

What a year it's been!

I am thrilled to announce that, as of this afternoon, negotiations with our new senior rabbi were successfully completed. I will call a special Board of Trustees meeting to take place this Monday, February 4 at 7:00 PM for the purpose of presenting for approval the terms of his proposed contract. Pending that approval, our next senior rabbi will be Rabbi David Vaisberg. He is smart, personable, dynamic, enthusiastic, scholarly, and spiritual. I truly believe he will be the next in TBA's long line of great spiritual leaders. I am very grateful to Vice President Jeff Klein, Treasurer Carey Gertler, and our counsel, Jake Halpern for their excellent hard work on the contract negotiations.

The process of finding our next rabbi formally began a year ago with the congregational forum that followed last year's Annual Meeting. Immediately following that, my immediate predecessor as temple president, Julie Silbermann, agreed to chair the Rabbinical Search Committee. We are truly blessed to have had Julie in this position. The great skill and dedication that she applied to the job, and it has been a full-time job, was truly awesome. We all owe her a huge debt. On a personal level, Julie you have my tremendous gratitude and appreciation.

We identified and recruited a committee that truly represents our congregation, demographically, in terms of synagogue involvement, and in terms of religious orientation. I know Julie joins me in thanking each and every committee member for their very good work. They truly did their job well.

The search process began with a self-assessment phase; including a congregational survey and professionally led focus groups. The Search Committee incorporated the results of the self-assessment phase as it developed criteria for evaluating applicants and engaged in its subsequent work.

The next phase of the search involved outreach to recruit applicants. Hundreds of letters were sent by Julie and Rabbi Kulwin to solicit applications. The position was listed online. The outreach phase also included personal networking, including referrals from TBA members. It was truly a national search.

Julie spoke to all applicants with any potential. She reported to the committee, which determined which applicants to advance in the interview process. There was an interview subcommittee that did telephone interviews and reported back to the full committee. Two semi-finalists had video interviews with the full committee and were also interviewed by Gail and Julie. The committee unanimously chose one finalist, Rabbi Vaisberg. He subsequently came to TBA to meet with senior staff, clergy, the Ritual Committee co-chairs, and me. He returned a few days later to meet

in person with the Search Committee and the temple officers. That meeting included a meet and greet session, a Q&A, and delivery of a sermon. Then the Search Committee unanimously voted to recommend him to the Board of Trustees as our new rabbi. At its December meeting, the board unanimously voted to authorize the start of contract negotiations with him. Now those negotiations are complete and successful.

The other important item that I want to focus on in this report is security. We've bolstered our security posture in response to events - Parkland, Pittsburgh, the increase in anti-Semitic incidents, other threats - and in anticipation of possible future events. Doing our best to ensure the safety of our children, of our congregation, our staff, our guests, of anyone using this building, is paramount. Security Chair Ken Bernstein works tirelessly on our behalf. Ken, our temple officers, our Building and Grounds Chairs, Tracey Bent, and Gail Milchman constitute the temple's Security Committee. Under their leadership, we've bolstered security at TBA in ways that are visible and in ways that you cannot necessarily see. We obtained a security grant from the Department of Homeland Security for \$140,000 that will enable us to harden the security of our physical plant. We have excellent relations with the Livingston Police, the Essex County Sheriff, and with Bob Wilson, who is in charge of security for the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest. We have significantly increased coverage by security officers on-site. We have more and better security cameras and exterior lighting. There are now emergency phones tied directly to the police department. To allow better access to first responders and easier evacuation, we've eliminated parking on the entrance and exit driveways. When the weather permits, we will appropriately restripe and update signage in the parking lot. We have had to impose a security fee on congregants and on the non-member families of children attending our schools to help defray the increased security costs. We are not alone among Jewish institutions in having such a fee. It is the very unfortunate new reality. When I took office two years ago, I didn't think I'd become TBA's security president, but that's the way things go.

We all thank our clergy, Rabbi Kulwin, Rabbi Dantowitz, and Cantor Epstein for their spiritual leadership and guidance, and for their important pastoral work. I must mention Cantor Epstein's great work, which resulted in the installation last summer of our wonderful new organ in the sanctuary.

Thanks also to our educators, Melissa Weiner and Debbie Ziering, and their staffs for their important work. To Tracey Bent and his staff, many thanks. Gail Milchman and the administrative staff have our and my deep appreciation.

I want to acknowledge and thank in advance those of you who will begin your terms on the board this year. Tara Heyderman, welcome to the officer team.

To those of you who are completing your service as trustees, thank you for all you have done for TBA. Great job!

To the chairs of the various temple committees, and to the presidents and officers of Sisterhood, Men's Club, PTA and Parents' Council, many thanks for your hard work and dedication. Your work is vital to our synagogue.

I thank the temple officers and our counsel for your tremendous efforts during our first term of office together. Great job!

Jeff Kollin will complete his tenure as an officer. Over the years, he brought skill, intelligence, and devotion to his various leadership positions and tasks. He deserves our praise and gratitude. I'm glad he will be staying on as a trustee.

Rabbi Kulwin, our spiritual leader, teacher, and friend - as you know this is your final Annual Meeting as our senior rabbi. Over the coming months, particularly but not only, at the March 30 event in your honor, we will say many well-deserved words of praise to you. For tonight, in the context of the president's report to the congregation, I will simply say job extremely well done.

I invite all of you to attend the March 30 event and to support the ad journal with your donations. It is our annual fundraiser. It is also our opportunity to truly honor the legacy of our beloved Rabbi Kulwin.

In closing, I thank my family, Susan and Mark, and all of you. Your encouragement and support makes it possible for me to do this job, and certainly makes the task easier. It is truly rewarding work. As my first term ends and second term begins, I look forward to a great future for us all and for our synagogue. Thank you.