



## Rabbi Tilsen's Annual Report Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel 30 June 2015 – 13 Tamuz 5775



This summer marks the completion of my *twenty-second* year (1993-present) as Rabbi of Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel. The Congregation's previous longest-serving full-time rabbi was Rabbi Andrew Klein (at right), of blessed memory, who served from 1951 until his death in 1967, although Rabbi Aaron Shuchatowitz served B'nai Israel (predecessor of Beth El) in an ad hoc capacity for twenty-five years.



This past year has been one of continuing development for our Congregation. Here are *some* of the highlights of the year. For a more extensive and detailed account, request a copy of the annual reports of the Religious School, Youth Groups, Cemetery Association, Finance Committee, various other committees and Sisterhood from the office.

### Membership

This past year (Fiscal Year 2015, or FY15, that is, 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2015) we were saddened by the deaths of our beloved members Paul Goodwin, Marge Barnett, Harriet Meisel, Daniel Michael, Sally Abramovitz, Bill Hallo, and Margot Roten.



We also mourned the passing of members of the *extended* BEKI family, Dominic Palumbo, Mendel Lazar, Fruma Ginsburgh, Ronald Labowe, M. Riff, Chester Tomkins, Tillie Hausler, Ethel Elfman, Miriam Mermelstein, Ida Fidler, Mike Cooper, Mahmoud Ahmadi, Eunice Silverman, Blanche Sapadin, Rebecca Genn, Marvin Sachs, Elizabeth Mohr, Alan Lemkin, Cynthia Gimbel Baybick, Jean Berger, Sanford Kuvin, Anita Weinstein, Sheila Hennes Dubak, Jenna Bass, Irving Bashevkin and others.

Here are figures that describe membership trends. In FY13, we **set a new record with twenty-seven new membership units (households) joining** and **set a new record for net growth with ten new units**. This past year (FY15), **thirteen** households joined, resulting in a net increase of one unit, which is very "average" for BEKI in a climate where this result is viewed as a success.

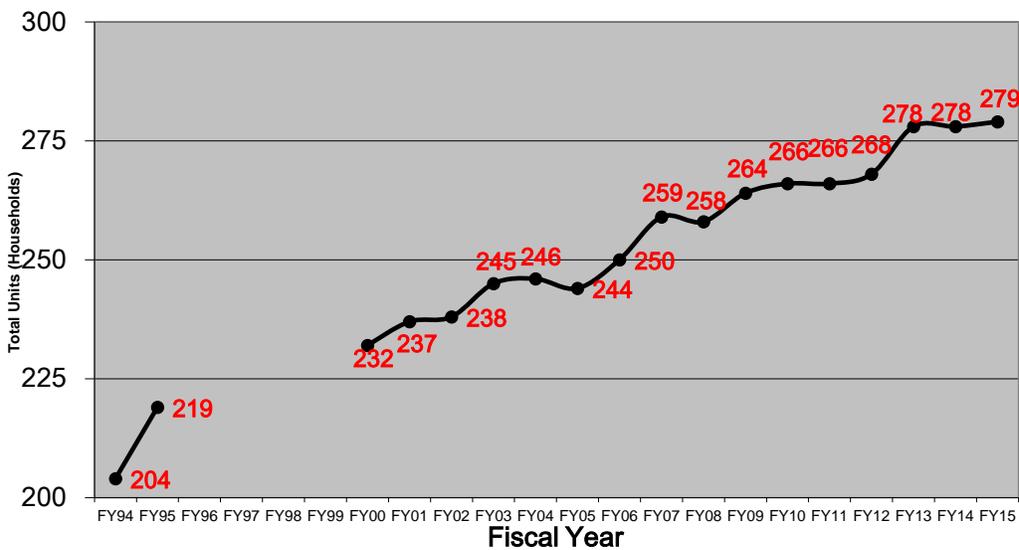
Most of our lost memberships were due to moving away (four) and death. Two households realized that another local congregation might work better for them, which

was balanced by two local households that came to a parallel conclusion and moved to BEKI.

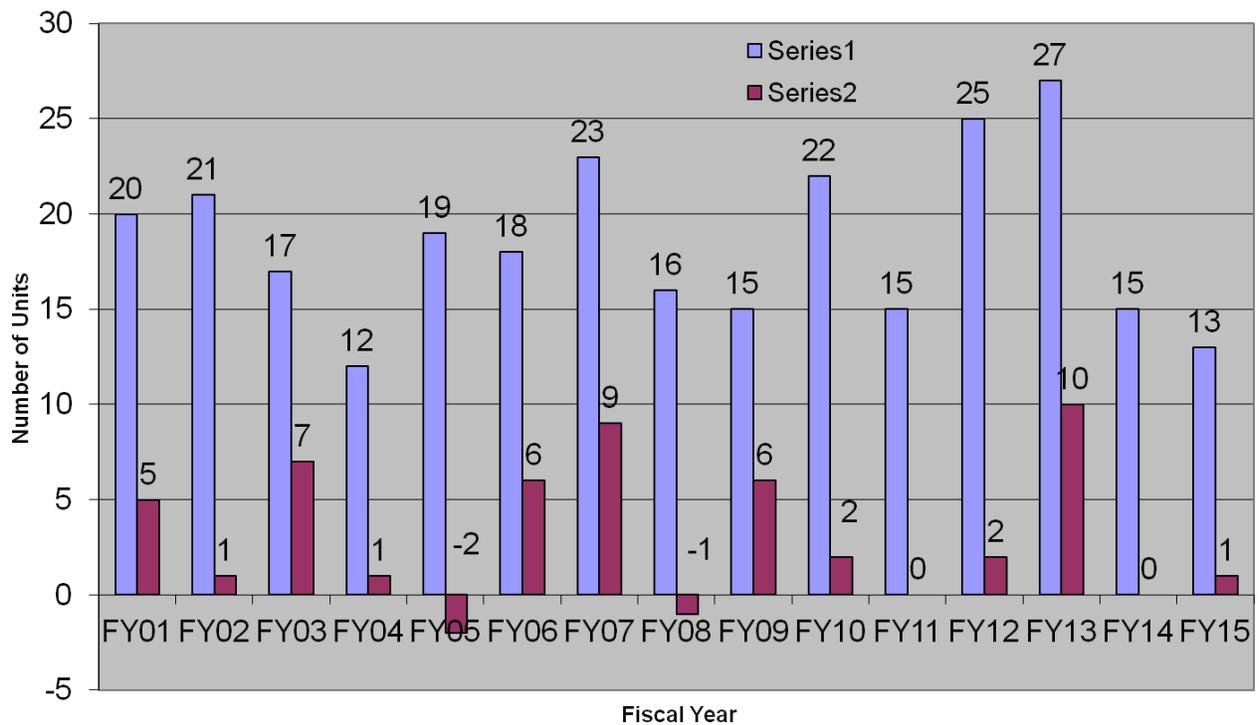
About ninety percent (90%) of our adult members joined the congregation in 1994 or later; stated differently, only one in ten of our adults have been members more than 20 years. This has a dramatic effect on our synagogue culture. Looking forward, we have reason to hope that this next year will be similar to the year concluded. We are aware of three families moving away this spring and summer (to NJ, FL and BC or AB).

What is the right size for BEKI? The Congregation could easily accommodate another 30 member units (10% growth) with only negligible additional expense or effort by staff. We have plenty of room in the classrooms and sanctuary. Our Treasurer assures us that we could find a way to manage the burden of additional income as well. So, bring a friend, expand your family.

**Total BEKI Membership (Units) Year-End (30 June)**



## Membership Growth by Year 2000-2015



The above charts show historic membership data.<sup>1</sup>

In September 1995, there were 213 formal members (“units” or households) on the books. As of 22 June 2015, **279** family or single members belong to BEKI. Although we welcome more new members each year than most other synagogues in New England, we have a high turn-over rate, mostly due to people moving away or dying. Our net growth, though modest, is impressive in the context of the demographics of our area. **BEKI is among the few congregations in our area with**



<sup>1</sup> These numbers may differ somewhat from those issued by our office or various committees during the year. Children who reach the age of majority are *not* counted as lost members unless they join as new adult members, in which case they get counted as both a new and dropped individuals, for no net change, but they are counted as a new unit. My figures count added members from the month they join. Deaths are counted as losses from the month of their death, but members who move away or otherwise notify us that they will resign are not counted as losses until the beginning of the next fiscal year. This means that we will begin the new fiscal year next week with several losses, according to this manner of accounting. Those losses will count in next year’s tally. Benei Mitzva are listed for the fiscal year; elsewhere, class size, calendar year, or academic year figures may be cited. The figures given here by fiscal year are especially helpful for comparing them with figures from previous years.

**a growing membership.** That said, it would be better if we could add 25 to 50 more families *net* in the next few years. Please encourage all adult Jews to join a synagogue community of their choice, such as Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel, as an expression of their Jewish identity and belonging to the Jewish People, and as a vehicle for social service, spiritual quest, intellectual and moral growth, socializing, and survival of the Jewish People.

