

**Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel's  
Legacy Heritage Innovation Project**



**Mid-Year Report to  
The Board of Directors  
December 2006 – Kislev 5767**

**Promoting Conservation & Alternative and Renewable Energy**

BEKI's project to promote Conservation & Alternative and Renewable Energy is a campaign to create new and enhanced informal settings for family-based education to explore and apply the *mitzva* of *bal-tashhit* and related *mitzvot* in the realm of energy consumption and conservation. It will create a culture of conservation at the synagogue and home as an expression of Jewish living based on tradition and contemporary priorities. It will transform and enhance the way the synagogue works by bringing people together in new ways for a shared goal.

**Elaboration**

The project is a mechanism to bring participants of our various committees (e.g., Social Action Tiqun Olam Committee, House Committee, Religious School, Youth Commission) and leadership groups together in a new *mitzva*-based project and transform the way these groups interact, enhancing our effectiveness and furthering a “big-picture” understanding of our efforts.

This project is bringing together diverse interest groups of the synagogue community in a common project to install a photovoltaic (PV) array on the synagogue roof, to learn and teach about feasible solar applications and energy conservation, to understand the *mitzva* areas implicated and ethical concerns addressed in the project, and to share the practical experience with others. It is creating a mechanism for “day school” and “religious school”

families to learn and participate equally, helping to bridge these two groups. **Each member of the synagogue, and each member of a household**, can be involved in learning and implementing a program to reduce energy consumption, adopt renewable and clean energy sources, and understand the *halakhic*, ritual and religious implications of the project, at the shul and at home. A solar installation is a symbolic, hands-on and “concrete” centerpiece of this project.

The project is making the Congregation a more responsible urban citizen and reduce its reliance on the electric grid. It is providing opportunities for people not previously engaged in our family-based activities, and connects home and synagogue through the performance of *mitzvot* that apply to both locales, through hands-on projects, learning and powerful symbols.

## Program Elements

### Installation of Photovoltaic Array

*Done:* A 10,500 watt photovoltaic array was installed on the roof of our classroom wing in August and September 2006. Over 240 people<sup>1</sup> were involved in the physical installation and fundraising for this array, including one new member who found the synagogue through this project, and several non-members who become first-time (or one-time) donors.



The installation generated a lot of interest, from the Garinim Montessori Preschool students who heard the workers installing the panels in the roof above their heads, to congregations in New England and the NY Metro Area, where our project has been mentioned. The project has received significant press attention, including publication in the following media.

- [Hannukah in the Age of Oil](#), (Video) *New Haven Independent*, 16 December 2006<sup>2</sup>
- [Innovative ways to cut heating and cooling costs](#), (Video) by Kent Pierce, *WTNH Channel 8 News*, 5 September 2006
- BEKI Running Clean and Green, *ShalomNewHaven*, September 2006, p. 10
- [Rabbi on the Roof](#), by Allan Appel, *New Haven Independent*, 3 August 2006
- [A Letter from Tsvi Benson-Tilsen](#), *BEKI Bulletin*, February 2006
- [The sun will shine on BEKI bar mitzva](#), by Howard Blas, *Connecticut Jewish Ledger*, 6 January 2006
- [A Higher Power](#), *New Haven Independent*, 19 December 2005
- [Student Power](#), *SmartPower*, December 2005
- [Stemming the Tide](#), by Liz Galst, *Forward* (English), 4 November 2005

Because of delays in the utility company's installation of a compatible meter, several more months will be needed before we will have the retrospective data to properly evaluate the system's output. We estimate that the PV system will reduce our synagogue's 2007 electric bill by at least \$2,800 and possibly as much as \$4,000. The installation process was a learning experience as well for the local utility employees, who, as a result of their experience with this installation, will be better able to serve other customers.



The array has also received much attention in our internal publications (*BEKI Bulletin*; BEKI Happenings weekly email; BEKI website at [www.beki.org/ecology/energy.html](http://www.beki.org/ecology/energy.html)) and Divrei Torah (some of which are linked on the website). Most of our members are aware of it and several have made inquiries

with local vendors and are considering their own home or business installations.

