

History of Congregation B'nai Chaim

In the fall of 1992, an acquaintance introduced Steve Rothenberg to Dan Stanger. They were both Jewish and did not know of any other Jewish people in the southwest suburban area of metro Denver. They decided to see if they could find other Jews in the area and put a small ad in the local newspaper. The ad invited Jews interested in meeting other Jews in the area to gather at the Fun Plex. To their surprise fifty people showed up. A second meeting was decided upon and advertised. Hosted by the Discovery Zone, again about fifty people came and many were new faces. Everyone was asked to sign up for the various activities they would be interested in.

The first Shabbat evening service on November 13, 1992, was held at the Abiding Hope Lutheran Church with lay people conducting the service. It was a service with great spirituality and feeling.

In November 1992 the Southwest Jewish Forum was established and by January 1993, the Southwest Jewish Forum had set up bi-weekly Shabbat Services and we were meeting in the new Genesis Presbyterian Church.

A new name was needed for the fledgling congregation. On March 6, 1993, everyone interested met and chose B'nai Chaim, Children of Life, as the name for the newest Denver Metro Reform Jewish Congregation.

Committees for Finance, Shabbat Services, Childhood Education and Communication were set up. In April 1993, the first 5 programs began, designed to introduce children to their Jewish heritage and culture. In the following fall, the more formal religious school program started.

Rabbi Judith Beiner, a newly ordained Reform Rabbi, joined B'nai Chaim in the summer of 1993, and in December 1993, she was officially hired to be B'nai Chaim's first rabbi.

B'nai Chaim joined the Denver-Boulder Synagogue Council and participated in many community wide projects. In June 1994 B'nai Chaim elected their first formal Board of Directors.

B'nai Chaim received a fabulous donation of a torah in May 1995. The celebration was citywide. Everyone celebrated and danced with the torah as it was welcomed to its new home.

Rabbi Beiner then moved from Denver to Kansas City. B'nai Chaim hired a wonderful student rabbi, Anne Persin, from the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. She stayed for two years.

Rabbi Joel Schwartzman became the rabbi in July 2000, and B'nai Chaim's membership soared to 125 families. His leadership has touched every aspect of Congregation B'nai Chaim's life.

In August 2003, Shabbat services were moved to the Heritage United Methodist Church. However, the Religious School could not be held there, so it was moved to Little People's Landing.

The Long Range Planning Committee was formed to look what was needed for the congregation. A building on W. Marlowe Ave was on the market and the committee could not pass on the opportunity to try to buy it.

The concept was presented to the congregation and it was embraced heartily. B'nai Chaim moved in to the building in August 2004. On April 18, 2005 the papers were signed and the building became the permanent home of Congregation B'nai Chaim.

Rabbi Séverine Sokol served as Rabbi for three years from the Summer of 2011 to the Summer of 2014.

In the Summer of 2014, Cantor Kim Harris became the new Spiritual Leader of the congregation.

B'nai Chaim is a member of the Union for Reform Judaism and currently has 75 member families. Among its many active groups, B'nai Chaim hosts a Religious School, a Preschool, an award winning Youth Group (BCTY), a Women's Book Club, the Tummelers who go on city-wide, cultural excursions, a Women's Torah Study group, and a Social Actions group which organizes various mitzvah projects and programs.