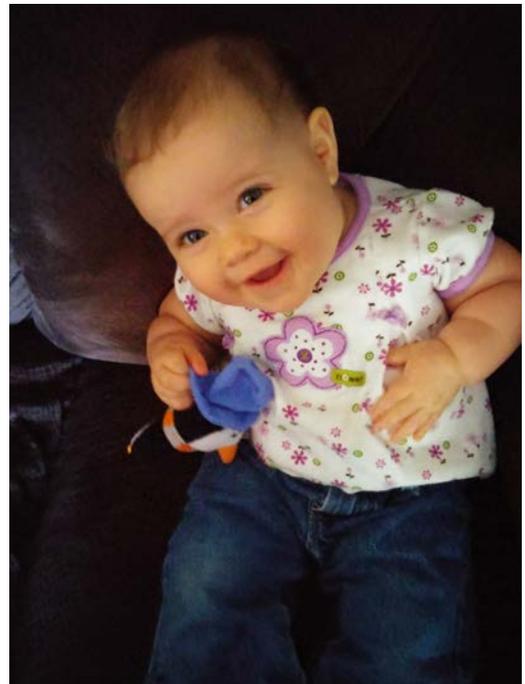


We were blessed with the birth or arrival of **Talia R. Serkin-Morgan, Mateo Cruz & Sasha Ratner** and a number of grandchildren of members, some of whom were noted in our *Bulletin*. Why do we have so many children if only a few are born each year? Most of the children in the Congregation were born *before* their parents joined. Thirteen children joined the congregation with their parents this year (2015), but about as many either moved away or grew up and went to yeshiva, college, military service, volunteer service, employment or other activities.

During the past twenty years, the number of children has grown from under 70 to over 200. Twelve youths became *benei mitzva* in celebrations at BEKI in FY15 (compared to seven last year and nine the prior year). Ten youths have reserved dates to celebrate bar- or bat-mitzva at BEKI in the new fiscal year.

It was my honor to convene and serve on the *beit din* (rabbinic court) overseeing the **gerut** (conversion) of several adults and numerous children from this and other synagogues. Of the adult Jewish members of our congregation, 12% are converts to Judaism.

I have served as an agent for several **gittin** (bills of divorce) for our members and for others in our area. While divorce is not publicly observed as a lifecycle event, it is by all accounts significant in the lives of our families and community. Minimally, those experiencing divorce deserve our support and friendship during what is most often a challenging transition.



Several members, including **Mila Pizer, Charlotte Krosnick, Ralph Friedman, Albert Friedman, Charlie Ludwig, Bud Volain, Gladys Lipkin, Al Barnett, Evelyn Benson, Baruch & Corinne Levine** and others live in The Towers, Coachman Square or other assisted-living facilities. All of these members appreciate visits, calls and cards from the community. In addition, several members of the extended BEKI family live in local assisted living and other institutional settings.

This positive membership trend is in part due to the efforts of **Mark Oppenheimer** (pictured), **Betsy Ratner, Ghis Palumbo**, and the Membership Network, and of course the new members themselves. Mark has undertaken to bring together members and friends through social media, which seems to have a substantial response; time will tell if it translates into more or happier members. Ivan Alvarez will be our Membership Czar next year. Most of all, thanks to you, our members, for creating a community that is attractive to so many of our neighbors.



We will continue to promote a “whole-life membership” initiative to encourage young adults to view synagogue membership as part of growing up and part of being Jewish. It is time to begin working to ensure every Jewish adult who grows up at BEKI sees synagogue membership as an adult responsibility beginning after high school. We want every Jew to belong to a synagogue their entire life.

The 2010 Greater New Haven Population Study shows that the adults in their 20s and 30s represent 0% (sic) of the New Haven area Jewish population. It looks like we’ve garnered a good share of that cohort. This year saw continuing efforts to involve this segment through the 20s-30s Havura, thanks to the initiative of **Miriam Benson** and the support of a number of program participants such as **Eva Landau** and **Will Auriemme**. It’s a nice way to bring people together and to help people locate their cohorts in the sea of members.

The number of formal members does not tell the whole story. There are many families or individuals who identify BEKI as “their” synagogue, even though they are not formally members. For at least some purposes, **we should think of BEKI as a “500+ family” congregation.**

Some belong to BEKI for historical reasons. **Jessie Claire Goodwin**, a bat mitzva celebrant last September, is a *sixth generation* BEKI member, whose ancestors were among the Congregation’s founders. **David Margolis** is a descendant of Keser Israel founders (on Bernice’s side). **Shayna Weinstein** (Andy & Paige’s daughter, a Past-President of USY) has Beth El ancestors going back to the beginning in 1892. Some come to BEKI because this Congregation best matches their religious orientation. Some come because BEKI is their “neighborhood” shul – 56% of our members live in the City of New Haven, and most of the remainder live in nearby Woodbridge (16%), Hamden (8%), Branford, Orange, West Haven and surrounding communities (figures from 2011). Some of our Woodbridge and Hamden members walk to shul on Shabbat. In fact, a good number of families have located to the BEKI neighborhoods specifically

so that they can be physically close to the synagogue and its community. Many enjoy the challenge of our diversity.

The framework of a traditional Masorti-Conservative philosophy and ritual provides support and definition in which the congregation can thrive, without having to continually face every contentious issue of ritual or creed. In some ways the Masorti-Conservative approach is most difficult to maintain, in part because of its sophistication and reliance on a high degree of education, much as democracy (done well) depends on an educated and involved citizenry. We are moderates, to the extreme, and it is a difficult balancing act. It turns out, though, that most people are concerned about the “quality of community” more than ideological correctness, so our adherence to a “good theory of Judaism” is only part of the basis for our relative success.

What are the keys to the BEKI success? Dedicated veteran members, who have kept the Congregation and its traditions alive; enthusiastic new members; volunteers, the likes of whom are not seen elsewhere; a tremendous diversity of skills: computer experts, engineers, decorators, sign hangers, Torah readers, bakers, planters, movers and shakers; a religious commitment to respecting each other whatever our educational or religious backgrounds and orientation; an appreciation of the importance of our heritage, and equally, a commitment to meeting the challenges of the coming decades. The Congregation enjoys excellent, dedicated leadership. We have the most awesome synagogue board.

## Staff



**Peggy Hackett** assumed the mantle of Office Manager at the beginning of FY04. Her strong organizational, personal and computer skills have made our administration both efficient and pleasant. Peggy has become a fixture of the Congregation. Many members have expressed appreciation for her prompt and courteous attention to their synagogue business. She is the rare individual who seems able to get along with almost everyone, keep her “head together” while attending to an onslaught of details in a busy office, and get it right.

**Ina Silverman** assumed the position of Principal of the BEKI Religious School in June 2008. Ina holds a degree in education, as well as a law degree. She is also an experienced teacher. She has been focussing on making our religious school a model of academic excellence. Ina is also our chief outreach coordinator for adults with special needs, and is heading our renewed efforts at programming especially for seniors.

**Clarence Bromell** continues to serve as the anchor for our building. He is conscientious, friendly and thoughtful. He works with members observing events with the aim of making their experience the best it can be. He goes beyond the call of duty. We are fortunate to have our building and events in his capable hands. I have visited other



congregations with smaller buildings and smaller memberships that have a whole crew of custodial and building workers doing what Clarence does largely by himself.

In addition, as of 2014, **Fred Ames** serves as our Shabbat custodian and helps out on special occasions.

## **Administration**

Acknowledging the volunteer effort in administering the Congregation would require two full pages. The Board of Directors and the Officers have invested a tremendous effort in operating this shul. Budgets, reports, programs – thousands of hours of dedicated volunteer effort. This is a busy place. During the past year, I received thousands of phone calls or messages and have sent many individual letters to Congregants and contacts. I have visited the local hospitals (Yale-New Haven, the hospital campus formerly known as St. Raphael's, Bridgeport and Milford) and other facilities about 20 times. I have attended hundreds of worship services and officiated at or attended many funerals, baby namings and *benei mitzva* observances. Working with Peggy, Ina, Clarence and Fred, enjoying the support of the officers and volunteers, and being blessed with a wonderful wife have made my job so much easier. I appreciate the understanding of Congregants for all of the things I do not do that I should or for my delays in responding to your needs and inquiries.

Thanks to officer **Yaron Lew's** initiative, for the second year the Congregation refrained from soliciting funds on Kol Nidre Night of Yom Kippur, replacing that drive with a pre-Holy Day direct Annual Appeal. Some members feel that the Kol Nidre appeal inserted a potential note of institutional self-interest or served as a distraction at one of the most sacred moments of the year. To those who feel the desire to act on the notion that "*teshuva* (repentance), *tefila* (prayer), and *tzedaqa* (synagogue dues or charity) avert the severity of the decree," the opportunity for all three remains on Yom Kippur and year-round. We accept pledge cards on Kol Nidre night from anyone who wishes to submit one. From an administrative standpoint, there is an advantage of knowing what our resources are earlier in the year so we can plan or adjust our course accordingly. The success of this effort came thanks to the response of our members and supporters.

