

In the 1990's, one of our congregants named us "the little shul with the big heart." This descriptor has since appeared on all of our correspondence and literature. Everyone is made welcome at Melrose B'nai Israel Emanu-El. Six years ago, the synagogue moved to its present location so that we would be on one level to better serve the needs of those with mobility issues.

All access in our new space is on a flat surface. There are no stairs to the entrance.




In 2016, "The Little Shul With the Big Heart" was honored to be one of 18 congregations nationwide selected to participate in the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's Ruderman Inclusion Action Community. With their guidance and that of our Rabbi, Charles Sherman, a committee has been actively engaged in initiatives to realize our mission statement, prominently displayed in our lobby:

MELROSE B'NAI ISRAEL EMANU-EL
Now Celebrating Our 60th Year

Inclusion Committee

Mission Statement

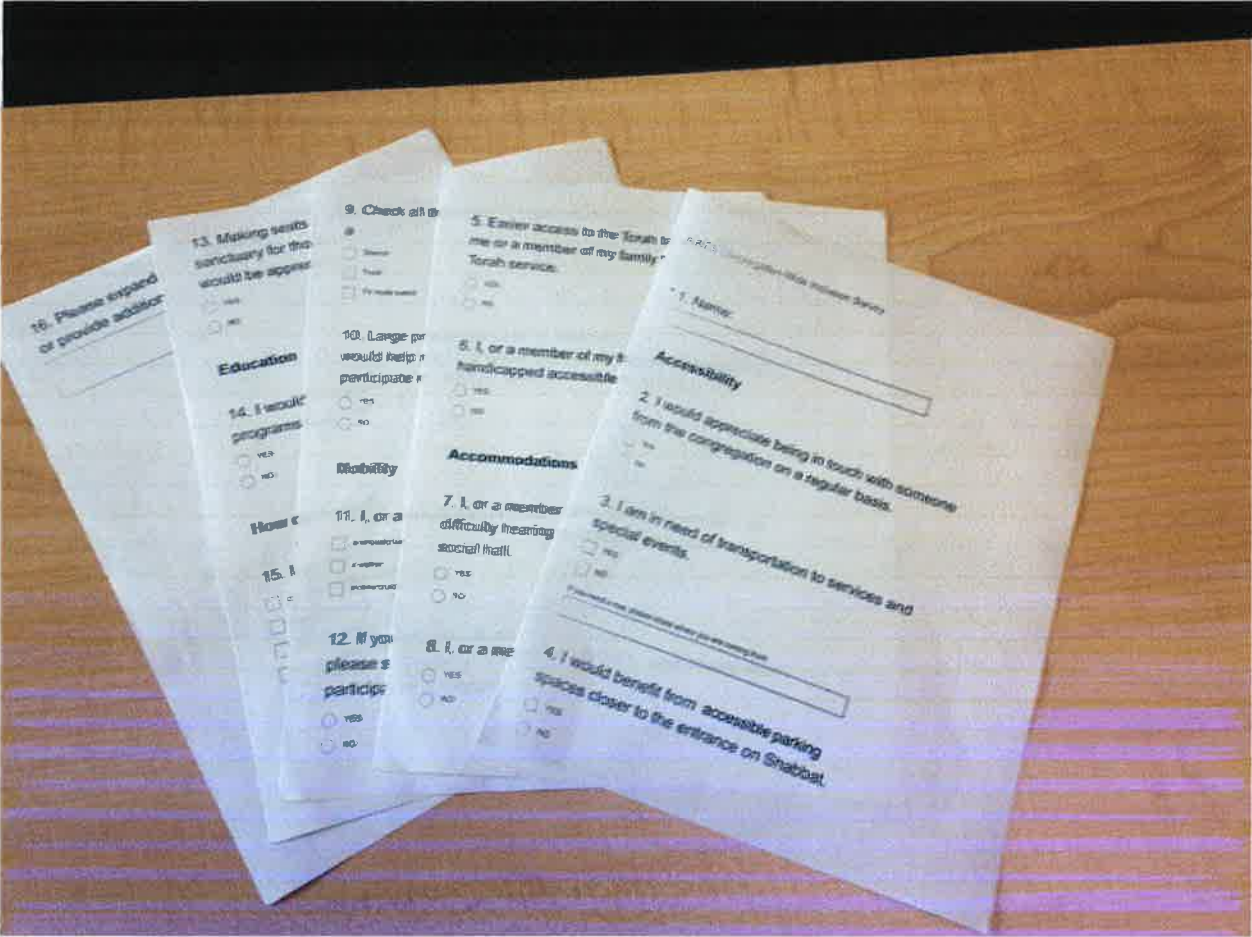
To enhance a warm welcoming environment affirming and embracing the dignity of all - congregants and guests - allowing for full participation and inclusion in the religious, educational and social life of Melrose B'nai Israel Emanu-El.



