



# BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

## Save the Date

### 25th Anniversary Reception

Honoring Rabbi Blecher

Sunday, May 18, 2008

7:30 p.m.

River Road Unitarian Universalist  
Congregation

## Beth Chai Auction A Rousing Success

Burning Tree Elementary School was filled with people eager to bid on all the wonderful items donated for the Beth Chai Auction. And, did they ever bid!! In the live auction there was the usual spirited contest for the Redskins tickets donated by Mel Elfin, David's father. But that paled in comparison to what took place in the melee for Tom Israel's vacation house on Lake Champlain in Vermont and Sue Silverstein's offer of a professional paint job for a home. And for the third year in a row, the live auction featured a gift from The Sands of Time in Georgetown, this year, a Bronze Dagger from the Third Millennium BCE. Art Blecher topped things off by auctioning off the hats he had doffed while running the show. All in all, the live auction contributed nearly 20% of our proceeds. *(Continued on page 4)*

## I.C.E. Grant Provides Opportunity to Expand Music at Beth Chai

You've probably noticed that music at Beth Chai has gotten even better, and more diverse at Beth Chai this year. The reason? We have been the beneficiaries of a wonderful grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington's Initiative in Congregational Education (I.C.E.).



Thanks to I.C.E. – and the hard work of our Sunday School principal, Rain Zohav – we have been able to take advantage of several new opportunities to enrich the music program, and learning, at Beth Chai.

Specifically, as many of you know, we have enjoyed the teaching and expanded musical experiences provided by our new Shabbat music leader/educator, Andrea Foster. Andrea has brought new songs, new music, and new lessons to our monthly Friday Shabbat services,

and made those evenings full of song and enjoyment. The Tot Shabbat program has really taken off, with our new musical component. This would not have been possible without the funding we secured from I.C.E.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## You Are Invited to the Beth Chai Congregation Passover Seder

Please join the Beth Chai congregation for a community Passover seder on Sunday, April 20, at 5:30 p.m. at the River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 6301 River Road, Bethesda, MD. The service uses our own humanist and inclusive Haggadah, revised and updated in 2006, illustrated with original artwork by Beth Chai member Rob Weinstein.

The meal is potluck. Please bring a dish that serves 8 people, with its contents labeled for the benefit of those with various dietary restrictions, e.g., Kosher for Passover, vegetarian, allergen-avoidance. Beth Chai and RRUUC provide ceremonial items for the Seder. Space is limited, so please send in your reservation form (see newsletter insert) as soon as possible. April 16 is the last day for RSVPs.

## Beth Chai Directory

Position	Name (* = Board Member)	Email
Rabbi	Dr. Arthur Blecher	ablecher@starpower.net
Education Director	Rain Zohav	rainzohav@earthlink.net
President	Andrew Strongin*	astrongin@starpower.net
Vice President	David Elfin*	ElfinD@verizon.net
Secretary/Past President	Deborah Signer Balaschak*	balasig@verizon.net
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Community Building Chair	Shannon Rudisill*	JMG_SLR@hotmail.com
Family School Chair	Susan Stewart*	ssstew@aol.com
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Music Chair	Marji Ross*	mross@eaglepub.com
Program Co-Chair	Ken Jacobson	kenjacobson@hotmail.com
Program Co-Chair	Mike Wexler*	ela.mike@verizon.net
Social Action Chair	Howie Feinstein*	khfeinstein@verizon.net
Tot Shabbat Coordinator	Joe Gitchell	kgitchel@pinneyassociates.com
Bookkeeper/Accounts Payable	Diane Page	dmpage1@comcast.net
Correspondent	Elizabeth Mumford	eam222@verizon.net
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Newsletter Editor (layout)	Judy Gordon	justplus3@comcast.net
Parent Council Coordinator	Susan Stewart	ssstew@aolcom
Sunday School Volunteer Coordinator	Phyllis Kristal	Kristal@fr.com
Website Content Manager	Mary Jo Shapiro	Mjshap-bethchai@yahoo.com
Beth Chai Web Site	Beth Chai Answering Service/Email	www.bethchai.org; info@bethchai.org

**Financial Need Policy:** Beth Chai welcomes anyone to attend services, become a member, or have their children attend our Jewish Family School, regardless of ability to pay. Considerations available include extended payment plans, service exchange, and fee reduction. Financial aid determination will be made on a case by case basis. Please contact Pat Lovenhart, Treasurer, for assistance.