This year the "Annual Campaign" has enabled the Congregation to operate on a higher level, and has continued to develop a "culture of giving" at BEKI. We are fortunate that **a generous majority of our members participated in the Annual Campaign**. This annual campaign is essential, as BEKI, typical of synagogues, receives only about 38% of its annual income from dues. Our ability to operate depends on the goodwill and generosity of Annual Campaign contributors. The success of the Campaign showed us that we can do it as well or better without intruding on Yom Kippur. In the upcoming year, an effort will be made to include more of our members in the campaign.

We are current on our mortgage, which was taken out to cover the replacement of the HVAC system and to fund building renovations. Our external debt is now about \$380,000 (compared to \$687,000 six years ago). Our operating income (and expenses)

have more than *doubled* since 1993, but adjusted for inflation we have kept our expenses in line and our dues have increased gradually for many years. By this measure, we are better managed than many European countries. However, we still have a structural deficit, which has not turned into actual deficits thanks only to unplanned good fortune.

Financial officers **Donna Levine** and **Steve Rudof** work with Peggy and the Board in tracking, analyzing and presenting our financial condition on an ongoing basis. Their work and that of the Finance Committee have been instrumental in enabling efficient and responsible operations.

A significant governance reorganization effort was conducted in a deliberate and thorough manner during the prior year, an initiative of (then) Vice-President **Andy Hirshfield** and director **Harold Birn**, with extensive and valuable consultation from **Rachel Light**. The board structure and governance process have been streamlined and modified to adopt the “best practices” for similar non-profits and in particular to meet the changing needs of our members. The original procedures were drawn up before the widespread adoption of the telephone; now that we have more ways to communicate, less in-person time is needed in meetings for routine business matters. The areas of responsibility of the Board and the Officers has been clarified and re-defined, so the time and effort of our directors can be employed most efficiently and meaningfully. The effort appears to have been successful.

## Major Gifts



BEKI is participating in the **Grinspoon Legacy Campaign**, to increase the synagogue’s endowments through estate planning, overseen by the [Jewish Foundation](#). **Donna Levine** (pictured with Sid Levine), **Carl Goldfield**, **Karen Kassap**, and **Alan Lovins** are leading this effort. The Legacy Campaign asks members and supporters to commit to making a gift or bequest through a will, life insurance, retirement account, or other estate planning vehicle. So far about 36 members have made formal commitments. BEKI received an incentive grant of \$15,000 as we met agreed-upon goals. If you have already made estate plans that include a legacy gift to BEKI, please let Donna ([sdisj@aol.com](mailto:sdisj@aol.com)) or another committee member know. This effort also serves to help us be mindful of expressing appreciation to past and future donors, and of the importance of honoring a legacy and of providing ongoing support to BEKI.

This year, we received legacy gifts from the estates of **Paul Goodwin**, **Margot Roten**, and another member, all of blessed memory.

Early in the fiscal year (i.e., last summer) we completed the \$80,000 **Windows 2014 Project** of window replacement and masonry repair. The largest contributions came

from a matching grant from the Jewish Federation and Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven and a gift from the **Borick Family** (LIATIS Foundation). The grant came thanks to the focused efforts of **Barbara Rader** to prepare a compelling grant application, and then of a team led by **Dennis Rader** to plan and oversee the construction project, which began in early June 2014. Our grantor (Federation & Foundation) wanted us to have a ceremonial recognition of the project, but that remains deferred as our project leaders, **Dennis & Barbara**, continue to recover from traumatic injury.

We enjoyed the fifth full distribution from the **Oscar & Irma Hamburger Memorial Fund** for Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel at the **Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven**. The Hamburger gift is **the largest single gift** in the history of the Congregation (even when adjusted for inflation).

In addition to the professional services of our member **Lisa Stanger** (the Director of the Jewish Foundation) and her staff, we have benefitted tremendously from the attention past-president **Donna Levine** has given to this bequest. Donna has also been instrumental in obtaining additional bequests.

Following the passing of member **George G. Posener** on Yom Kippur four years ago, his bequest to BEKI was added to the existing Posener Family funds. George wanted to make sure that we will remember him, and these funds help insure that we are constantly reminded of his philanthropy as well as his many other positive qualities. George is indeed missed.

We also call your attention to another fund, which may be suggestive of possibilities available to many of our members. **Rabbi Murray Levine** funded a charitable remainder annuity which will create the **Malka & Murray Levine Memorial Fund** for the Benefit of Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel. Rabbi Levine explained that he wanted to share some of his assets "with the Jewish institutions here in New Haven and at the same time to receive income" during his lifetime. He said, "BEKI is a responsible institution which will help guarantee Jewish values and Jewish continuity forever."



Rabbi Levine, a widower, also wished to memorialize his wife, Malka. "I wanted to guarantee and perpetuate the principles of Judaism that she lived during her lifetime." He will receive income from the Charitable Gift Annuity for the rest of his lifetime. Upon his death, the undistributed income and principal in the annuity will be used to establish the Malka and Murray Levine Memorial Fund for the Benefit of Congregation Beth El-Keser Israel. Rabbi Levine initiated this process in 2001 by establishing his first annuity. In subsequent years, he has added additional annuities for the benefit of the Congregation.

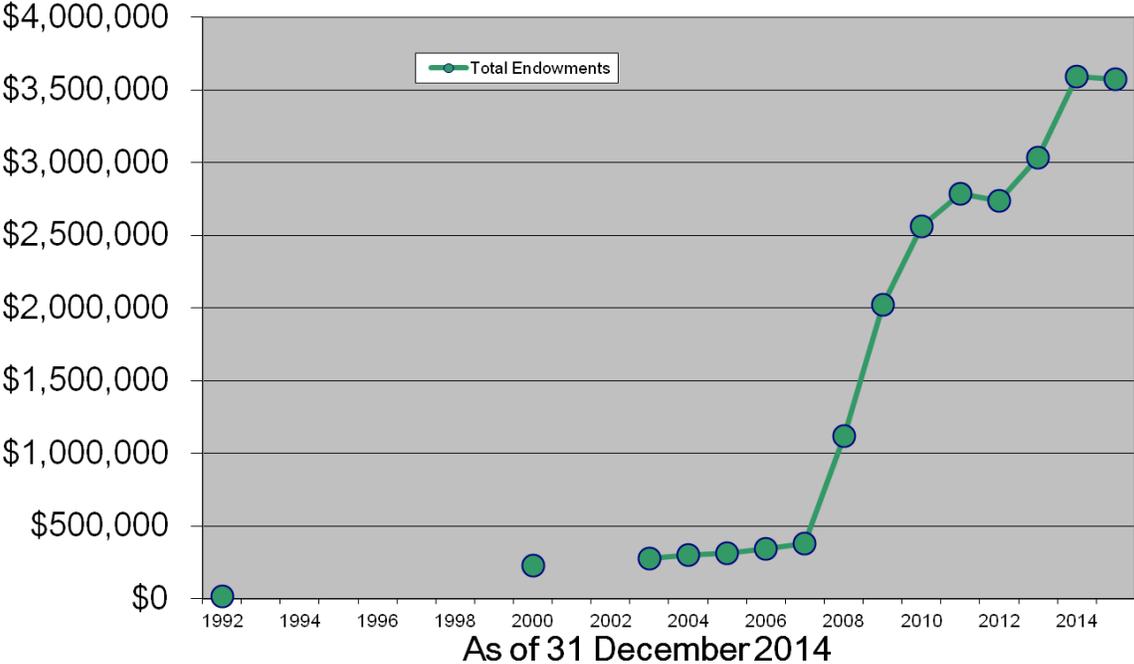
Our member **Stanley Saxe**, who just celebrated his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday, established a charitable remainder annuity for the benefit of the congregation. Way to go, Uncle Stan!

These endowment funds are managed or owned by the Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven (JFGNH) for our benefit (except for the Simon Fund and Hamburger Fund #2 which are managed by the Community Foundation).