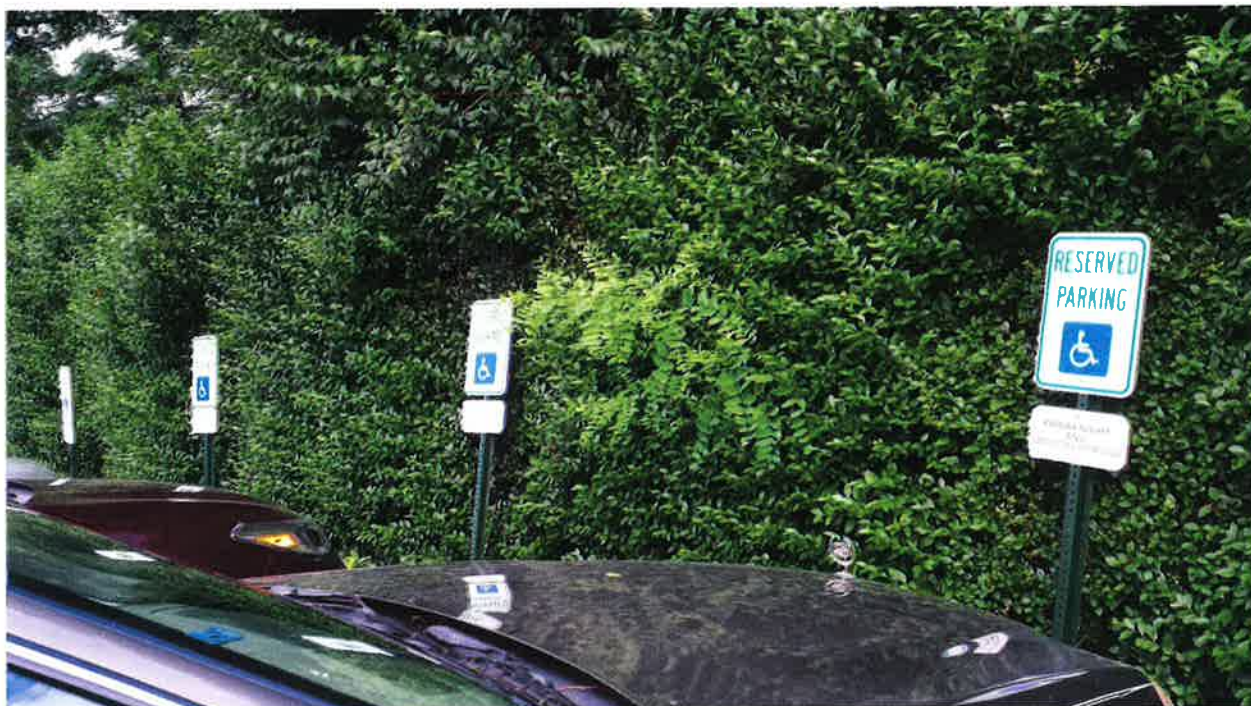
in Partnership with the
Ruderman Family Foundation

From its inception, based on a five page congregational survey, the Inclusion Committee has systematically initiated changes that required little or no funding. The eight pages of photographs that immediately follow depict these initiatives.