*Future Plans:* This installation leaves two paths for expansion. First, and most simply, the current inverter and wiring could accommodate an additional 2,000 watts. This could be accomplished by expanding the mounting rack and adding eight additional panels. Second, the BEKI roof has room for parallel systems up to eight times the current installation; in other words, we have room to add one or more of the same system.

A Sunday noon “inauguration” is to take place on 4 February 2007, tying in to the general environmental and renewable resource theme of Tu BeShevat. This will be a twenty-minute event that will “catch” the Religious School and MAKOM at BEKI families after classes. A photo or video/PowerPoint presentation is envisioned but has not yet been created. Some photos and information appear on the BEKI website.

A local church leader who saw a TV report on the system called and came for a roof-top tour. Another church leader from the Hartford area called for information and hopes to visit in the spring. While our current project is not focusing on outreach beyond our extended synagogue community, we recognize many opportunities to share our experiences with local synagogues, churches, mosques and other institutions. Such outreach has the potential to strengthen the commitment of our members to their ideals and institution and to further our project mission of promoting Conservation & Alternative and Renewable Energy.



### **Or Hadash – New Lights**

*Done:* Much of the incandescent lighting has been replaced by compact fluorescent (CFL) and light emitting diode (LED) bulbs. This has included twenty-eight illuminated exit sign bulbs (saving about \$200 per year in electric use)<sup>3</sup>; 250 large memorial tablet bulbs; 600 miniature memorial tablet bulbs; the sanctuary menorah; the sukka; and several bulbs in other public spaces such as washrooms.



The illuminated exit signs were changed with the help of parents with children or single adults, who spoke about the religious significance of conservation and their own experiences as the bulbs were changed throughout the building. These people either volunteered to help or were invited “randomly” following another activity such as a class or service. It was a simple activity

that parents did with children, or that adults or youth could tell their parents, children, and siblings about (“we did something weird today after class”). The memorial tablet bulbs were screwed in by a mixture of adults and children as well. Thirty people were involved in bulb selection or installation.

Our member electrician, after consulting with the Renovations Chairperson, President, office and custodial staff (three people), daycare staff (one non-member and one member), preschool (Garinim) staff (two members), and rabbi, changed the lighting system in three entryways and the parking lot timers. Consultation was necessary to insure that the efficiency measures would not negatively impact these users, and constituted another opportunity to discuss the impetus and meaning of these changes with them in an informal context. These changes will reduce our electric use by at least \$500 per year. These changes are pointed out to members in our publications and by involved members to passers-by.

Our Shabbat custodian worked with the rabbi and qiddush servers to identify redundant or unneeded sanctuary lights that can be left off without notice on Shabbat mornings. This includes two rows of six 120 watt lights that shine on the windows of this room which receives a lot of natural light. The window illumination served no purpose during the day but was done in the past simply because the custodian or volunteer was directed to “turn on all the lights.” Now some switches are marked to be used only at night. Savings: \$60 per year. One member commented, “I turned my porch light off. There is a street light there now anyway so, I don’t need it.”<sup>4</sup>

In this same period, we completed our lobby renovations (which were planned before the Legacy Heritage Innovation Project). The new efficient electric lighting, as well as the advantage taken of natural lighting, are included in the conversations about lighting efficiency.

The use of CFL and LED bulbs has been promoted in Divrei Torah and the various synagogue publications. During Sukkot, three varieties of CFL bulbs were displayed in Moishe’s Place (a.k.a. the Moishe Schnitman Memorial Sukka) and were commented upon and discussed during the Festival and Hol HaMoed services and other programs held there. The theme of conservation fit naturally with the imagery and symbolism of

Sukkot. While hundreds of people saw the bulbs, at least 40 were involved in conversations about them in the sukka.

*Future Plans:* The remaining incandescent lights will be targeted and replaced with CFLs. Some applications await the development of better alternatives. The promotion of CFL lighting and conservation will continue in our publications and other forums. CFL or C7 LED bulbs may be included in this year's Purim baskets, distributed to hundreds of households in our area. Bulbs may be displayed at a contemplated conservation and energy fair. There is continuing discussion over whether it is better to directly provide CFL bulbs to our families, or to show people how to buy them locally, or to do both.

