

'Brotherhood of Jews'

Temple Israel of Riverhead celebrates its centennial

By PETER L. ROTHOLZ

Exactly 100 years ago, when William Howard Taft was in the White House, a handful of Jewish men came together in Eastern Long

IN THE COMMUNITY

Island to form the Brotherhood of Jews of Riverhead. Among them were two butchers, a farmer, a fisherman, a tailor and a couple of merchants. In the ensuing century, Jewish life in and around Riverhead developed from that modest beginning into a well-established community that will celebrate its centennial in its beautifully renovated shul, Temple Israel of Riverhead, this Shabbat morning, Sept. 17.

The impressive synagogue, built in 1946 in the Gothic Revival



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Before and After. The newly renovated Temple Israel of Riverhead (left) includes a "brightening" of the interior, yet still focuses on the stained-glass windows of the old synagogue (below) that contain the names of esteemed members over the decades.

A hundred years ago, a handful of Jewish men — among them two butchers, a farmer, a fisherman, a tailor and a couple of merchants — came together to form the Brotherhood of Jews of Riverhead.

style, dominates a spacious grassy triangle at the intersection of Ostrander Avenue and Northville Turnpike and today has a membership of more than 80 families. It is an egalitarian shul, affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. According to its spiritual leader, Rabbi Bill Siemers, 43, "We have redefined ourselves as a regional Jewish center and draw members from as far as Greenport in the East, Miller Place in the West and Hampton Bays and Quogue in the South. While we have a Hebrew school and offer adult education programs, we are Shabbos and yom tov focused."

Siemers, who was born at Fort Ord, Calif. while his father served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam conflict, holds a degree in neuroscience from the University of Pennsylvania and was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary. Prior to coming to Riverhead in 2007, he served a congregation in Lexington Park, Md. "I love congregational work," he says, "and like to hang out with people." Siemers participates in many community-based organizations and serves on the Southampton Anti-Bias Task Force and on the board of the Peconic County Medical Center. He is also president of the East End Jewish Community Council, which is dedicated to "in-reach

activities designed to break down barriers." The rabbi and his wife, Deborah, "a full-time wife and mommy," have two children, Rebecca and Daniel.

The renovation of the interior of the synagogue, under the supervision of members Rob Brown, architect, and Richard Israel, general contractor, began on May 12 and features a new ark for the congregation's five Torah scrolls, new pews and a refurbished balcony, new lighting and a general "brightening" of the interior, without giving up the beautiful stained-glass windows, many of which list the names of earlier congregants.

As Jaime Siegel, the synagogue's vice president, said the shul is "now more user-friendly, more personal and less scary." During our visit, Siegel (in T-shirt and shorts) and Israel worked alongside the construction crew, as did several other members of the community.

The special services on Centennial Shabbat will be conducted by Siemers, assisted by a visiting cantor. Among the many highlights of the service will be the recitation of the Haftorah by Roberta Korus, who celebrated her bat mitzvah in the synagogue 40 years ago. Siemers expects many former members, who have meanwhile "been promoted" to Florida and elsewhere, to return for the

occasion. Many elected officials will also be present including: Congressman Tim Bishop, State Senator Kenneth LaValle, State Assemblyman Dan Losquadro, Legislator Ed Romaine and County Executive Steve Levy.

What began as a small group of Jewish "pioneers" on the East End has now matured into an established community including scientists from Brookhaven National Laboratories and Plum Island as well as leading professionals and businessmen and -women, all of whom remain dedicated "to the glory of God and the Brotherhood of Man," the words inscribed over the entrance of Temple Israel of Riverhead.



GILAD SHALIT DAY

The New York City Council and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations declared Sept. 7 "Gilad Shalit Day" in New York City. NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn and Conference of Presidents CEO Malcolm Hoenlein presented Noam Shalit, Gilad's father, with thousands of cards and messages of support from around the world; these messages have also been sent to the American Red Cross as part of an effort to demand that the International Red Cross be allowed to visit Gilad.

(L-r): New York City Councilmember Dan Garodnik; Richard Stone, chairman, Conference of Presidents; Malcolm Hoenlein, CEO, Conference of Presidents; Noam Shalit; New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn; and New York City Councilmember Mike Nelson, chair of the Jewish Caucus.



Quinn, Hoenlein and Consul General of Israel in New York Ido Aharoni all expressed their solidarity with the Shalit family and with Israel. Noam Shalit thanked the Council for Gilad Shalit Day, saying, "We are

waiting for good news about our son and hope he will be home with us before Rosh Hashanah."

Supportive messages for Gilad Shalit can be submitted online, at www.giladgreetings.org.