### Reflecting on 60 Years of Israeli Statehood; Distinguished Guests Explore Key Themes

**April 6: Israel at 60, Part II – New Visions of the State and the Holy Land.** It has become clear to many in Israel that an entirely new vision of the Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish relationship to the Holy Land will be necessary if both communities are to survive and flourish in the future. Dr. Marc Gopin, a rabbi who is professor of World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, will speak about his work with an unusual group of spiritual peacemakers who have had a vital but little-known impact on those future visions – and are among the very few who are deeply engaged with each other even in the midst of violence. His talk will present implications this work has for what Diaspora Jews should – and should not – be doing right now when it comes to their own relationship to Israel.

**April 13: Israel at 60, Part III – Rethinking Israel's History.** In the past two decades, many Israelis have come to see crucial chapters of their nation's history in a new light. This owes partly to historical writings based on archival material that has become available only since the mid-1980s, and partly to a process of societal maturation that has enabled Israelis to take a more critical view of themselves and their past. National myths and long-held beliefs are now portrayed with more nuance in school curricula and textbooks, in the media, and in political and popular discourse. Dr. Adina Friedman, a native Israeli currently teaching at George Washington University, will guide us through Israel's painful and difficult process of re-examination. She will talk about what it has entailed on both a collective and an individual level, and about its ramifications for the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab-Israeli conflict.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Letter from the Rabbi: Hotel Rooms and Yarmulkes



The scandal involving the – by now ex – governor of New York is a lesson in human vulnerability on two levels. It's not just that a respected law-enforcement official was discovered supporting the very same organized criminal activity he himself undertook to root out, and it's not just that his family is certainly devastated by his behavior. Society has been damaged as well, as it is whenever the public trust is betrayed like this.

This whole sorry affair reminds us of the historical origin of the traditional Jewish practice of wearing head coverings. Although most people know that observant Jews wear yarmulkes or head scarves not just in synagogue but also when going out in public, not many people know how this practice began. References to covering the head as a sign of piety occur in the classical rabbinic literature, but only with regard to scholars and judges. (It was not until centuries later that it became the practice among all pious Jews.) The idea was that rabbinic officials had to identify themselves when walking in the streets. This meant that the same standards of decorum and dignity that characterized their conduct in the rabbinic courts had to be observed when they were off duty. Today it would be like requiring judges to wear their robes while going about their personal business on the streets.

What I take away from all this is that people in the upper echelons of power can never really have private lives. The fact is as long as they hold high office, they are never off duty. Their public person must govern their everyday lives. That is the sacrifice they make when they take office. This is no secret. The choice to be the governor of a state means accepting the need to be circumspect in all matters during the term of office. It is part of the job, and the public has every right to hold its officials accountable.

**ART**

*(ICGE Grant from page 1)*

So, what's ahead for next year? We are requesting another ICE grant, so we can continue to grow and develop our Friday night Shabbat music program with Andrea AND we are hoping to add Israeli dancing to the list of exciting musical learning opportunities we offer at Beth Chai. Plus, we hope to add an "intergenerational program" to our roster of music education at Sunday School.

So much of Jewish tradition is wrapped up in our music, it's wonderful to be able to expand and develop this component of Beth Chai to further enrich our congregation, to bring families closer together, and to have fun! And thanks so much to Rain for coordinating this program, and making it a reality.

*(Continued from page 2)*

**April 20: No Adult Education (Passover).**

**April 27: Israel at 60, Part IV – Israel and the Dilemma of American Jews.** How does language influence American Jews' attempts to come to grips with the complex reality of the Middle East? What is the difference between being "critical of Israeli policy," "anti-Israel," "anti-Semitic," and "a self-hating Jew"? How are such labels used to shape – or limit – discussion of the options that may be open both to American Jews and to Israel itself? What effect do they have on how we interpret information and positions articulated by the U.S. Jewish leadership, U.S. academics, and the U.S. media? Noted author and Middle East expert Milton Viorst will explore this pivotal topic against the background of U.S. reaction to *The Israel Lobby and Foreign Policy*, a controversial study of the making of American Middle East policy by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. The latest of Mr. Viorst's numerous books, *Storm from the East: The Struggle Between the Arab World and the Christian West*, will be offered for sale and signing at the session.

## Letter from the Education Director - April 2008



Dear Congregants,

Happy Spring! Isn't it nice that the days are longer, we have some flowers blooming and some sunshine? In April, we will meet on April 6 and 13, take off for Passover on April 20, the first night of Passover is April 19 and our combined Beth Chai/River Road seder will be on Sunday, April 20. This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate this holiday of spring and freedom with a group of like minded people. The seder is very family friendly. See the article on page 1 for details. We will reconvene on Sunday, April 27 with our regular programming.

