

Temple Shalom: A Brief History

by

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FOUNDERS

In the early 1950's there were no admitted Jewish residents in Naples or Collier County because it was known that the community did not embrace Jews. However, by the end of the decade several Jewish families along with their school-aged children, made Naples their permanent home and established themselves in businesses. They were the Freschels and Gilmans, the Dinaburgs, and the Luffs.

In the early 1960's Jewish salesmen employed by the developer of Golden Gate and Golden Gate Estates, added to the Jewish population of Naples and Collier County and there were enough Jewish residents to have High Holy Day services. The Jewish Community Center of Collier County was founded in 1962, with Garson Dinaburg as the lay leader and Leo Spiegel as the volunteer cantor. In 1965 a governing board was established.

Services were held in various venues available at the time: offices, Golden Gate Community Hall, the community room of the original Citizen's National Bank, the forerunner of Suntrust Bank, Coast Federal Bank community room, and St. Anne's parish hall.

On September 23, 1966, a Certificate of Incorporation was issued by the State of Florida, and signed by Garson Dinaburg, President; Gabriel Luff, Secretary; and William Freschel, Vice President and Treasurer. By 1970 the Jewish population had increased -- retirees had become part of the Jewish community as well as Jewish professionals, retailers, and a few families with children.

The original founders of the Jewish Community Center of Collier County, the forerunner of Temple Shalom, were joined by others, who recognizing the need to establish a Jewish presence in Collier County, and for working to establish a Jewish home in the form of a building of our own. We are indebted to them for their foresight and for their dedication of purpose.

BUILDING PROJECTS

In 1970 we began to seriously look for a piece of property on which to build our Jewish "home." There were two aborted attempts, due to zoning problems in one case, and to neighborhood antipathy in the other- the first on Trail Boulevard and the second on Diana Avenue. When it was learned that the Baptist Church had been given a special price for land on which to build a future church, Joseph Weinfeld, president of the congregation, and Garson Dinaburg, the lay leader, had approached officials of Collier Development Corporation, about acquiring a site on Pine Ridge Road. When the representatives of Collier Development Corporation read in the newspaper that the request for rezoning of the Diana Avenue property had been turned down by the Naples City Council, they offered us the site on which the Jewish Community Center of Collier County was built. The price was \$15,000.00.

On July 15, 1973, a deed to 2½ acres on Pine Ridge Road was turned over to President, Joseph S. Weinfeld, by Norman Herran and George Huntoon of Collier Corporation. The membership was 57 family units. The ground breaking was on November 25, 1974 and a building was erected mortgage-free at 1575 Pine Ridge Road. It was dedicated on April 31, 1975, and consecrated by Rabbi Simon Friedeman of Beth El, in Cape Coral. The membership had grown to 76 family units.

An Educational and Social Wing was added to the original Temple, also mortgage-free and dedicated at Shabbat Services on Friday night, January 15, 1980.

On May 5, 1980 the name was officially changed to TEMPLE SHALOM, Inc. a Florida corporation not for profit, under the seal of the State of Florida, by George Firestone, Secretary of State.

Temple Shalom became an affiliate of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in December, 1982. UAHC is now the Union for Reform Judaism -- URJ.

Under the forward-thinking leadership of President Bob Coplan, a Long Range Planning Committee was established in April, 1988. As a result a group of younger congregation members purchased property on Pine Ridge Road not far from State Road 951, in Golden Gate Estates, and donated it to Temple Shalom with the expressed purpose that a new Temple Shalom be built.

the fund were \$95,000.00. Sisterhood now donates \$15,000 yearly for Religious School Scholarships and donated \$3,000 toward the Preschool Reading Room.

In 1998 Temple Shalom Sisterhood became affiliated with Women of Reform Judaism. It has won two OR AMI—Light of Our People awards.

MEN'S CLUB

The Men's Club was started in 1976 as a recommendation of the Jewish Community Center of Collier County.

Over the years it has donated in excess of \$60,000.00 to Temple Shalom from fundraising activities. It supports the Religious School and the Youth Group and funded the completion of the ark in the multipurpose room in the Learning Center. It gives Kiddush Cups to the B'not Mitzvah and pays for the gown rental for conformation.

