

Neve Shalom's loom allows users to create personalized items

Weaving metaphor for 'delicate way world works'

■ By **SARA KARLOVITCH**
SPECIAL TO THE MIRROR

Neve Shalom is helping people connect to Judaism by weaving their own religious items, such as prayer shawls and challah covers, on an in-house loom. The hope is that the hands-on experience will bring the weavers closer to their faith.

At Neve Shalom, a Conservative Jewish synagogue on Grove Avenue, the loom has been used by more than 50 people in the past 2½ years. It is run by the synagogue's Sisterhood. The weavers also take commissions and are working on an order from Chicago.

The loom sits in a second-floor office of the synagogue and takes up the entire room. It's a wooden machine operated with pedals and a shuttle for the thread.

It was acquired in 2015 by Cory Schneider, now the head of the loom program, after she moved from Pennsylvania. Her neighbor had a loom in the garage and ended up donating it to Neve Shalom.

"Now she can park her car in the garage," Schneider said.

Schneider has knitted more than 15 tallitot, or prayer shawls. She started weaving for her son and has since woven tallitot for her grandchildren. She teaches new weavers how to create their own Jewish heirlooms.

"It's a very simple process," Schneider said. "And we've had a lot of kids do it. We had the nursery school do it."

The nursery school class made a challah cover for the braided bread during Shabbat blessings. Two children worked on the loom while an adult helped them use the pedals.

The woven tallitot are customizable. Users can choose the colors and what to embroider on the collars and corners.

That is why Margot Julis, of East

Brunswick, was able to use purple and pink thread, her granddaughters' favorite colors, for her tallit. The women at her Conservative Jewish synagogue, the East Brunswick Jewish Center, have just started to wear the tallit, so Julis, 60, decided to make her own.

"It's just really special to have something so close to you that you make yourself," Julis said.

After 20 hours of work, she was close to finishing it on a recent night at Neve Shalom. And she was pleased with her creation. "I think it looks gorgeous. I love it. I love the colors," Julis said.

Schneider said weaving has a meditative effect and is not as hard as people think.

"You get into kind of a zen state and it's one of the most relaxing things you can do it. Everybody who's woven has loved it," Schneider said.

She said she wants to give people a Jewish experience that's meaningful, memorable and "significant to where they are in their lives that will never be forgotten."

Weaving has a metaphoric place in Judaism, according to Neve Shalom's rabbi, Eric Rosin. It has been used "as a metaphor for the delicate way the world works."

What the loom allows, according to Rosin, is for people to connect further to the tradition of using the tallit.

The loom has been very impactful on the Neve Shalom community. More and more people are weaving their own tallit. "It really, I think, lifts the entire congregation," Rosin said.

"It just allows people to add themselves into a ritual that otherwise could be something they do by rote."

"There's a tradition in Judaism called Hiddur Mitzvah, which means taking something that's a commandment and making it beautiful," he said. "So this is a great example of Hiddur Mitzvah."

Only one person can use the loom at a time and one does not have to be a Neve Shalom member or even Jewish to do so. To schedule loom time, contact office@neveshalom.net or call 732-548-2238.



ROSIN



Cory Schneider, left, and Margot Julis work on Julis' tallit on the loom at Neve Shalom.

— SARA KARLOV