### **Cool the Demand**

*Done:* Most refrigerators over 15 years old should be replaced, even if they work well. We replaced the old small unit in the upstairs kitchenette with a modern EnergyStar unit. We discarded an underutilized large old unit in the cemetery office. Electric Savings: \$90 per year. The building committee, qiddush committee and officers were involved in the discussion. Volunteers of the renovations committee took care of the disposal (as they had a *dumpster*).

*Future Plans:* Our kitchen has a large commercial refrigerator that is at least 20 years old. It is likely that replacing it would provide a fast payback. We will need to analyze its energy use and determine the rate of return on its replacement with a modern efficient unit. The need to do this has been discussed by the directors (October 2006) but there is not yet a timetable for analysis and remedy. This will have to be discussed thoroughly with the Qiddush Committee, as it will need to be prioritized as part of their plan for kitchen renovation, and with the Sisterhood, the donor of the original unit and potential funder of its replacement. During such discussions, all involved will have an opportunity to learn about the religious and efficiency issues involved in refrigeration, and will also interact in new ways with other synagogue volunteers.

## Articles & Divrei Torah on Shabbat, Web Site, Bulletin, TV

Divrei Torah and live presentations, written articles and short pieces have been distributed through the synagogue's channels and the public media. Selections of Divrei Torah are available at [www.beki.org/ecology/energy.html](http://www.beki.org/ecology/energy.html) (bottom). Back issues of the BEKI *Bulletin* are available at [www.beki.org/newsindex.html](http://www.beki.org/newsindex.html); an article on some aspect of the initiative has appeared in almost every issue. Weekly "BEKI Happenings" email messages, distributed to 253 member email boxes and 80 non-member boxes, provide bite-size ideas for families.<sup>5</sup>

### Table Talk

*Continuing:* The family Shabbat dinner table, and the synagogue communal dinner hall, are a natural and central locus for Jewish learning and sharing. As Rabbi Shimon said (Avot 3:4): "Three who dine at a table and exchange words of Torah are considered as having eaten at God's table...." Each week, an aspect of the project has been discussed at the Shabbat dinner table at the Benson & Tilsen Residence, or their hosts, or at the synagogue communal table. This may begin as an update on the PV system, or a conversation about the merits of CF bulbs, or an association with the *parasha* ("Why did the angels in *parashat VaYetsei* go up the ladder before going down? They were climbing up to install CF bulbs"). "Table Talk" will have involved over 100 individuals of all ages by January 2007.

This informal and intimate setting has provided many opportunities for gaining insights into the concerns, barriers, progress and effectiveness of the program. These conversations have been a primary source of the "Frequently Asked Questions" material under development for printed and email distribution (e.g. January 2007 BEKI Bulletin [www.beki.org/bulletin/buljan07.pdf](http://www.beki.org/bulletin/buljan07.pdf)), particularly with respect to technical questions about residential solar and CF bulb options.

*Future Plans:* A set of home-study or home-conversation guides for Shabbat evening can be assembled and distributed by email, at religious school, or through regular mailings.

## **Retreat or Shabbaton**

*Future Plans:* Our initial schedule included presenting a Shabbaton for the congregation. A neighboring congregation invited us to jointly hold a Shabbaton retreat at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in December. This was met with some enthusiasm by our members. Due to logistic obstacles, we have had to search for new partners and a new date for the Shabbaton retreat. If we are able to find a date in the spring, we will have a retreat at Isabella Freedman; if not, we will have a Shabbaton at the synagogue. While these options are not exclusive of one another, our thinking is to do one this year, and another next year.