- ☞ The Ari Nathan Levine Memorial Fund for the Continuity of BEKI
- ☞ The Batsheva Labowe-Stoll Fund for the Support of Jewish Life at BEKI
- ☞ The Ben & Ruth Marks Endowment
- ☞ The Bessie & Max Levine Children's Library Endowment
- ☞ The Beth El-Keser Israel Religious School Fund
- ☞ The Borick Family Endowment for Special Education for Youth
- ☞ The David & Lillian Levine Endowment for People with Special Needs
- ☞ The Diana Friedman Opton Fund
- ☞ The Eric I.B. Beller Environmental Endowment Fund
- ☞ The George G. Posener Family Memorial Yom Kippur Break-Fast Fund
- ☞ The George G. Posener Kadima & United Synagogue Youth Fund
- ☞ The George & Leah Posener Endowment for the Jewish Education of BEKI Youth
- ☞ The Gilah Benson-Tilsen Fund for Youth
- ☞ The Gladys R. Lipkin Fund for the BEKI Hebrew School
- ☞ The Goodwin Brothers Endowment
- ☞ The Irving Simon Fund
- ☞ The Legacy LeChayim Fund
- ☞ The Leah E. Posener and Betty D. Zelen Memorial Fund for Sisterhood
- ☞ The Lester & Bernice Margolis Fund
- ☞ The Louis & Mary Rosenkrantz Family Library Endowment
- ☞ Future Fund: The Malka and Murray Levine Memorial Fund
- ☞ The Marvin Missan Fund
- ☞ The Morris & Sara Oppenheim Fund for Sacred Music
- ☞ The Oscar & Irma Hamburger Memorial Fund
- ☞ The Posener Family Memorial Fund (Building)
- ☞ Future Fund: The Stanley Saxe Fund

- ☛ The Tillie Dworski Horwitz & Edward Horwitz Endowment
- ☛ The Tova Benson-Tilsen Fund for Animal Welfare at Congregation BEKI and in Israel

## BEKI Endowments



**George G. Posener**

More information on each of these endowment funds is available at [www.beki.org/endow.html](http://www.beki.org/endow.html). For information on establishing an endowment for the benefit of BEKI contact Financial Secretary **Donna Levine** at 203.985.9033 or Rabbi Tilsen at 203.389.2108 ext. 10 or by email [jjtilsen@beki.org](mailto:jjtilsen@beki.org). For information on the Jewish Foundation or a **confidential** meeting contact its Director (and BEKI member) **Lisa Stanger** at 203.387.2424 ext. 382.



**Ben & Ruth Marks**

**The total value of BEKI endowments held by the Jewish Foundation and the Community Foundation now exceeds \$3.57 million (31 December 2014).** This compares to a total of \$3.0 million at the end of 2012, \$309,000 in 2005 and \$25,000 (\$36,000 in current dollars) in 1994. During the period before 2008, BEKI managed about \$50,000 internally, only some of which is included in the above figures.

Distributions from these funds provide about 17% of our combined operating and capital budget. This is significant income in relation to the size of our membership and total

budget. These and additional **endowments must grow** very substantially in the coming years to ensure the vitality of the shul. **We need several million dollars more** to insure the maintenance of our building and the strength of our services and programs. These endowments represent a vote of confidence in the future of this Congregation and a crucial investment in the future of the Jewish People.

The names of the righteous are a blessing during their lifetimes and continue as a blessing even after death. Philanthropy is not the only way to support the community, but it is a pretty good one. As the Torah says, "From each according to his or her means."

We greatly appreciate the philanthropy of **Abraham Bettigole, Ida Bettigole, Regina & Martin Faymann, Ida Goldstein, J. Paul & Deanie Levine, Ruth Pollowitz, Paul Goodwin, Margot Roten** and **Sidney Weinstein**, all of blessed memory, who remembered BEKI in their wills and estate plans.

Each person should have a will or estate plan. **Corinne Blackmer, Gloria Cohen, Rabbi Murray Levine, Bob Oakes, Stanley Saxe, and Mark & Cyd Oppenheimer** are among those who have permitted us to know that they have included the synagogue in their plans with the hope of encouraging others to follow their lead. There are a few others who have included BEKI in their wills but prefer not to share that information at this time. **I have included BEKI in my will** as well. (Do not expect to collect anytime soon.) The way I look at it, if I die wealthy, my heirs won't miss a modest share of my estate. And if I die poor, which seems the more likely scenario, they won't miss such a small amount. Either way, they will understand how important Jewish philanthropy and the Congregation are to me, and I will be doing the right thing.

**You don't have to be wealthy to include BEKI in your will. Anyone can do it.** No gift is too large or too small.

Please consult with your attorney or financial advisor, or contact attorney (and BEKI officer) **Donna Levine** (203.985.9033) for help in planning your estate or will for the benefit of BEKI. Donna offers to prepare a codicil or will **free** to those who include BEKI as a significant beneficiary. These documents normally cost hundreds or thousands of dollars, so taking advantage of Donna's offer is another great way to save and help the Congregation. It is very easy to do. You can also contact Jewish Foundation Director **Lisa Stanger** (203.387.2424 x382) for a confidential consultation.

Having said that, it is important to recognize the centrality of the contributions our members and supporters make through their dues, Annual Campaign and other donations. For many of our families, dues alone represent a significant financial commitment. Please be assured that as much as we highlight major gifts, our institution is dependent on the continuing support of all of our hard-working members and supporters; dues account for about a third of our annual income. The \$25 donation from baby sitting money from a teen and the \$50 from this month's Social Security check is as appreciated as a donation of any larger or smaller amount. Don't give until it hurts, give until it feels good.

I have been serving on the board of the Jewish Foundation since 2006, along with BEKI member and Foundation co-founder **Paul Goodwin** until his death in June 2014, and more recently BEKI members **Sharon Bender** and **James Shure**. It is a very exciting opportunity for me to work with a set of dedicated leaders, under the professional guidance of Executive Director (and BEKI member) **Lisa Stanger**.

## Services & Minyanim

- Good Daily Attendance
- Friday Night Athrive
- Qiddush Committee enhances Shabbat & Festival experience
- Now Serving: Festival Qiddush

This year, **83% of our services enjoyed a minyan (quorum)**. It was **the fourth best year** for daily and Shabbat service attendance in the past twenty-one years, the years for which we have records (compare FY13 at 96.7%). Quite a number of those services that did not have a minyan were short by one or two people – everyone makes a difference. We hold services during blizzards and hurricanes because, as it says in the Good Book, “The shul must go on.”

BEKI holds 730 services each year (counting Minha & Maariv as one, and not counting Musaf; if we counted them separately it would be about 1,000 per year). There were over 17,000 attendances at our services. During the past year, we received significant help in coordinating daily service attendance from Minyan Captains **Rachel Gerber, Karen Kassap, Jennifer Myer, Mark Oppenheimer, Harold Birn, Corinne Blackmer & Pilar Stewart, Harriet Friedman, Beth Weintraub, Miriam Benson** and others. They are like shepherds (or cattle rustlers) whose constant attention keeps us together. **Rachel Gerber** (pictured with Alan and their children) has continued to be an extraordinary force in supporting the other captains, attending and recruiting to insure a quorum for each service. We need your help to sustain this. It would help if a few people would make a commitment to regular or occasional attendance for at least one service a week. The more the merrier. The “minyan” is a minimum; a larger group positively transforms the nature of the experience. Kids and others who don’t formally count toward the quorum are equally welcomed and encouraged to attend. Minors are welcome to participate and lead certain portions of the services.



**The Shabbat morning services enjoy a participation rate approximately five times that of other synagogues in our size class.** For the past few years, there have been six or seven concurrent services on Shabbat mornings for people of all ages. Our

regular attendance is typically 110 to 150. No other *shul* in our region compares to the quality of our programs. Just eighteen years ago, most Shabbat morning services were held in the Daily Chapel (capacity 45). All of the *davening* (prayer leading), Torah reading, and Divrei Torah (sermons) are done by congregants, with the exception of occasional special guests. We are a “learning congregation” in the same sense that local medical facilities are “learning hospitals.” **Jacques Ben-Avie, Jon Hayward, Elie Azoff-Slifstein, Miriam Gerber, Rachel Gerber, Darryl Kuperstock, Paul Bass, Marsha Beller, David Wright, Rabbi Eric Silver, Rachel Light, Gabriel Freiman, Tova Benson-Tilsen and Noam Benson-Tilsen** and others have been wonderful *Shamashim, Gabbaim* and Torah Reading coordinators for Shabbat and Festival mornings.



The Friday Night Qabbalat Shabbat & Maariv services continue to enjoy a dedicated core of participants and are among the “best kept secrets” of the Congregation. **David Kuperstock** and **Steven Fraade**, often with their families, have been particularly supportive of this service. It has been especially nice to see so many youths attending these services. Typical attendance is 20 to 25, unless there is an associated event or, *le-havdil*, a snowstorm. Every now and then we have to bring in extra chairs to accommodate extraordinary attendance. We tried to organize volunteers known as “Friday Night Greeters” to welcome members and visitors to this service in a more consistent and helpful way. More Greeters are needed.



*David Kuperstock*

**Michael Stern** successfully served a third year as our High Holy Days Hazan Rishon (lead cantor) following the retirement of **Alan Lovins**. The season featured exceptional programs. Kol haKavod (kudos) to **Darryl Kuperstock** (pictured), **Jay Brown** and others for creating the season’s services and programs. Darryl, who celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her bat mitzva observance this year, brings together over 60 volunteers to make the High Holy Days happen in such an elaborate and active way. We enjoyed a large set of successful children’s programs, organized by **Rachel Gerber** and **Harold Birn**. The logistics of these services are particularly challenging and the level of satisfaction with this project is quite remarkable.