On Sunday, April 13 there is an opportunity for 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders to participate in J-Serve: National Day of Jewish Service. The teens will work with a local non-profit organization to clean-up the natural surrounding of nature trails around the Anacostia watershed and to increase public awareness about environmental issues. This is a great Tikkun Olam and service learning opportunity. I am in the midst of seeing if this can be a 7<sup>th</sup> grade Mitzvah class project and/or a Beth Chai teen activity. If you would like to help, please contact me.

Two resources you might be interested in using to refresh your seder this year are as follows. The first deals with including a consciousness of the earth into our spring festival of Passover. It is a guide for an earth-centered Passover prepared by Rabbi Jeff Sultar, director of The Shalom Center's Green Menorah Covenant campaign. It is available on the Shalom Center Website in the Green Menorah section at: [http://www.shalomctr.org/taxonomy\\_menu/1/1](http://www.shalomctr.org/taxonomy_menu/1/1). See: Seder Supplement, Newsletter Column Ideas and Teaching Points.

The second concerns the continuation, even in this day and age and even in our own country of forced labor. If our Passover tradition teaches us anything at all, it teaches us that since we must regard ourselves as being personally released from bondage we must work for others to also be released from demeaning, degrading, forced and poorly paid labor. If you would like to make this relevant to our lives today, check out [fairfoodnation.mayfirst.org](http://fairfoodnation.mayfirst.org); it includes a petition and information of the conditions of farm workers in Florida, including forced labor at: [fairfoodnation.mayfirst.org](http://fairfoodnation.mayfirst.org).

Have a very happy and meaningful Passover!

B'Shalom,  
Rain Zohav

*(Auction, continued from page 1)*

And the proceeds exceeded all expectations. Between the auction and the Café, we took in \$18,000, close to 20% more than in previous years. This total was enhanced by some major purchases by non-members and some direct donations. So much for the fundraising chairman's frequent laments that we had maxed out the amount that our small group could raise at an auction. For this thanks go both to our generous donors and our members and guests who made purchases.

Auction co-chairs Ron Leve and Julie Zalkind are especially appreciative of all the folks who helped make the auction a success. While many of the names follow, apologies to those who deserved mention below but are missing due to both the crush of the day's activity and the memory of those supposed to record such things.

Maintaining the Auction Database – Ilene Sokolsky took over this function from Julie Zalkind this year and performed in a yeo-woman's manner. Without her quick learning curve, diligence, long hours and late night efforts, both before and after the auction, we would have floundered.

Beth Chai Café – Miriam Meyer again did a professional job to feed the masses. Her Belgian waffles and homemade sauces were a real hit. She was assisted by Marji Ross, Bob Finkelstein and Rain Zohav with setting up and taking down the Café. The wonderful food was made and donated by Mary Jo Hlavaty Shapiro, Elizabeth Thede, Elizabeth Mumford, Julie Vigdor, Michele Sturm, Ivy Brown, Sara Duke, Julie Goss, Robin Pollock, Rachel Silber, Bega Toolanen, Lisa Spain, Vicky Marchand, Beth Sodie, Marji Ross and Joyce Rechtschaffen. Discounted pizza came from Manny and Olga's at 8118 Woodmont Ave in Bethesda (and we'll have more next year).

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Shabbat Service and Program — Greater Washington's Jewish Community: A Portrait from 1795 Through the Present

**Friday, April 4.** We've looked extensively at the history and culture of Jews who have lived far and wide throughout the world, and in many different eras – but we have somewhat overlooked those who live, and have lived, in our own backyard. Helping us make up for that on this evening will be Laura Apelbaum, executive director of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington. Laura will present a slide show tracing the history of the Jewish community in our area from the arrival of the first Jewish Washingtonian in 1795 to today, when the region's Jewish community has grown to more than 215,000 people.

In addition, she will have available for sale and signing *Jewish Washington: Scrapbook of an American Community*, the beautifully designed and crafted 100-page book she has co-edited. Based on the Historical Society's award-winning exhibition, this large-format, hardcover volume contains more than 100 images of historic documents, artifacts, and photographs. It also features brief essays and an historic overview of the Jewish families, businesses, congregations, neighborhoods, and communal organizations in the city and its suburbs.

### Schedule

**6:30-7 pm:** Tot Shabbat.

**7-8 pm:** A light supper costing \$10 per person (post-mitzvah and older) and \$5/child (ages 6 to 12) will be set out buffet style at 7. Those wishing to join in are asked to sign up by contacting Ron Leve before noon on Thursday, April 3, either by email at [TheRon@comcast.net](mailto:TheRon@comcast.net) or by phone at 202-496-9292.

