

# A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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## Only at AJ



**B**y now, you may have seen the new billboard outside the synagogue with the theme “Only at AJ.”

In three years, AJ will mark a historic milestone, our 150th anniversary. Founded just before the Civil War, our congregation has thrived and grown, and has had a remarkable impact on legions of individuals who have been touched by our services, programs, and caring community life. It is appropriate, then, as we anticipate

a gala celebration of historic success and future promise, that we highlight what is special and unique about our congregation, from our roots on the American Jewish scene, to the present.

**Only at AJ...** In 1913, AJ was one of the twenty-two founding congregations of the United Synagogue of America, now the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism. We are the oldest synagogue in the Conservative Movement that has an unbroken history in Philadelphia. We are the original Conservative synagogue in town!

**Only at AJ...** We are proud of our lay and professional leadership through the years, who have made a lasting impression upon the community. The stability and lengthy tenures of clergy have been the thread that have linked individuals and families to the congregation and given it a unique character.

**Only at AJ...** The historic achievement of the Oxford Circle Jewish Community Centre- Brith Israel, whose members represent its historic contribution to the Philadelphia Jewish community, adds to the history and quality of Jewish community at AJ.

**Only at AJ...** “Shabbat Rockin’ Eve” Services, the first of which is this month, on Friday night, September 9, 2005, and our “Havdallah Rockin’ Eve.” I always look forward to joining with **Hazzan Glantz, David Seltzer, Amy Blum** and a talented ensemble to get us all “rockin’” at the opening or ending of *Shabbat*.

**Only at AJ...** Distinctive *Shabbat* morning services. A main Sanctuary service with our own unique prayerbook, the *Seder Avodah*, and the magnificent accompaniment of choir and organ. Originally edited by Rabbi Max D. Klein, the spiritual leader of the congregation from 1910–1960, *Seder Avodah* has been re-edited for the High Holy Days, and is being re-edited for *Shabbat, Yom Tov*, and Daily services. For those who want a more intimate, traditional format, the Havurah Alternative Service also meets every week.

**Only at AJ...** Preschool services with our own unique prayerbook.

**Only at AJ...** **Debbie Miner** and a Framework of Excellence accredited religious school marked by meaningful retention into the high school years, and unique programs like the high school Social Action, *Ulpan*, and Seminar tracks.

**Only at AJ...** **Sherry Bohm** and her leadership of an award winning, state and NAEYC accredited AJ Preschool that is the portal for our children into both general and Jewish education and social interaction.

**Only at AJ...** **Neil Wise**, our “pied piper” who inspires our youth and is a dynamo of ideas that have enhanced programs like our Rockin’ Eves, and brought the Mummies and the Phillies Phanatic to our *Purim* Carnivals.

**Only at AJ...** The Donsky-Hunn Torah Institute, which this year will feature Rabbi Elliot Dorff over a *Shabbat* weekend and a Sunday conference in conjunction with the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, on the “end of life” issues raised by the Terry Schiavo case last spring.

**Only at AJ...** Regular holiday Healing Services, the Blessing of the Pets, the *Pesah* and *Hanukkah* Bowls... and so much more!

And, **only at AJ...** A “Go Eagles!” sign in Hebrew and English to root our team on.

And, **only at AJ...** A rabbi who is a “groupie” of Jerry Jeff Walker.

Yes, there is much that is special about AJ. Some of it is historic and rich in meaning. Some of it is quirky and just a lot of fun. But all of it adds up to a truly unique, original and creative congregation. We may be almost 150, but we are not old. As God renews each day, so we renew and reinvent ourselves each year.

As we begin a new program year, I know it will be grounded in our history, but also soaring with new ideas and thrilling activity.

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