Memorable events include the Tashlikh services, led by **Sarah Berry & Roger Colten**, and by Rabbi Tilsen, with over 60 participants, and the Sukka Hop organized by **Miriam Benson**. The Post-Yom Kippur Break-Fast, on George Posener’s third Yahrzeit, sponsored by the **George G. Posener Family Memorial Endowment**, created a pleasant and fulfilling conclusion to the Days of Awe. The Break-Fast was an exceptionally powerful spiritual moment this year, as **George G. Posener** died on that very day, at home, during Kol Nidre.

This year marked the third year after the completion of seventeenth consecutive years in which **Alan Lovins** served as Hazzan Rishon. For most of our members, Alan was the only BEKI High Holy Days cantor they have known. His service to the Congregation has been exemplary and extraordinary. Happily, Alan has continued to lead services, read and teach scripture, and provide leadership and support in other settings at BEKI in the coming years. **Michael Stern** is one of Alan's students and a former BEKI member.

BEKI's **Moishe Schnitman Sukka** is without exaggeration the best sukka on the block. It was used daily during the Sukkot festival and there is talk about a need for expansion



(image courtesy of **Paul Bass**, NewHavenIndependent.org). **David Kuperstock** and others organized the building and the storage. The Purim Megila reading and the *seuda* (organized by **Miriam Benson**) were highlights of the liturgical year. Purim Baskets, organized by **Ina Silverman** and others, brought the joy of Purim to more households than ever before. **Esther Serkin, Tova Benson-Tilsen, Corey Stone, Rachel Light, Marsha Beller** and **Noam**

**Benson-Tilsen** read the Megila proficiently. At Passover, Shir HaShirim was read by **Willa Needler, Miriam Gerber, and Marsha Beller**. The Tisha BeAv readings, including Eikha (Lamentations), Qinot (Dirges and Songs) and other scriptural readings, were the moving and intense liturgy of the day, all presented by proficient and capable readers, including **Miriam Benson, Gary Kupfer, Yedidya Ben-Avie, Darryl Kuperstock, Isaiah Cooper, Sarah Magidson, and Rena Cheskis-Gold**.

A corps of dedicated Torah readers ensured the continuity of the ancient tradition of four weekly Torah readings. **Noam Benson-Tilsen**, among the pre-benei-mitzva set, became a regular reader, and **Cantor Lash** indicates that we have a couple of strong candidates for new readers in the Benei Mitzva class. Under *halakha* (Jewish Law), pre-benei mitzva youth can read Torah publicly, but usually don't because they haven't yet learned how. We promote youth reading Torah because we are a learning congregation with a progressive outlook (or, alternatively, we are desperate for more Torah readers).



Thanks to the **Qiddush Committee**, formed in 2004, for substantially enhancing the food presentations after Shabbat and Festival services. This has significantly improved the experience of members and visitors. The efforts of these four teams have added to the positive feelings within, and about, our Congregation. They create an opportunity for extended Torah study,

celebration, fellowship and community building during the preparation and on Shabbat mornings. And thanks go as well to the weekly qiddush sponsors.

Sponsored qiddush refreshments marked happy events such as aufraufen, anniversaries, and birthdays, or memorialized beloved family members and friends. At most events a core of members fulfill the *mitzva* of reciting *birkat ha-mazon* (grace after meals) and sing *zemirot* (Shabbat songs), thereby enhancing our events with music and fellowship, and creating another opportunity to learn Jewish language and culture. *Pictured is the cover of the bencher (song and blessing booklet) donated in quantity in 2010 by editor Barry Walfish & Adele Reinhartz.*



A major step was taken in 2010 through the creation of the **Benei Mitzva Qiddush Committee**. **Joy Kaufman, Andy Hirshfield, Monica Starr, the late Amy Aaland,** and several others planned and executed the launch of this greatly anticipated project with great care and to wide acclaim. The BMQC has made our celebrations more communal and accessible to our families. Joining this cooperative is also another way for members to volunteer on an occasional basis for something that is both significant and generally enjoyable.

The matza baking with **Bill Shragis, Sascha van Creveld** and others on the afternoon before the first seder was in fulfillment of a central mitzva of the festival. See the TV video from three years ago at <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20120406/video-making-matzo-for-passover-in-new-haven>.



The Ritual Committee and High Holy Days Taskforce are initiating a process to study and evaluate Mahzor Lev Shalem, a recent publication of our Masorti-Conservative movement, and is planning to adopt it for use on Yamim Noraim at BEKI.

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

We have continued efforts to enhance our energy efficiency. The “Green Team” led by **Marsha Beller** and **Alice Koslowsky** promotes conservation and “green” living, at BEKI and at home. This year the composting project ripened, and they have begun a new gardening project. Major conservation efforts are described in the “Building and Renovation” section of this report.

BEKI has been awarded an [Energy Saver Honorable Mention](#) and recognized for “stellar efforts to address climate change” by Interfaith Power & Light, a nation-wide organization promoting energy conservation, efficiency and renewable energy. The award, published in April 2015, was in response to a report submitted by BEKI’s Green Team detailing our extensive and specific efforts to control and reduce energy consumption in our building and among our members.

We are not resting on our laurels. Our next steps included the installation of a large solar electric array (July-August 2015) and efficient LED parking lot and perimeter lighting (July-August 2015). For information on the parking lot lights, contact Building Committee chairperson David Wright. Thanks to Yaron Lew for underwriting part of the project and for his guidance.

## **Building & Renovation**

Major building projects were completed or begun this year.

**Barbara Rader & Dennis Rader** spearheaded the efforts to obtain (Barbara) a competitive grant from the Jewish Foundation and the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven and to implement (Dennis) the **Windows 2014 Project** of window replacement and masonry repair on the east (chapel and office – parking lot) and north (classroom - driveway) sides of the building. This project, on the scale of about \$80,000, will stop the deterioration caused by broken masonry, and replaced about 25 windows. The rooms are more comfortable and energy-efficient, and enjoy better ventilation and look nicer. Construction began in June 2015 and was completed by the end of August. In addition, several new window airconditioning units were installed, providing better control and efficiency. For the first time, classroom six (used by the K2 Qehila and Talmud Torah Meyuhad) and the Administrator’s Office (Peggy’s room) are served by new, right-sized units, to complement the ventilation enabled by their new openable efficient windows.

In the spring of 2015, a project was undertaken to purchase and install a 40,000 Watt grid-tied array on the roof of the classroom wing and the roof of the social hall. The installation is expected to be complete by the end of August 2015. The array comprises 141 LG PV panels (model LG270S1C-B3) and matching Enphase micro inverters (model M215), using a Unirac RM ballasted mounting system. Special care was taken to protect the new roof on which the array is placed and to comply with roof warranty conditions. The project qualified for a zREC contract with the local utility. The project budget is \$140,000 and includes all system components, labor, roof inspections, engineering studies, permits and other related expenses. [Sun-Wind Solutions](#) (Fairfield) is the vendor providing the system. The array will reduce the building’s carbon emissions by about 30 metric tons per year, according to the [EPA model](#). Officer **Yaron Lew** led the project. Supporters will be recognized in the *Bulletin*.

We are very fortunate to enjoy the dedicated efforts of House Committee Chairperson **David Wright**, working with his predecessor **Eric Dunsker**, **Bob Spear**, **Dennis Rader**, and **Yair Minsky**, along with a host of occasional volunteers and skilled tradespeople, and with our staff members Peggy, Clarence, and Fred.

### Torah for the Hungry Mind Adult Education



- An Outstanding Learning Community
- Top Scholars Teach Community
- Shabbat Schmoozes Draw Crowds

The Rashi Study Group, meeting weekly since January 1994, completed the Five Books of Moses after Passover 2011 and then completed the Book of Joshua by Shavuot 2012. The group has been incredibly persistent, and it has grown from three the first week to a dozen regular participants. The RSG completed the Book of Shoftim (Judges) early this year and is well into First Samuel. The Shabbat Shalom Torah Study, formerly known as the “Learners’ Minyan,” led by **Steven Fraade**, **Rabbi Alan Lovins**, **Rabbi Murray Levine**, **Nadav Sela**, **Rabbi Eric A. Silver**, and others, also enjoys a loyal following. The Sanhedrin Study Group, which was initiated by Eric Beller, of blessed memory, continues to meet weekly through the efforts of attorney **Isaiah Cooper**. **Rabbi Murray Levine** continues to teach a weekly study group of local rabbis, which meets at BEKI.



