

December 12 Edition - Pages 75-76

QJC Sanctuary To Be Named For Rabbi Grunblatt

The main synagogue of the Queens Jewish Center will be renamed in honor of the shul's long time *moreh d'asra*, Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt on Sunday, Dec. 14.

Rabbi Grunblatt served the Queens Jewish Center since 1967. He was an eloquent speaker whose *drashot* attracted overflow audiences from all over Queens. As a descendant of the *Leviim*, he sang the praises of Hashem with a magnificent voice and inspiring *kavanah*. As a community leader, his opposition to the proposed low-income housing project in Forest Hills not only saved the Queens Jewish community but transformed the history of New York. People far and wide, from all walks

of life, sought his wisdom. Yet through it all he was the most humble of men, a true *anav* in every sense of the word.

Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt was born in Leipzig, Germany. Non-Jewish neighbors hid the family during *Kristalnacht*. They escaped to London where Rabbi Grunblatt learned at Yeshiva Eitz Chaim under the tutelage of such *gedolim* as Rav Elya Lopian and Rav Yechezkel Abramsky. He was a *masmid* who spent every possible minute

learning and was regarded as an *iluy*, a prodigy. One of his *chaverim* at Yeshiva Eitz Chaim London was a young man from Vienna, Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld. Who could have imagined that one yeshiva in London would produce two pillars of the rabbinate in Queens.

After the war the Grunblatt family came as refugees to America. Rabbi Grunblatt studied at Yeshiva Torah Voddath, received *semichah* and went on to become a rav in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. and Montreal, Canada.

In 1967, Rabbi Grunblatt took over the spiritual leadership of the Queens Jewish Center, succeeding Rabbi Morris Max. The Queens Jewish Center was already a well-re-

spected congregation and Rabbi Grunblatt would lead it to new heights.

As a *darshan*, Rabbi Grunblatt was literally world renowned and his *derashot* would be remembered decades later. On *Shabbat Hagadol* and *Shabbat Shuva*, extra seats would have to be put out in the Queens Jewish Center to accommodate people who came from miles around to hear him.



Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt

Continued on p.76

QJC Sanctuary

Continued from p.75

While most people saw his father as a great communicator with words, Rabbi Grunblatt saw himself primarily as a communicator through music. Many noted that his *tefillah* was like a conversation between him and the *Ribono Shel Olam*. Throughout the year, there could be no better spur to *kavanah* in davening than to hear Rabbi Grunblatt harmonizing with Chazan Aryeh Rendel.

In 1971, Mayor John V. Lindsay announced a plan to build a low-income housing project with three 24-story apartment buildings in Forest Hills. When Rabbi Grunblatt and others protested that bringing hundreds of deeply troubled families into one area would destroy the neighborhood, most of our elected officials turned a deaf ear. Rabbi Grunblatt assumed the role of a community organizer. Working with the Queens Jewish Community Council, under the leadership of Dr. Alvin Lashinsky, Rabbi Grunblatt organized protests against the project. As a result of the protests the city was forced to back down and a compromise was reached. The size of the project was cut in half and it was limited to low families from the five surrounding zip codes. At the insistence of Queens Borough President Donald Manes, the proj-

ect became a co-op, giving the families living there a financial stake and an incentive to preserve the quality of the buildings and the neighborhood. The Jewish community of Queens was saved.

The controversy over the Forest Hills housing project would have an impact beyond what anyone could have imagined. During the protest an ultra liberal congressman from the East Side of Manhattan was encouraged by a friend to go to Forest Hills to at least hear what the protestors had to say. The congressman would later refer to his discussion with Rabbi Grunblatt that day as his political "crossing of the Rubicon," giving him a better understanding for the concerns of middle class New Yorkers outside of Manhattan and leading him to oppose the Forest Hills project. The congressman who credited Rabbi Grunblatt with transforming his political vision was Ed Koch.

The man who mediated the agreement between the city and the opponents of the Forest Hills housing project was future New York governor Mario Cuomo.

His key role in the careers of the two most influential political figures in New York of their time makes Rabbi Grunblatt a significant figure in New York's political history. It is a mark of the man's modesty that this probably never occurred to him.

With the arrival of the first immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the 1970s the Grunblatt fam-

ily led the way in spreading out the welcome mat for the new arrivals. Rebbetzin Esther Grunblatt organized the Russian Service Center, helping the new immigrants to find housing, food, clothing and jobs. It was said at the time that the one thing every immigrant knew about New York when they got off the plane was to ask for Rebbetzin Grunblatt.

Rabbi Grunblatt's advice was sought after by people far and wide because of his wisdom and understanding. Whether it was a major political figure or a person who had just lost his job and was desperate for help, Rabbi Grunblatt was the man people looked up to for help and guidance.

In his letter announcing his retirement, Rabbi Grunblatt wrote that if he was *zocheh* to see the *Mashiach* come in his lifetime he would be proud to march to the *Beit Hamikdash* with the Queens Jewish Center. Unfortunately, Rabbi Grunblatt, like so many *tzaddikim* over the millenia, did not live to see the *Mashiach*. But when he does come, and may it be soon, there is no question that it will be in the merit of the *tzaddikim* over the ages and that the Torah, *Tefillah* and *chesed* of Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt will have brought him a little closer.

The dedication program on Dec. 14 will begin with *Mincha* at 3:30 p.m. and will conclude with *Maariv* at 5:15 p.m. It will take place at 66-05 108th Street in Forest Hills.