

## GREETINGS AGAIN FROM THE SITE OF OUR NEW HOME!

Greetings from our wintry site! Notwithstanding the wet weather, we are pouring concrete at our new home.

In our ongoing program to be as “green” as possible we’re using the latest fly ash concrete technology for all of the below-slab concrete work.

Fly Ash is a fine, glass-like powder recovered from gases created by coal-fired electric power generation. U.S. power plants produce millions of tons of fly ash annually, which is usually dumped in landfills. It is an inexpensive replacement for Portland cement used in concrete and it actually improves strength and eases pumping of the concrete. Because it uses less water, it is less likely to crack. A recycled industrial by-product that is otherwise

waste, fly ash is environmentally friendly. Since fly ash concrete can be difficult to finish we’ll use a standard concrete mix for the exposed slab work.

This is a big moment. The site has been a muddy mess this past month but during this time there has been furious activity putting in the first part of the foundation, the underground piers.

The structural system that has been developed for our project, a pier and grade beam foundation, is typical for most hillside construction. Piers, or columns of concrete, are poured at ten foot intervals around the perimeter and below the building. These approximately 170 piers are connected with reinforcement (rebar) to grade beams (horizontal bands of concrete) creating a grid. A reinforced slab of concrete is poured on top of this grid to tie the whole system together.

These piers are hard to see — they are buried out in the field (along with the geothermal wells) and are 24 to 30 inches in diameter, going down almost 20 feet below grade. Presently the grade beam cages are about to be set in place to create the extensive grid system.

A long retaining wall is also starting to take shape, running parallel to Spruce Street about a third of the way down the slope. This line will separate the one-story portion of the building (the sanctuary and social hall) from the two-story portion below it (school and administration wings).

Once all the concrete is poured (by the end of March), the footprint of the entire building will be clearly visible.

Since the Torah portion “Terumah” comes at the end of this month, next month’s “postcard” will discuss how the concepts of “congregation” and “sanctuary” have evolved from biblical times to the present. I will be leading the discussion of this parashah at Torah Study on Saturday, Feb. 28th at 9:30 a.m. in the library. Please join us for an interesting and fun discussion!

Alex Bergtraun