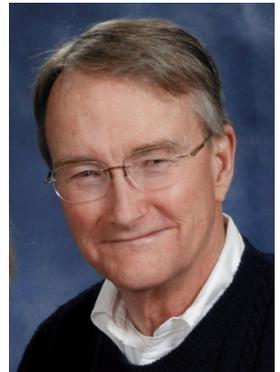
**Steven Fraade**

The annual Tiqun Leil Shavuot Night of Adult Studies included fascinating presentations by **Tani Cohen-Fraade**, **Gadiel Robbins**, and **Jay Sokolow**. About 75 people participated, and more than two dozen were awake when we recited *Qaddish de-Rabbanan* well after midnight.

Shabbat Divrei Torah (sermons or Torah lessons) continue to provide a forum for shared learning, taking advantage of the wealth of scholarship and experience in our community. **Jay Sokolow**, **Carole Bass**, **Bob Oakes**, **Rabbi Eric Silver**, **Barukh Levine**, **Nadav Sela**, **Nanette Stahl**, **Rabbi Murray Levine**, **Steven Fraade**, **Mark Oppenheimer**, **Jonathan Freiman**, **Bill Hallo z”l**, **Rabbi Stuart Kelman**, **David Kuperstock**, and others, and several *benei mitzva* celebrants, served as *Darshanim* (presenters) in this fiscal year and presented teaching that can only be called thought-provoking and inspiring. It was gratifying to hear, on several occasions, congregants comment, “That was the best Devar Torah (or sermon) that I have ever heard,” although it would have even better had the comments come after one of *my* Divrei Torah.



We continued presenting a mini-lesson on prayer and liturgy during Thursday mornings and a “Word for the Day” (a Hebrew language feature) on Wednesday mornings. Shabbat Schmoozes were held again this year and continued to be very popular, including speakers who addressed Abraham’s Tent and Homelessness, as well as **Julie Cohen**’s talk on the Hagada of Pesah.



Two major scholars, Judy Klitsner and Avivah Zornberg visited and taught at BEKI this year. These were major events and wonderful visitors, each providing a Shabbat-full of engaging and significant programs. Judy Klitsner was here as a visiting scholar of our Shabbaton sponsored by **James Shure**. It was wonderful to see over 200 adults and some teens deeply engaged in her presentations. Avivah Zornberg was here as part of larger project with B’nai Jacob and The Westville Synagogue and supported by the Jewish Federation; about 200 attended her lecture at BEKI. A lot of effort went into these weekends, and both were very well-received. Thanks to **Shoshana Zax, Darryl Kuperstock** and the Programming Committee for organizing the events, and to **Jimmy Shure** for his initiative and generous support.

Several other community leaders and artists presented enlightening or delightful talks on Shabbat afternoons.

### **Qeruv – “Outreach” & Tiqun Olam – Social Action**

- Abraham’s Tent
- Elders of Zion (Seniors)
- BEKI Builds – Again
- Food Collection, Toy Collection
- Soup Kitchen
- March Against Hunger
- Kulanu & Saul’s Circle

BEKI continued to develop its involvement in the “Tiqun Olam – Social Action” field with the help of Dr. **Jennifer Botwick, Ivan Alvarez, Steve Werlin, Darryl Kuperstock** and others. We continue our membership in Interfaith Cooperative Ministries. **Mimi Glenn, Stan Saxe** and others helped collect and distribute food to those in need, sometimes in collaboration with the Hesed Committee (see section below).

Our participation in The Abraham’s Tent Program to provide housing to men experiencing homelessness was taken to a new level this year when BEKI hosted a dozen men for a week in our social hall. An extraordinary level of planning and volunteer effort went into this program, thanks to **Darryl Kuperstock, Steve Werlin, Ivan Alvarez** and others who organized and did the foot work to make this happen. It is

one thing to learn about a mitzva or pay someone else to do it; it is another to do it with your own hands in your own home.

Thanks to a grant from the Jewish Home for the Aged Building Fund, **Ina Silverman** presented a wonderfully successful lecture-lunch series on a range of Judaic topics designed especially for (but not limited to) seniors. Attendance ranged from a dozen to around 50 for some events, and this “Elders of Zion” program was supported by guest speakers including **Elaine Braffman, Morris Bell, Donna Levine, Daniel Prober, Steve Werlin, Shai Silverman** and others. Beyond the wonderful speakers, the program was successful, we think, because of the personal and persistent invitations made by Ina, as well as the provision of transportation.

This year, we again had a significant presence at the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen. **Judy Hoberman** and **Miriam Benson** helped organize our wonderful volunteers. A winter blanket and coat drive provided warmth and safety to people in our area. Beyond our contingent of servers at the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, BEKI members collected food, toys and duffle bags for people with need.



BEKI again offered great support and participation in a Habitat project. New this year was a project called “Abraham’s Tent,” spearheaded by **Darryl Kuperstock**. Our members also participated in the Jewish Coalition for Literacy. **Ivan Alvarez** mobilized a large BEKI group to participate in the March Against Hunger.

Kulanu – BEKI’s outreach program for adults with special needs – and “Saul’s Circle” – BEKI’s outreach to adults with

mental illness – continued into their tenth year. Income from the **David & Lillian Levine Endowment** provides partial funding for these efforts. These programs are a sign of the vibrancy of our shul and help us fulfill our mission of drawing our fellows closer to Torah.

Since the inception of Kulanu and Saul’s Circle, we have experimented with formats and programs. We have built a significant base of participants and have established a reputation as a leader in this field in our region. The next step for us is to translate this programmatic success into long-term ongoing funding for these projects.

## Hesed Committee

**Barbara Cushen** continued our efforts through the “Hesed Committee” to address the particular needs of members and extended family who benefit from friendly contact and support. The visits, calls and support they have provided or organized have been very much appreciated. Several members have coordinated meals for families after childbirth, hospitalization and loss. This quiet work is what helps us be a caring community and is central to our mission.

## Libraries

**Rachel Wizner** and **Hannah Winer** continued the process of reorganizing the Rosenkrantz Family Library. **Miriam Benson** continued to serve as the buyer for the **Ari Levine Children’s Library**. Coffee, tea and hot cocoa are available to library patrons and minyanaires; your choice of *Java Nagila* or *Mika Mocha*.

## The Sisterhood



The major accomplishment of renovating the Women’s Lounge and Washroom in 2013 marked the realization of a long-held goal and project of the Sisterhood. The Sisterhood supported an update to the upstairs washrooms in 2015.

The Sisterhood continues to be an important arm of the Synagogue, responsible for several events and fundraising efforts. For many members, Sisterhood is their primary point of contact with the Congregation. Their accomplishments, under the leadership of **Adele Tyson** (at left) and **Mimi Glenn** are detailed in the Sisterhood Report and described on our website. Some highlights are also mentioned throughout this report. Sisterhood continues to provide tablecloths for events, a wonderful Giftshop, and refreshments at Purim, Simhat Torah and Hanuka, and Yom HaShoah Memorial Candles, among other services. The Sisterhood also provides scholarships for BEKI youth to attend United Synagogue and Masorti-Conservative youth programs such as Camp Ramah and various Israel trips, and has contributed to the Congregation’s general income. The Sisterhood has updated certain areas of the building, and is exploring new projects.

## Publications & Media

**BEKI-web 3.0 has arrived.** Our website, [www.beki.org](http://www.beki.org), went up in 1997. Every issue of the BEKI *Bulletin* is available on-line going back to November 1993. Go back and see – we all sure looked goofy back then; now we all look very dignified. According to Google Analytics, **our web site gets over 100 visits per day**. Seventy-five percent of visits are by new visitors; 25 percent are returning visitors. The heaviest traffic is on

Wednesdays; the lightest on Shabbat. This website is important as a source of information for our members and other readers, as well as a primary point of entry for new members. Close to half of our new members find us first through our web site. A major plan to update the website was implemented, thanks to many hours of work by **Eric Dunsker, Darryl Kuperstock** and a crew of interested members. The website supports on-line **Donations** and **Payments**.

Our *Bulletin* remains one of the best in the synagogue world. It is produced completely by BEKI members, from writing and editing to printing and mailing. None of that would be possible without the tremendous volunteer effort of **Jay Brown** and **Charlie Ludwig**, as well as **Stan Saxe, Barbara Cushen, Sylvia Zeid, Shula Chernoff, Barbara Rader, Herb Winer, Muriel Banquer** and others in processing the mailing. **Herb Winer, Donna Kemper** and **Donna Levine** edit and proofread the text. Layout and some original artwork are done by **Bruce Oren**, a noted artist whose careful work and extraordinary creativity have enabled our *Bulletin* to match, at some points, the quality of national publications. The *Bulletin* is mailed to 780 households. In 2003, BEKI received a Solomon Schechter Gold Award from the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in recognition of the excellence of our *Bulletin*. Beginning in the new fiscal year, all of our members will receive the *Bulletin* by email, enjoying Bruce's layout and graphics in full color and faster than the Postal Service can lick a stamp. We are still sending printed copies by *schleppost* as well.