## **Conservation & Alternative and Renewable Energy Fair**

*Future Plans:* Numerous programming ideas and suggestions have emerged from the congregation after our initial team created an outline of the project. Among the most practical suggestions was to hold a Conservation & Alternative and Renewable Energy Fair. A Sunday fair would be an opportunity for merchants and vendors to communicate directly with the community, to demonstrate products and showcase the Congregation's PV system and other efforts, and to display educational material such as posters and multi-media presentations that are not suitable for postal or email mass distribution. This fair could be done in conjunction with Tu BeShevat or Sukkot in 2007 or 2008 as a stand-alone event or as part of a Shabbaton weekend. It could also serve as a forum for some groups within the Congregation to highlight their own particular efforts (e.g., Religious School curriculum, Tiqun Olam Social Action projects) with the aim of enhancing appreciation and communication. We have identified two Connecticut-based organizations to help us with this event.

## **Integrated Educational Material for Family Education Structure**

Creating an integrated "curriculum" for family education through the various existing programs for youth and adults is a key program goal. While the Congregation has a wealth of existing family education vehicles, the integration is poor, representing a lost

opportunity for effective education and optimal deployment of resources. The challenge we face is in finding a way to create a higher level of integration while maintaining the positive character of our primarily volunteer and parent-driven programs and efficiently deploying, or obtaining, professional curriculum and administrative guidance.

The existing youth and family education programs at BEKI – the Children’s Shabbat Havura for Preschoolers, the K-2 Kehila, the Junior Congregation, Cosmic Conversations, Religious School, Garinim Montessori Preschool, Benei Mitzva Program, MAKOM at BEKI (high school), Kadima and USY – are believed to be of fair to very good quality as individual programs, and in most cases have largely or wholly embraced the family education model. But the overall coordination of the content of these programs is lacking.

The Conservation & Alternative and Renewable Energy concepts were included in the Yamim Noraim High Holy Day children’s programs. High Holy Day programs were designed by a team of staff and volunteers, unlike weekly programs which are prepared by volunteers with minimal staff guidance. The concepts were included only sporadically in the programs in the autumn.

Steps toward enhancing the level of coordination include staff discussions (Kempton & Tilsen); discussion with a few key volunteer leaders (Benson; Lovett-Graff; officers); the search for a volunteer to insure that each weekly program plan gets written up and placed in the resource cabinet for future use; an open parents meeting to discuss the CARE theme and the question of better integrating the programs (in December or January).

The Religious School (BRS) has advanced in the project by discussion in three faculty meetings (Summer and Autumn 2006). The faculty understands the concept and all of the teachers have applied their own research and creative skills to collect and develop material for their classes consistent with the BRS curriculum. This period of development is partially guided by the coordinating efforts of the Principal (Kempton), who also supplies some material to the teachers. The School has also planned theme days that include parental involvement. The students will be directing their *tsedaqa* collection to provide solar cookers for women in Darfur.

Only one of the BRS faculty members (along with Kempton and Tilsen) is a leader of Shabbat children and family programs. That connection is a natural point for communication and coordination. Thought is being given to ways to advance that coordination, as well as to increase the level of participation of BRS children and adults in Shabbat programs. While only a little progress can reported toward this goal, there is a growing awareness and appreciation of the extent to which we can improve our programs by working in this direction.

## **Other measures**

Done: Several brief presentations have been made to the Board of Directors and somewhat more detailed progress reports have been given at Executive Board meetings. John Weiser (of Broady Weiser Burns [www.brodyweiser.com](http://www.brodyweiser.com)), a consultant to non-profits, is providing half-day retreats and consultation<sup>6</sup> to the synagogue officers and directors, focusing in part on the dynamics of systemic change with specific reference to this project and the materials distributed by Legacy Heritage. These retreats and consultation are co-funded by the Eder Leadership Grants of the Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven.

A prototype “Solar Menora” was created by two prospective members and a veteran member<sup>7</sup> and was mounted on the Eastern entrance shortly before Hanuka. The Solar Menora is simply but strikingly attractive in its setting and is proving a major conversation starter.