The Men's Club provided the Automatic Defibrillator (AED) that is housed in the Temple office, the LCD projector and screen, the document camera for the Religious School, and the Hearing Impaired system for the sanctuary and the social hall, as well as books for the Children's Library. It is in the process of purchasing a wireless, lavalier microphone for the Cantor.

The Men's Club also sponsors social events — baseball and hockey games, fishing, kayaking, boating, and recently sponsored a bowling event for the Religious School students. It supports JNF, Jewish Federation of Collier County, the Holocaust Museum and Jewish War Veterans.

ENDOWMENT FUNDS

In 2000 the first Scholar-in-Residence week-end took place, featuring Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. It was made possible by the Shirley and Henry Kraus Scholar-in-Residence Endowment Fund. This program is a well-attended yearly event.

Other endowment funds include:

Ruth and Herbert Abramson Endowment Fund

YOUTH GROUP

The first Youth Group was started in 1973, with Dr. Joel Fried, psychologist with the Collier County Mental Health Association, and his wife, Ellie, as consultants. After periodic reincarnations, the Youth Group is finally a stable youth-oriented arm of the Temple. The members of NAWTY, the older group, conduct Friday night services from time to time.

PRESCHOOL

The preschool, under the direction of Nancy Ross, who was also the Religious School Director, was approved as an entity in April 1989 and had its first sessions beginning August 7, 1990. In February 1991 there was an enrollment of 11; in August 1997 there were 50 and as of May 2012 the enrollment was 80. Director Seyla Cohen has instituted an innovative program, including the new Reading Room. There is a summer camp program. Shalom Preschool is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

SISTERHOOD

During the “homeless” period when Friday night services were held at various venues, Sisterhood was busy fundraising for the time when we would have a building and funds would be needed to equip a kitchen. Community suppers, the forerunners of the Food Fair, held at St. Anne’s parish hall started in 1972 as our most popular and productive fundraiser, and continued for the 18 years of the Food Fair. There were break-the-fasts, Seders, rummage sales, book-of-life cards, fund raising luncheons, and other events. When the small building was a reality, so were the funds for the kitchen.

Sisterhood has continued to provide many of the other needs of the Temple, donating over \$75,000.00 to the original building, and \$50,000.00 to Shalom 2000. Sisterhood supports the Religious School and the Youth Group in many ways, including supplying the \$5,000.00 necessary to start the Religious School Enrichment Fund and the \$5,000.00 necessary to start the Youth Activities Fund. In 2003 Sisterhood donated \$30,000.00 to start an endowment fund for Religious School Scholarships and its total donations to

On November 27, 1989 the Architectural Plans and Model of the new Temple Shalom to be erected at 4630 Pine Ridge Road were presented to the members of the Temple. Murray Hendel was chair of the Steering Committee, which raised \$1,500,000.00 of the funds necessary to build the new Temple.

In April, 1989, when Irving Berzon was president for the second time, he placed the remaining responsibilities in the hands of the Executive Committee, consisting of himself, Martin Millender, Vice President; Mel Rubinstein, Vice President; and Seymour Sekuler, Treasurer. Under their guidance the present Temple Shalom was built. The ground breaking took place on February 28, 1989, at which point the slab was already in place. The first service was held on November 8, 1991, when there was a membership of 375 units. The dedication was in March, 1992, with Corban Wyant, publisher of the Naples Daily News, as featured speaker.

When it became apparent that there was insufficient space to house our growing religious school and preschool, in 1998, President Allen Solomon appointed Sandy Stone and John Woog, co-chairs of a committee that would later be known as Shalom 2000, to raise funds to build a wing to house a Learning Center. Under the able supervision of General Bernard Weiss, and later Steve Aaronson, as well as Daniel Spintman, David Pendergast, and Dr. John Little, the addition was completed. Connie Mansfield became president in April 2000, in time to oversee construction of the Shalom 2000 addition, which was dedicated in November 2001. A weekend celebration was chaired by Veora and Dr. John Little, with Russell Silverman, UAHC Chairman, guest speaker.

CLERGY AND CANTORS

From the time the Jewish Community Center of Collier County was established in 1962 until 1972, lay leaders conducted services, with the assistance from time to time of a volunteer cantor.

From 1972 to 1974, Rabbi Stanley Relkin, an ordained Reform rabbi, was our volunteer rabbi and a member of the Naples Ministerial Association. He participated in area ecumenical services, and officiated at the first Jewish wedding in Naples -- Judi Dinaburg to Charles Wallowitz, at the Beach Club Hotel, as well the first baby naming – his daughter, Jennifer Relkin.