Our *Yizkor Memorial Book*, produced by **Tina Rose** and **Darryl Kuperstock**, memorializes our loved ones and provides the text for our Yizkor services, Qever Avot Cemetery Services and individual home services. It also provides useful information on mourning observances. The 5775 edition memorializes **Violet Kantrowitz Ludwig** of blessed memory in the dedication on the inside front cover.

The **BEKI Facebook social network group** initiated and managed by **Mark Oppenheimer** has proven popular. It is a good way for our members and friends to strengthen their bonds of community. This is one of the ways that Mark and others are working to reach out to develop our membership.

BEKI has received extensive press coverage during the year in the local, Jewish and national press. See "The Shul in the News" at [www.beki.org/news.html](http://www.beki.org/news.html) .

### **Youth Programs**

- Twelve Benei Mitzva Observances
- Record 22 at Camp Ramah
- Shabbat Children's Programs Thrive
- Youth in Israel

BEKI boasts award-winning Kadima and USY youth groups. Commissioners **Rena Cheskis-Gold**, and the youth officers with volunteer parent support provided a great year. We enjoyed the support of wonderful Stefan Kosolitz. We were extremely

fortunate to have such talented and dedicated leaders this year. Rena continued her tenure as Youth Commission Chairperson, a position previously held for more than a decade by **Darryl Kuperstock**. Rena and our youth deserve our full support. (Students pictured below are holding bowling balls, not pumpkins.)

Our chapter is operated jointly with neighboring Congregation B'nai Jacob (BJ), which adds a level of complexity to organization and logistics, but which also brings its own rewards. Temple Beth Sholom is also participating informally in our consortium. Thanks to a lot of effort by our parents, a room was updated to serve as a dedicated Youth Lounge for Kadima & USY at BEKI. The Pie and Deli Box fundraisers were again quite successful. We are running a friendly competition with our partner B'nai Jacob to see who will order more pies; this year, we creamed them. Memorable events included preparing and delivering mishloah manot at Purim, the Limos Scavenger Hunt, halla baking, and the end-of-year Shabbat dinner. USY also enjoyed several regional dances and overnight events.

At the Hanefesh Spring Convention, our chapter won several awards, including the coveted **Gold Award for Chapter of Excellence**. Chapter officers for 5775 were President **Jacques Ben-Avie**, and Deanna Heine (BJ), **Elie Azoff-Slifstein**, **Eva Gerber** and **Maya Lew**. Regional officers included President Noa Shapiro-Franklin (BJ) and VP **Tova Benson-Tilsen**.



The year saw the sixteenth season for BEKI's Benei Mitzva Preparation Program (BMP). Twelve students celebrated becoming benei mitzva at BEKI (while some might have marked this milestone in other settings), including **Emily Sachs**, **Kinneret Levene Magid**, **Jessie Goodwin**, **Elijah Freiman**, **Rafi Gottlieb**, **Benjamin Goldstein**, **Matthew Silverman**, **Ari Gad**, **Isaac Callaghan**, **Guido Secchiaroli**, **Adin Jennings**, and **Fiona Jennings**.

Scheduled for the next fiscal year are **Owen Kempton**, **Aaron Bruce**, **Benjamin Bruce**, **Eran Avni-Singer**, **Benjamin Birn**, **Eitan Hirshfield**, **Ayelet Kaminsky**, **Jaden Labowe-Stoll**, **Caleb Freiman**, and **Noam Benson-Tilsen**. Several youths have scheduled dates in the following year as well.

This year **Cantor Shoshana Lash** and I led the program, assisted by in-class tutors **Naomi Caldwell** and **Myles Caldwell**, **Sophia Bruce**, **Sophia Colodner**, and **Hana Feldman**, and home tutors **Marsha Beller**, **Isaiah Cooper**, **Eva Gerber** and **Tova Benson-Tilsen**. Our *benei mitzva* enjoy one of the finest programs available, one which will be further developed in the coming year. During the fiscal year now ending,

nine of our youth celebrated their becoming *benei mitzva* in some form of public worship at the synagogue. The BMP is one venue in which our Religious School (BRS), Ezra Academy and other youth can get to know each other. Again this year, several students mastered most of the services for Shabbat and weekday.

**A large contingent of 22 BEKI youth (including two as staff) will attend Camp Ramah this summer. BEKI has one of the largest Ramah contingents in Connecticut and the largest contingent proportional to membership. This is the largest contingent from BEKI ever.**

Hurry up!  
We'll be late for tefila!



Ramah families pay camp tuition totaling somewhere around \$75,000 – **we could use more scholarship support!** Your gift of \$10,000 to a BEKI endowment could make camp possible for one student each year by providing a partial scholarship. Your gift of \$100,000 would pay full tuition for one or two campers a year. Your gift of \$1,000,000 for camping at BEKI would make Jewish summer camp available to all of our kids.

Several children attended other fine Jewish and Zionist camps. Their experiences reinforce the atmosphere we try to create during the year in our shul and school. The sense of community built during the summer will last a lifetime. Paying for BEKI kids to go to Ramah and other Jewish camps is one of the best investments you can make in the future of the Jewish People. **I urge parents to consider sending their children to fine Jewish summer camps such as Ramah.** Grandparents, you can help, too.

We concentrate on Ramah because it is affiliated with the Masorti Conservative Movement, and it is the first choice for BEKI campers. The community they form over the summer benefits us all year round. The Sisterhood's **Marcel Gutman Scholarship Fund** also helped several students attend Jewish Camp or Israel Experience programs.

Likewise, **Ezra Academy**, our affiliated Solomon Schechter school, is the single most popular school for BEKI kids (that is, more of our students attend Ezra than any other school), and BEKI kids are the largest synagogue contingent at Ezra (41% of the 2013 graduating class, 31% of the 2014 graduating class, and 33% in 2015). The shared school experience intensifies, reinforces and multiplies their BEKI and (in many cases) Ramah and USY experiences. Mazal tov to this year's graduates **Sophia Bruce, Hana Feldman, Elijah Freiman, Rafael Gottlieb** and **Elijah Labowe-Stoll**.

BEKI's Shabbat morning children's and youth programs are a source of pride for our Congregation. Thanks to **Miriam Benson** for organizing, recruitment and support, and to all of the adults who participate in and support the programs. The programs continue to be a point of entry for many of our newest members. Three children's programs are

held every Shabbat morning, and a fourth is held fortnightly. These kids will have wonderful, warm associations with the synagogue and Judaism as they grow.

## Religious School

- Ina Silverman Completes 7th Year as Principal
- Leading Families Provide Financial Support



**Ina Silverman** assumed the position of Principal in summer 2008. Her organizational abilities, vision and understanding of the theory and practice of Jewish education, familiarity with our faculty and studentry, and dedication to the cause contributed to making this one of the best years ever for the School. This year, students were happy and learning, and parents were happy. The **George & Leah Posener Fund** provided important financial support, as did the **Gladys Lipkin Endowment** and the **Religious School Fund** (formerly known as the Hebrew School Endowment Fund).

The Talmud Torah Meyuhad (TTM), the Special Education Religious School, was initiated here in 1994 and was in prior years supported by the Department of Jewish Education (DJE) of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven. Apparently, going forward we may not enjoy DJE budgetary support for the program. We are responsible for the education of our own children so we will find a way to fully fund the program. In addition to the children formally enrolled in TTM, all of the children in the School benefit from the presence of teachers and *madrikhim* with special education training. We owe a debt of gratitude to the **Borick Family** through the LIATIS Foundation for helping to cover BEKI's expenses in special education through the **Borick Family Endowment** for Special Education for Youth at BEKI. The commitment of our Congregation is to provide the best educational opportunities we can to all of our students. Susan Jacobson served as Head TTM teacher and also functioned as a vice-principal to the whole school.



The **Louis Friedman Scholarship Fund** (LFSF) provides tuition assistance to students in need. The **Rabbi Andrew Klein Scholarship Fund** also provided support this year.

The Principal works with *madrikhim* (teachers' aides) who serve as positive models for the younger students. The hallways and classrooms of the School are decorated with colorful displays. Our BRS students especially

enjoyed their interaction with our BEKI-family-hosted and other Israeli teen emissaries.

Our son **Noam**, who is a student at Ezra Academy, attended BRS for the past six years – he’s in a dual-degree program. He enjoyed the Sunday Hebrew classes and made good friends with kids he would not have otherwise have met. There was little overlap with his Ezra studies, because the world of Judaic knowledge is great and our time for study is short. Other **Ezra** kids would enjoy BRS on Sundays with **Helene, Rita, Shlomit** and the other younger-grade teachers; thanks to generous scholarship support, the program is extremely affordable.