An “Eating Locally Workshop” was presented on a Sunday morning in October by Shabbat program leader for a dozen participants. While not initiated as part of the present project, the workshop was used as an opportunity to increase awareness of the project. An environmental message with a rabbinic quotation was included as a footer on the redesigned synagogue stationery:



85 Harrison Street, New Haven, CT 06515-1724 • (203) 389-2108 • Fax (203) 389-5899 • e-mail: [office@beki.org](mailto:office@beki.org) • [www.beki.org](http://www.beki.org)

Promoting alternative energy & conservation as a Jewish value

*Do not spoil and destroy My world, for if you do, no one will come after you to repair it* [Qohelet Rabba 7:13]

A similar but playful message (front, back below) was included on the T-Shirts created in response to a basketball challenge<sup>8</sup> from a local synagogue:



Congregation  
Beth El-Keser Israel's

## New Haven Mavens

*The Renewable Energy Basketball Team*

וְקוֹנֵי ה' יִחַלְיפוּ כֹחַ יִעֲלוּ אֶבֶר כְּנִשְׁרִים יִרְצוּ וְלֹא יִיָּגְעוּ וְלֹא יִלְכוּ וְלֹא יִיָּעֲפוּ:  
They who trust in the Lord shall renew their energy...

They shall run and not be weary.

*Isaiah 40:31*

*Now Being Prepared:* A BRS poster or T-Shirt contest will be held during the year. Later, a Congregation-wide contest will be held.

### Evaluation Process

The evaluation process has benefited by the guidance of Rena Cheskis-Gold, Joy Kaufman, and Michael Ben-Avie. Morris Bell has also consulted. In addition to satisfying the requirements of the granting agency, the Legacy Heritage Foundation, we are attempting to implement an evaluation procedure that will help us determine what is, and what is not, effective in achieving our objectives, and that will be of some value to other congregations who may follow a similar path. We aim to develop data that will guide our continuing efforts in this campaign.

We initially hoped for a weather balloon, but due to the level of expertise of our evaluation team, which Rena is leading, we are getting a fully equipped space station.

Along the way, we have collected many comments and suggestions. Examples: "I've been following this on your website.... My husband is Senior Attorney at CT Fund for the Environment.... I'd love to be able to see and show what your installation looks like."<sup>9</sup> "I liked what [Rabbi Tilsen] said at Kol Nidre...we have all CFL in our house and now I drive a Prius. We were doing this and now I understand the Jewish part."<sup>10</sup> "David & Mary were at a bar mitzva in New Jersey and the rabbi mentioned BEKI's solar and energy projects.

Where can we get those lightbulbs locally?”<sup>11</sup> “Stan and I are getting all CF bulbs now.”<sup>12</sup> “I bought a dozen ‘green’ bulbs, and have replaced most of the incandescent bulbs that are on a lot in my home.”<sup>13</sup> “[I] saw you on YouTube....wow! Be careful on the roof...of course, Akiba did fine up there.”<sup>14</sup>

## Observations

This ambitious project has been embraced with enthusiasm in our community. We are working to consider and incorporate more creativity from people other than the original project team than was originally foreseen. Our beginning question, “How do we create, gather and deliver” our “curriculum” to our families has been supplemented if not replaced with “how do we



collect, sort, organize, coordinate and share” the program ideas and curriculum supplied by our participants. This increases our options and opportunities while adding complexity to the planning process and probably ultimately to the scope of the project as well; the need to maintain focus, and integration, itself a project goal, has become all the more apparent. We have numerous encouraging indications that the ideas and practices promoted in this project are having an impact on the knowledge, attitude and practice of our constituent families; this impact has yet to be quantified. Since the program began, our members have undertaken significant complementary efforts in their places of work, including the Jewish Community Relations Council<sup>15</sup> and the Department of Jewish Education,<sup>16</sup> as well as a private properties owner/manager.<sup>17</sup> This adds synergy on a communal scale, and reinforces our efforts. We have also been able to reach most or all of our members and supporters at least once, and most members multiple times, with some facet of the project, including hands-on or small-group activities. Actual physical changes in our facility are also plainly visible as well as small or symbolic reminders. The challenge of better integrating our existing family education programs appears to be a substantial and largely achievable goal.

