

## FROM THE PRESIDENTS DESK

June, 2021

I want to begin my first column as your Temple President by thanking you for giving me this opportunity to be of service. I have only been a member of Temple Israel since 2010 when I moved our family from Michigan via Windsor, Ontario, Canada which is where I was born and raised. Yes, I'm Canadian and you'll hear a little of that when I speak. My wife of 27 years, Bonnie, is American, and we have three wonderful girls together – Samantha 25, a 2018 graduate of FSU, who lives and works in Tampa as a Speech, Language pathology assistant, and recently engaged, Megan 23 who is preparing to sit for her Occupational Therapy Assistant exam and our youngest, Jessica 21 who will be a senior at FSU this coming fall majoring in Business. Our girls attended Temple throughout their teenage years and Jessica had her Bat Mitzvah at Temple Israel in 2013.

In 2010, I participated in the Temple Israel leadership training shortly after moving to Tallahassee but both personal and professional commitments prevented me from truly engaging with Temple in a more meaningful way after completion. In the summer of 2017, I was asked by Shannon Novey and Susan Nipper to join the Board as Treasurer due to an unexpected vacancy. Without much hesitation I said yes. Timing is everything and I was finally able to give back to the community in a meaningful way.

As a child growing up, I spent my first 12 years attending an Orthodox Synagogue in Windsor. The year before my Bar Mitzvah, my parents decided to switch to a reform synagogue also named Temple Israel a few blocks from my childhood home. I could easily walk or ride my bike to Hebrew lessons in preparation for my Bar Mitzvah. My Orthodox grandfather was not initially going to attend my Bar Mitzvah due to his strong religious beliefs and feelings that a reform education was somehow less than adequate. After completing a full service in Hebrew with a full Torah portion, Haftorah and all the blessings in Hebrew including a full kiddush being sung by yours truly, I received the biggest hug from my grandfather – I thought my ribs were broken – seriously, it was a very tight squeeze. I share this to say I believe in the education we provide to our children can be just as enriching and perhaps more meaningful than the teaching I received while at our Orthodox synagogue as a young person.

In May, the Temple's new board convened our first meeting, and I would like to introduce our new Board members: Bruce Weiner has agreed to become our Vice President/President-Elect. Eric Zimmerman will continue as treasurer and Leah Wiederspahn is our new secretary. For what we believe to be a first, our Past President chairing the nominating committee sent out an application seeking interested Board members to apply for open seats on the board. We received approximately 15 applicants. This enabled us to onboard several new faces in support of our mission with varied interests and backgrounds. These new Board members are David Byrne, Howard Rubin, and Mimi Garcia. Our returning/continuing board members are Marty Merzer, Claudia Blackburn, Claudia Sperber, Bob Rackleff, Bob Canter, Allie Fleming and Karen Cyphers. Our Memorial and Cultural Chair is Lainie Cohan. I am grateful for the agreement by all who serve and leverage their time and talents for the benefit of our Temple.

2020 has been a very challenging year for all of us, including Temple, as we have all had to deal with the pandemic in a multitude of ways. I am incredibly proud of our professional staff, led by

Rabbi Shields, on how they all stepped up and continued to deliver the spiritual and programming needs of our community while we were all locked away for over a year in near isolation. They transitioned to live streaming of services, programming and life cycle events and stepped-up efforts to keep everyone engaged and connected. Thank you to the entire professional Team.

Now, some 'New' BIG news:

- Temple Israel will be reopening in full for all vaccinated members effective July 1, 2021. Please stay tuned for a more detailed message on the specifics.
- For the past three years, Shannon Novey, Alicia Smith along with support from Corcoran Partners and our Board have tried to get our Safety Initiative funded by the Governor. Well, as you may have read in the local news, our Governor approved Temple Israel to receive \$500,000 in support of our safety initiative for the upcoming State fiscal year. This money will be used to enhance our building security. Items under consideration to enhance our security posture include: the installation of bulletproof glass, intercom systems, replacement of locks and doors, upgraded security system and cameras and so much more including upgrades to security fencing, barriers and improvements to lighting, among other things. This will allow us to continue to safely provide services through our Community Center, Temple and preschool. A committee has been formed to take on this challenge to ensure the money received is spent in the most beneficial manner while addressing our pressing safety concerns.

Jewish Food Festival:

- We have begun the initial discussions to plan for a 2021/2022 food festival. We may try for something in the fall or just wait until the spring of 2022. Either way, the festival will be back this year! Stay tuned for more information. If you have ideas, please reach out to Bonnie Burk at [jewishfoodfestival@templeisraelth.org](mailto:jewishfoodfestival@templeisraelth.org)

Capital Campaign – 'Debt Free by '23'

- In the coming weeks you will start to see additional information about a Capital Campaign. The sole objective is to eliminate the outstanding balance of our mortgage by May of 2023. The expected balance owing will be approximately \$450,000. Elimination of this debt will free up cashflow and allow approximately \$80,000 per year to be redirected to improving our building. This will enable us to improve things such as; flooring/carpeting, lighting, painting as needed and ultimately renovation of the kitchen. We will be reaching out to everyone in our community and asking for support above and beyond their current annual commitments to meet the goal of eliminating our debt by 2023. A Building Committee was formed last year and numerous items have already been prioritized once funds become available.

In summary, I am very proud to be your Temple President for these next two years. When I took over as Treasurer, cashflow was extremely poor and we did not have much money in our accounts

to get us past the next month or so. Aged Accounts were also not at an acceptable level. Over the past three years, together we have greatly improved this situation and I am incredibly excited about our prospects looking forward. This is the reason why the Debt Free by '23 needs to happen now. We are in a position of strength and we can leverage this for even greater benefit to our community. With your continued support and generosity of time, effort, and money, we can leave Temple Israel and everything she embodies in great shape for future generations.

I also need to thank our past presidents whom I have had the pleasure to watch and learn from over these past few years while being on the Board. These individuals continue to serve our Temple in numerous capacities: Shannon Novey, Susan Nipper, Steve Mindlin, Mike Glazer and Buddy Herrell. Their coaching, advice and guidance has been invaluable, and I am grateful for their continued support as I navigate forward as Temple President. I still have much to learn and look forward to traveling this journey together with each of you, our congregants. I am always happy to hear from you with concerns or questions. I cannot promise that I will always do everything you might ask, but I will listen and be accessible. The best way to reach me for Temple business is by email at [President@templeisraelth.org](mailto:President@templeisraelth.org)

I look forward to seeing everyone in person at Temple in the very near future.

All the Best,

Mark Burk  
Temple President