**8-8:30 pm:** Beth Chai's Shabbat service, which features a humanistic Kiddush, singing, thought-provoking readings, and roles for children wishing to participate, begins at around 8.

**8:30-9:45 pm:** Slide show and talk on Washington's Jewish history.

**Location of all Beth Chai Shabbats** (unless otherwise indicated): Beth Chai Congregation at River Road Unitarian Church, Fireside Room (second floor), 6301 River Rd. (entrance on Whittier Blvd.), Bethesda.

*(Auction, continued from page 4)*

**Set-up** – You can't help but have noticed the great physical layout and organization of the auction. Before she arrives very early on the day of the auction, Rachel Feldman has this all laid out on paper. Once there, she directs a crew of thousands to set up and take down all the tables and material. Amongst those involved were Mike Wexler, Ela Koniuszkow, Mark Balaschak, Ken Jacobson, Reed Dewey, Adam Davis, Michelle Sturm, Jackie Hess, Warren Milberg, Rob Weinstein, and Lynn Weinstein.

**Music** – In what might be her last year of performing at the auction as she goes off to college, Celia Feldman serenaded us with her wonderful cello playing. Howie Feinstein's illness meant that Alan Feldenkris was left to cover the remaining time on his own. Folks absolutely loved the virtual crew he recruited to accompany the sounds of his cool saxophone.

**The Back Room** – This year the computer operations were moved to the media center where Walter Scott led his crew that included Dennis Wallick and Daniel Korn. He was further assisted by five students from the Mitzvah

class: David Balaschak, Abbie Israel, Lena Shapiro, Alex Istaphanous, and Zachary Wolpoff, some of whom also helped with the raffle.

**The Check-out Process** – Because of the problems encountered on auction day, we didn't get to see the results of Karen Feinstein's amazing effort to organize the check-out process. But Karen has provided the first written documentation of the auction process, so we'll certainly put that to use next year. Those who assisted her were Ilene Sokolsky, Suzanne Greenfield, Julie Zalkind, Deborah Balaschak, Rachel Wallick, and Mariyama Scott

**Auction writers and phone callers:** Susan Lubman-Edwards, Joyce Ellen Weinstein, Rachel Silber, Mika Savir, Warren Milberg, Kate Taylor, Lisa Spain, Tom Israel, and Cal George.

**Working the auction floor:** Tom Israel, Bega Toolanan, Julie Goss, Sheldon Hofferan, Dianne Sonnenberg, and Susan Stewart.

Thanks to everyone, and we'll see you at Auction 2009!

# Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Fri., April 4, 6:30 PM, Tot Shabbat 7 PM, Light supper 8-8:30 PM, Shabbat service 8:30 – 9:45 PM, discussion with Laura Apfelbaum	Monthly Tot Shabbat and Shabbat service, featuring Andrea Foster as regular song leader. Discussion: Laura Apfelbaum, executive director of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, will present a slide show tracing the history of the Jewish community in our area from the arrival of the first Jewish Washingtonian in 1795 to today.	Beth Chai Congregation at River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 6301 River Rd.
Sun., April 6, 9:30 AM Assembly 10AM- Noon Classes	Sunday School, Post-Mitzvah Class, Pre-School; Adult Ed: Rabbi Marc Gopin, will speak about his work with an spiritual peacemakers to help create a new vision of the Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish relationship in the Holy Land.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd.
Sun., April 13; 9:30 AM Assembly 10AM- Noon Classes	Sunday School, Pre-School; Adult Ed: Dr. Adina Friedman will address Israeli historical reappraisal of the years up to and including the War of Independence, and on how this reappraisal has affected Israelis' understanding of their history and the current discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab-Israeli conflict.	Burning Tree Elementary School
Sun., April 13, 7 PM	Board Meeting. All members are welcome to attend.	Home of David Elfin, 8206 Bryant Drive, Bethesda
Sun., April 20	No Sunday School – Passover	
Sun., April 27, (No music assembly due to Teacher Appreciation Breakfast) 10AM- Noon Classes	Sunday School, Pre-School babysitting; Adult Ed: Noted journalist and Middle East expert Milton Viorst will explore how the framing of the U.S. discussion of Middle East policy has shaped – and at times limited – consideration of options that may be open to American Jews and to Israel.	Burning Tree Elementary School



## Beth Chai Congregation

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**Address Correction Requested**