## Special Events

Veteran members fondly recall the “good old days” when BEKI (or Beth El and Keser Israel) had wonderful social programs, opportunities for fun and fellowship. This past year, we enjoyed a continuing resurgence of special events, in addition to the weekly Shabbat and Festival gatherings, the Posener Family Break-Fast after Yom Kippur and the occasional Shabbat dinners. *These are the good old days.*



We enjoyed another LaG BeOmer Kumsitz Campfire Singalong hosted by the **Hirshfield Starr Family**.

Among the special Shabbatot were those honoring Ezra Academy students and families and our high school graduates.



**Helen Rosenberg** continued a significant effort to organize a series of **lobby art shows** with the Arts Committee in conjunction with local galleries and featuring local and nationally-noted artists. Several artists also presented artist talks on Shabbat afternoons while their art was on display. Our lobby areas now feature rotating art exhibits. I wish we could do the same in the lower lobby. The **BEKI ArtGallery** has proven very popular.

This has been the third year of a successful Israeli Dance series on most Tuesday nights, thanks to the support of **Rena Cheskis-Gold, David Wright, and Eric Dunsker**. The Monday morning Yoga with Debby Kahan, free to BEKI members, continues to meet rain or shine.

Noted above, two major speakers, Judy Klitsner and Avivah Zornberg were the centers of attention at special events as well. A Havdala Yoga series in the spring proved a wonderful way to extend the tranquility of Shabbat.

New this year as a series was “**BEKI in the Backyard**,” which was initiated at **Mark & Cyd Oppenheimer**’s microranch in Westville as a Shabbat afternoon hangout. Less lunch, more munch, after qiddush but before minha. While some go home or to friends for lunch, a study group, or a snooze, others have climbed **West Rock** after qiddush, a physical representation of their spiritual ascent attempted in the morning service.

## Conclusion



The sense of unity of purpose and spirit of cooperation within our community has continued to grow. BEKI is a caring community, based on love of God, Torah, the Jewish People and humanity. There is a great deal of confidence for the coming year and coming decade. That is thanks to your untiring efforts and generosity.

I am awed by the level of commitment and dedication of our leaders. While we have made great strides, we still have a long way to go to fulfill our vision. Many people have had wonderful experiences in our *shul*, but we all know that there are those who have had less wonderful experiences, and we need to improve

this situation. I understand that as Rabbi, there are many areas that will require my additional efforts.

Special thanks to **President Andy Hirshfield** and the other officers for their tireless and dedicated leadership. It has been personally a great pleasure to work with the officers. I do not think you can find another synagogue with more dedicated and qualified leaders. We were very fortunate to have the outstanding leadership contributions of Past Presidents **Jay Sokolow, Donna Levine, Brian Karsif, Adele Tyson** and **Carole Bass** to bolster these efforts, as well as the continuing support of Past Presidents **Alan Gelbert, David Sagerman, Andy Weinstein, Nadav Sela** and others.

On 30 June, **Andy Hirshfield** concludes his full year as titular President. Thanks to Andy's efforts, our Congregation has continued to grow and develop. We had a very good year after all. The budget is close to balanced, the balance sheet looks better than at any point in the Congregation's history, the building is undergoing continuous major renovation and is in the best state of repair in many years, participation rates and membership continue to grow, and our education and programming staff comprises great talent. Andy led the Board and officers with his attention to detail, by improving the things we're already doing, by insisting on fiscal responsibility, respect for tradition and for the individual, reaching out to involve others, and personal example. Andy is eager to help the organization embrace rational practices to operate effectively and efficiently in our changing world. Among his accomplishments last year was guiding the board reorganization from concept to implementation so that all involved understood the value of the changes, and the transition and results were positive. As of 1 July 2015, Andy begins his second year as elected **President**, not counting his time as Acting President.

The Board of Directors represents one of the most intelligent, dedicated and accomplished assemblages in New England. It is a pleasure and a privilege to work with them. I learn a lot, and appreciate the directors' support, encouragement and patience. Thanks to your efforts, we are now in a much stronger position than we were twenty one years ago. I expect to see continuing progress at BEKI during the next year. We must preserve the heritage of this synagogue as we build for the next



120 years. It has been my privilege to serve this congregation and may it please God that I be enabled to do so into the future. I feel truly blessed to enjoy your support and friendship, and to enjoy the support of **Miriam Benson** and that of our children. These have been among the most exciting years of my life, so far.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jon-Jay Tilsen*  
Jon-Jay Tilsen

# Programming Committee Report 2014-2015

Submitted by Shoshana Zax

As programming “midwife” it is my pleasure to help bring programming of all kinds to BEKI. Here is a summary of the programs at BEKI since last July. Very few of these have been entirely conceived and produced by the “Programming Committee.” Most have been created by other individuals or committees and have been given minimal (or no) assistance by the programming committee. I wanted to include many types of programming in this report, so BEKI members will have a sense of the scope of programs and events that have happened since the fall. I deeply appreciate ALL THE HELP I HAVE RECEIVED to make these programs possible. Please forgive me if I have omitted or duplicated anyone else’s efforts.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>PROGRAM TITLE/THEME</b>	<b>PRODUCED BY:</b>
9/9/14-10/26/14	"Genesis Stories as Jewish Myth"- Sunday morning study with Rabbi Alan Lovins	Allan Lovins; Shoshana Zax
Sept-November 2014 - Mondays	Elders of Zion- lunch and discussion with guest speaker, focused on areas of interest to seniors	Ina Silverman
10/12/14	Pizza in the Hut - second annual!	Shoshana Zax, John Weiser and the programming committee with special help from Chefs Tess Arnsten and Tani Cohen-Fraade
11/22/14	Motsei Shabbat Party- Saturday evening family event with food, drink and music	Steve Werlin
Nov-March - Once a month, Shabbat afternoon	Informal singing circle/study session between Mincha ad Maariv services	Carole Bass
9/15/14-10/20/14 and 1/13, 1/20, 1/27	Introduction to Heart Meditation - short sessions of guided meditation held after minyan	Robin Goldberg
1/24/15	Winter Fiesta fundraiser for Abraham’s Tent	Darry Kuperstock, Ivan Alvarez, Steve Werlin and TO Committee
2/7/15	Shabbat Schmooze - Abraham’s Tent - What is it About	Darryl Kuperstock and the T.O. Committee
2/28/15 and 3/28/15	Havdalah Yoga - Shabbat afternoon meditation, yoga and musical Havdalah ceremony led by local professional, Jewish yoga teachers	Shoshana Zax, with a grant from the Women of Vision Society
3/1/15	Artist’s Reception - Mindy Sidling	Helen Rosenberg, Cindy Rubin and Shoshana Zax

3/15/15	Purim Seuda	
3/9/15-3/15/15	Abraham's Tent	Darryl Kuperstock, Ivan Alvarez, Steve Werlin and the TO committee
3/28/15	Schmooze - "Haggadot through the Years "- a library exhibit and discussion	Julie Cohen and Rachel Wizner
February to April - Mondays	Elders of Zion- lunch and discussion focussed on areas of interest to seniors	Ina Silverman - with a grant from ?
4/26/15	Year in Motion - film about her gap year in Israel, followed by a discussion led by film-maker Laina Pauker	Laina Pauker with the Programming Committee
5/1-3/2015	SHABBATON - Judy Klitsner - an entire weekend of learning with internationally known Torah Scholar	Darryl Kuperstock, Shoshana Zax and the programming Committee - sponsored by James Shure
5/3/2015	Community Lag B'Omer Event at JCC	Community group
5/6/2015	BEKI's Annual Lag B'Omer Kumsitz Campfire Singalong	Andy Hirshfield, Monica Starr, et al
5/15-17/2015	Community Scholar in Residence - Aviva Zornberg - speaking at 3 community synagogues - BEKI will host her on Shabbat afternoon. All are encouraged to attend all events	Programming Committee, Darryl K and Shoshana Z, along with Rona Shapiro and Sidney Perry- BEKI's portion of the honorarium and Kiddush meal generously sponsored by numerous BEKI members.
6/7/15	Sunday Brunch and panel discussion of homelessness in New haven	Darryl K, Steve W. and Tikun Olam Committee
8/22/15	Artist's Schmooze	Helen Rosenberg

This summer the programming committee will continue working on the following programs for the upcoming year:

Some kind of congregation-wide dinner in the Sukkah - either another "Pizza in the Hut" or, now that we have a BEKI gas grill, possibly a Bar-B-Q in the hut (doesn't have the same ring to it- but would be delicious!!).

“Safe Stance, Towers Fall Prevention Series” - a free 6 part educational series about the important topic of fall prevention for all, especially targeted to seniors.

Building on the success of this year’s community Shabbaton, we are likely to participate in a similar event this fall. Details TBA.

We will be working on developing a series of discussions about “How to talk about Difficult Topics” that affect our families, such as mental illness, drug abuse, suicide and divorce. These will be led by trained mental health, social work and/or rabbinic professionals.

Because Havdalah yoga was so well received, we will probably repeat it this winter.

Please feel free to contact me by e-mail with ideas for other programs.