From 1974 until 1977 lay leaders conducted services and ordained rabbis

and cantors were hired for the High Holy Days. In 1977 Rabbi Abraham Shusterman, Rabbi Emeritus of Bar Zion Congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, became our first paid rabbi. He was very active in the community, an important member of the Ministerial Association, and was known by the Naples clergy as "Father Abraham."

In 1983 when Rabbi Shusterman retired as rabbi of Temple Shalom, Mark Golub became our rabbi, and he served for the two years of his contract, as did Rabbi Alan Tufts for two years, then Rabbi Seth Philips for two years. In the intervals when we were without a full time rabbi, Rabbi Shusterman or lay leaders filled in for Shabbat services and Rabbi Shusterman or other paid rabbis were hired for High Holy Day services.

Rabbi Phillips left to become a Navy chaplain in 1991, at a time when we were on suspension from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. We tried for more than a year to find a rabbi without the assistance of a panel from CCAR, but were unsuccessful. After we made arrangements to become reinstated, we received a panel of Reform rabbis who were available. By the High Holy Days of 1993, Rabbi James Perman was rabbi of Temple Shalom. In 1999, Rabbi Daniel Sherman became Assistant Rabbi and in 2001 Associate Rabbi.

On June 30, 2006 Rabbi James Perman retired and became Rabbi Emeritus. At the same time Rabbi Daniel Sherman left for his own pulpit. On July 1, 2006 Rabbi Brad Bloom became our Senior Rabbi and Rabbi Baht Yameen Weiss became our Assistant Rabbi. On July 1, 2008, Rabbi Weiss became Associate Rabbi.

Rabbi Bloom served two and a half years of this 3 year contract and was replaced by Rabbi Emeritus James Perman, who agreed to serve as Interim Senior Rabbi until a replacement Rabbi was engaged. Rabbi Adam Miller became our Rabbi on July 1, 2010.

Over the years our Cantorial spot has been filled by Leo Spiegel, Wilfred Birnbaum, Lillian Rothchild, Hari Jacobsen, Invested Cantor Pamela Trimble, and Anne Newman, as well as cantors hired for the High Holy Days when we were without a Cantor or Cantorial soloist. On July 1, 2010 Invested Cantor Donna Azu replaced the Cantorial soloist and the Associate Rabbi.

TORAHS

In 1967 our first Torah was donated by Avrum Chudnow and his family, in appreciation of the community's forming a minyan to say kaddish on the yarzeit of their brother. They were not casual visitors or tourists as some people thought. Their company had built and was then in the process of building in Naples and in Ft. Myers. Our second Torah was a Torah dedicated to the survivors of the holocaust: written in 1874 and saved from a synagogue in Budin in der Egar in Czechoslovakia. It was presented by Julius and Anne Harris at Shabbat services on February 14, 1979. The third Torah in memory of George Drutz by his wife and children was dedicated in November 1985. The fourth Torah was a gift to Temple Shalom in the early 1990's from a group of members brought together by Jack Ward and Allen Solomon. The fifth Torah was donated by Michael Rubner in memory of his wife, Audrey Rubner and his parents, Maurice and Eva Edith Rubner, and dedicated at Simchat Torah serve on October 21, 2011.

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

In 1972, President Joseph Weinfeld, who felt empowered by the by-laws to do so, started our Religious School, over the objection of most other members of the Board of Directors, who complained that they "had done it before." The by-laws stated part of the congregation's mission is to provide for the religious education of the children. The original enrollment was 8 children. Eugene Linz was appointed Director of the Religious School, in which volunteer position he served until his 80th birthday in 1981. He conducted the first Chanukah service on December 1, 1972. There were 75 people present and the children participated.

Gene Linz also taught Hebrew and conducted a bar mitzvah group in 1973 -- the first in Naples. At that time there were 17 children in the Religious School. The same year at Chanukah services, Fran Gilman and the Freschels presented a small Torah to the children of the congregation.

After the small Temple was built in 1975, there were 19 children in the Religious School; at the beginning of 1987 -- 64; when this Temple was built in 1991 -- 75, and under the direction of Educator, Caren Plotkin, when the Learning Center was dedicated - 222. As of May 2012 there were 200 students.