



The Inspiration for the Founders Grove

By Sue and Mike Austin

The year was 1957 and Shabbat was in full swing at Camp Saratoga located in the Santa Cruz mountains (now in Santa Rosa and named Camp Newman). Campers, clergy and staff were dressed in white, and gathered for services on the *bimah*, a raised platform holding several benches. Magnificent redwoods overhead formed the roof. This communal coming together under the trees for prayer, music and reflection left an indelible impression on us as 15-year-olds. Now, more than 60 years later, we still remember the magic of that moment. We are not alone. Rabbi Kahn, who attended Camp Saratoga a few years later, cherishes the same precious memories.

Watching Beth El families gather outside on hay bales for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we wondered if we could replicate that Camp Saratoga magic on our own property. Could we have an outdoor gathering place for worship, study, and perhaps a wedding or two? Members and architects Alex Bergtraun and Jason Kaldis confirmed the viability of the idea and drafted consecutive plans. With the approval of the Board of Directors and the House Committee, ongoing support from Executive Director David Rothenberg, and input from staff, the project was launched. It has been our honor to contribute the necessary funds and guidance for this project.

Construction involved regrading of the area, and adding soil and rocks as well as pathways into the grove. The benches are made of high-grade cedar, supported by river rocks piled in gabion baskets. Two small benches just outside the gathering place provide a unique view of the setting and a space for reflection.

In honor of the 75th year of Congregation Beth El's founding, the decision was made to name our new site the Founders Grove. A new plaque in the gallery lists the founders' names including Mike's parents — Gay and Kurt Austin.

THE Builder

Contributors

(in order of appearance)
Allen Nudel
Robinn Magid

Designers/Editors

Mimi Abraham
Alexander Moore

Copy Editor

Janine Baer
Tara Steckler
Rachel Kator

Deadline for the next issue:

APRIL 5, 2020

CONTRIBUTE TO THE BUILDER:

Your thoughts and opinions are important to us. If you have a subject of interest to the Congregation, submit a **maximum of 500 words** and send it to Mimi Abraham at mimi@bethelberkeley.org. **No anonymous submissions will be accepted.**

Letters, essays and guest articles may be edited for length, content and style.