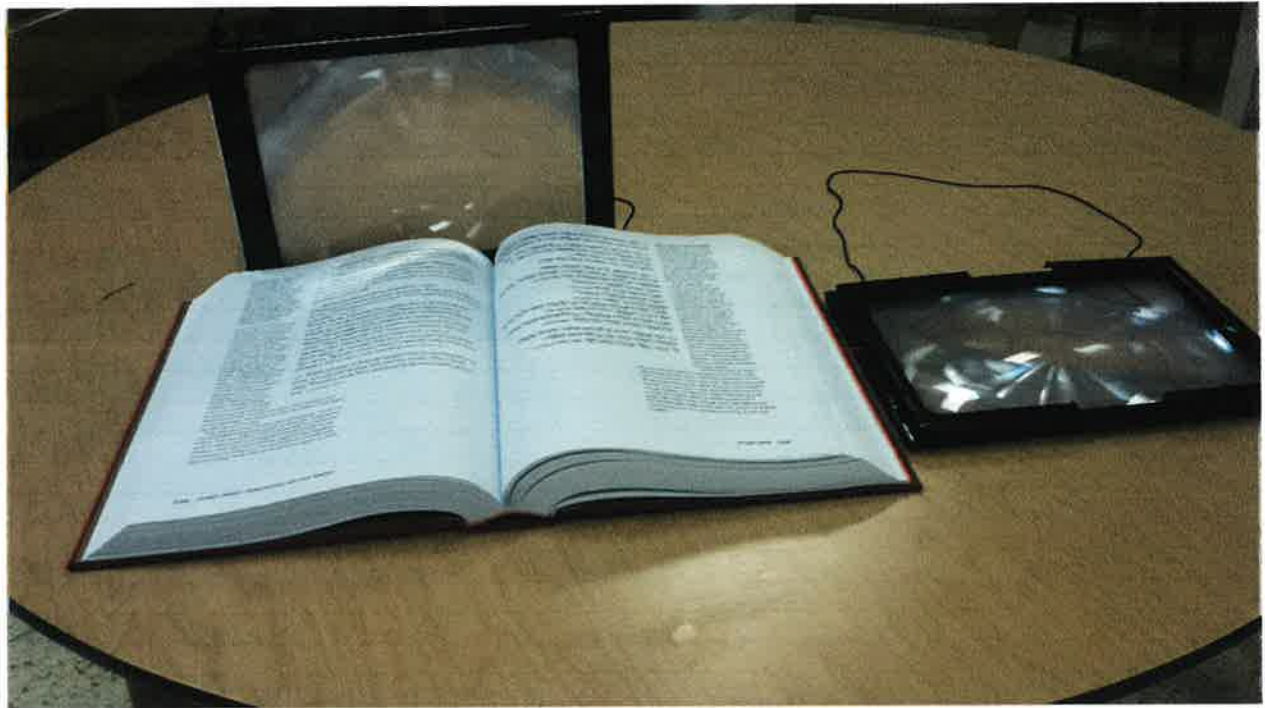
Congregational Survey:



At the request of our congregants, we now have a full row of accessible parking spaces opposite our front entrance.



We purchased visual enhancement devices and large print prayer books for those with visual impairment. The devices are offered at all events where written materials are used, allowing all to comfortably participate.



Because they are detachable, seating within the sanctuary is available for congregants and guests who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices allowing them to participate fully in all activities from wherever they are most comfortable.

The pictures on the following two pages make clear this possibility.







For those with dietary restrictions, gluten free and sugar free choices are now offered at every Kiddush, luncheon, dinner or event where food is served.

The pictures below and on the next page are samples of the selections provided so that all can enjoy being part of every celebration.





Although every day at MBIEE is an opportunity to educate the congregation and community on issues of inclusion, February in particular on the Jewish calendar has been designated as Jewish Disabilities Awareness and Inclusion Month. This February a thought provoking program was presented at our synagogue in partnership with Jewish Learning Venture. Two authors, Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer (*The Little Gate Crasher*) and Liane Kupferberg Carter (*Ketchup Is My Favorite Vegetable*) shared with us their experiences as the niece and parent of a family member with disabilities.



A major concern for our population as identified by the survey is hearing impairment issues. For this reason, we are in the process of improving our sound system so that all members and guests can fully participate in services and activities. Recently a friend of the congregation donated funds towards this effort. It enabled us to upgrade our existing control unit and purchase new microphone systems. Here we see John Dezell, the sound engineer we hired, rewiring our existing unit and explaining to a congregant how the reprogrammed system operates.





Our Rabbi tests the new microphone systems with John days before using them for the first time at a Shabbat service.

After the service, an elderly congregant, 94 years old, tearfully told him, "I heard you for the first time."

We can only imagine the impact when our system is fully enhanced and assistive listening devices are made available, projects we are currently pursuing.


We contacted the Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living and arranged for a two person team to come to our building to evaluate our accessibility and make suggestions about how we can be more inclusive for those with disabilities.

