as part of the BCJH's Havurah on the Hill.



We met **Andrew Perlman** and **Aaron Mandell**, both 27-year-old graduates of Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston. Partners in their own successful hi-tech company, they founded Havurah on the Hill.



As the service began, voices filled the space of the wonderful old shul. **Fred Mandell**, noted Newton pediatrician and Aaron's proud father, offered: "They have returned the neshama, the soul, to this place."

Aaron Greenberg, a self-proclaimed Modern Orthodox Jew, led the easy-to-follow service. **Reb Moshe Waldoks** compiled the liturgy. **Susan Schnur** is next month's leader.



The short program featured **Ori Winitzer**, creator of Soccer for Peace. Born in Israel, Winitzer spent many years at Schechter with friends such as **Dave Gerzof** of Havurah on the Hill. Winitzer is raising money to fund a program that will permit Palestinian and Israeli children to play soccer together.

The saviors of the old Vilna Shul, largely secular Jews, many of whom reside on or near Beacon Hill, ultimately embraced Mandell and Perlman and placed them on the BCJH board.

Among the most passionate about the old shul is BCJH vice president **Deborah Cohen**, whose keen intellect and fierce determination helped save the Vilna from the wrecking ball more than 10 years ago. She also led the push to establish a first-class center for Jewish culture.

Cohen, the other trustees of the BCJH, and executive director **Janet Giesser** are keen on maintaining the shul as a museum.

Thus far services have been limited to once a month.

But the question looms: How can the doors of the Vilna be locked on any Shabbos, night or morning, when so many of our youngest and brightest are attracted to this old shul to pray? For whom is the Vilna being preserved?

The Soccer for Peace model suggests that somewhere there is a way for Havurah on the Hill to reach its fullest potential as the BCJH emerges as a unique world-class Jewish museum.