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<sup>1</sup> List available as Rakefet printout of donors and Rabbi's list of laborers.

<sup>2</sup> The number of views on youtube.com does not include the vast majority of views, which are from the newhavenindependent.org article and are not counted by youtube.com.

<sup>3</sup> Cost of bulbs and parts: \$225. Labor is donated. This represents an 89% rate of return (200/225).

<sup>4</sup> Jay Brown, September 2006

<sup>5</sup> Examples: 19 Oct 2006: "**Solar & Conservation Update: Need Good Bulbs Cheap?** United Illuminating (UI) customers are entitled to subsidized high-efficiency light bulbs through <http://www.energyfederation.org/ui> . For an expanded selection of quality high efficiency bulbs and other items, see <http://www.efi.org> ." 13 October 2006: "**Solar & Conservation Update:** Installation of the Solar Array is complete. All forty-eight panels have been installed and will generate up to 10,500 Watts. The system has been tested, and it works. Images are available at [www.beki.org/ecology/energy.html](http://www.beki.org/ecology/energy.html) .

**Unplug your TV and turn off your computer monitor.** Even in "sleep mode," LCD monitors use several Watts, and the older CRT monitors use a lot of power. For overnight, Shabbat or vacations, at least, push the "off" button altogether. Most TVs use electricity even when "off"; we suggest unplugging them when you are away.

News reports suggest electric rates in our area may rise 40% to 50% in 2007. Conserving energy is a Jewish value. Now is a good time to find ways to reduce waste and increase efficiency in your home, office or synagogue.

**Need Good Bulbs Cheap?** United Illuminating (UI) customers are entitled to subsidized high-efficiency light bulbs through <http://www.energyfederation.org/ui> . For an expanded selection of quality high efficiency bulbs and other items, see <http://www.efi.org> ." 15 December 2006: "Enjoy BEKI's prototype Solar LED Hanuka Menora mounted at the Sachs East Entrance. This menora was created by Jason Ross and Seth Pauker *et al.* to remind us that if we are creative we can stretch our fuel supply, recreating our own miracle of the cruse of oil in the ancient Temple and presenting Hanuka in a new light.

Watch Rabbi Tilsen's message "The Miracle of Hanuka" at [www.newhavenindependent.org](http://www.newhavenindependent.org) (with thanks to Paul Bass and Michael Stern). ... If you are using an electric menora for ornamental purposes, we highly recommend using new high efficiency long-life cool-burning LED candelabra (C7) bulbs available at retailers such as <http://www.sivalinc.com/product.cfm?id=289> . The lights look very bright and intense but are easy on the eyes. These bulbs also make excellent "nightlights" and fit common household (indoor) nightlight fixtures. These bulbs cost about \$1.75 individually or \$1.25 in bulk and last on average 400 years if you use them only during Hanuka. Now *that* is a miracle."

<sup>6</sup> On 3 December 2006 (officers); March 2007 (directors); May 2007 (directors); possibly one additional date for officers.

<sup>7</sup> Jason Ross, Adam Glass and Seth Pauker, with input from several others.

<sup>8</sup> BEKI's *New Haven Mavens* vs. The Westville Synagogue *Warriors* (a.k.a. *Westvillains*) at the JCC of Greater New Haven.

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Dittes, email 07 Sept 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Marc Weitzman, comment at Avni-Singer shiva minyan, 18 October 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Betty Levy, schmooze following morning minyan, 1 November 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Paula Hyman, following Rabbi's *parashat* Noah devar Torah on topic.

<sup>13</sup> Rhoda Zahler, email 30 Nov 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Herb Brockman, email 16 Dec 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Lauri Lowell, JCRC, has made efforts to collaborate with our efforts in the JCRC's local campaign for efficient lighting.

<sup>16</sup> Rabbi Joel Hoffman has published *Divrei Torah* locally in relation to our project and promoting its ideas to our larger Jewish community.

<sup>17</sup> David Goldblum has begun consideration of replicating BEKI's PV system on a very large scale on commercial properties his firm manages or owns. He and his family have participated in several facets of our program.