Some future projects have been suggested based on their review that are currently being investigated. One example: A portable wheelchair accessible Torah Table will enable those who are not able to get to the Bimah to fully participate in our Torah Service every Shabbat. A committee is looking into this. We expect to have it in place by the end of the year. This Torah Table will be used by everyone in the congregation.

Another future project based on their evaluation: An accessible bathroom can be configured utilizing our existing space. We are excited about this and plan to begin the process by getting estimates after the high holidays.

Site Survey Report & Recommendations

Accessibility Report



Project: Melrose Sh'vai Israel Emanu-El

Building: Rented Keneseth Israel Building

Location: 3339 Old York Road, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania 19027

Date: March 21, 2017

Surveyors: Brian Rogers, CAP Program Coordinator
Bob Amelio, Accessibility Support Coordinator

Contact Information: 610-770-9781 ext. 123
brianrogers@lvclil.org

This confidential report was produced by the Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCLIL) and is based on the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design. This project supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council.

In July of 2016, the Rabbi and Co-Chair of the Inclusion Committee were interviewed by a reporter for the Jewish Exponent. Our synagogue's efforts toward inclusion were highlighted helping us to achieve a broader community profile for our endeavors. Guests recognize that we welcome all to worship with us and attend our programs and activities.

If you would like more information or want to join our committee as we move forward, please contact our co-chairs, Fran Sion and Honey Zazoff at Inclusion@MBIEE.org or call the office (215-635-1505).

We welcome your input!



HEADLINES

Little Shul With the Big, Inclusive Heart

By [Name] / Photo by [Name]

IN FEBRUARY the synagogue was awarded a grant from the Adelman Family Foundation that will enable it to be more inclusive to all members of the congregation. The grant was made possible through the generosity of the Adelman Family Foundation, which focuses on Jewish values and philanthropy as well as "advocating for and advancing the inclusion of people with disabilities throughout our society."

Since the synagogue was awarded the grant a committee was formed that meets monthly to discuss ideas for where the grant could help.

The idea, he said, is that the individual synagogues who receive the grant will create an action plan around inclusion with those with disabilities and begin to implement it," explained Fran Sion, who serves as co-chair of the Inclusion Committee along with Honey Zazoff.

While it's not a monetary grant, "what we get from the Foundation (Adelman Family Foundation) is guidance and coaching to help us through the process," Sion continued. "Leadership training and development, networking and we will be assisted by the inclusion specialist of the Adelman Family Foundation - will be going through our own plan with us, making suggestions and helping us to alter it."

As they brainstorm ways to implement the grant and make the synagogue more inclusive



of their commitments. Sion said they have begun by assessing the existing strengths and weaknesses of the synagogue. "We saw what our strengths are and also saw what our needs are," she said. "and based on the needs, we are working on an action plan to meet those needs."

The action plan will be presented to the board in the next few months and they have already begun to work on it.

able those who have not been able to come regularly to begin to come," Sion said. "We had that program when it was in the infancy of the synagogue, and we want to make it more inclusive."

Rabbi Sherman, the grant has personal stories. "When the synagogue was founded, it was a very different place than it is today and certainly much more inclusive for members," Sherman said. "I remember being a child at a synagogue that was really all-inclusive because the very atmosphere was so welcoming."

For him, this is a very important message, which is to say that the goal of building a more inclusive community is to make sure that everyone is able to participate in the synagogue. "It's not just about ramps, it's not just about access to bathrooms and hearing enhancements - and all those are important - but I've already seen how the conversation has become much more profound in terms of how do we become a more inclusive community and how do you define someone who has a challenge. Already what I've noticed is that the definition is much broader."

A lot of that conversation has to do with the synagogue being willing to actually have it, which they are.

The synagogue is celebrating its 60th anniversary. Sherman said, and having a congregation that is still willing to change and adapt is telling of

the kind of synagogue it is. "The Jewish world needs these are moments of courage, courage, courage, courage, courage," Sherman said. "It's not just about ramps, it's not just about access to bathrooms and hearing enhancements - and all those are important - but I've already seen how the conversation has become much more profound in terms of how do we become a more inclusive community and how do you define someone who has a challenge. Already what I've noticed is that the definition is much broader."

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We hope it will enable those who have not been able to fully participate.

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