

Salad meets Scripture as Temple Israel tills its soil

By Elise Kigner

Advocate Staff

Taking in the smell of fresh greens, the gardeners knelt at the edge of the vegetable beds behind Temple Israel of Boston to pick out their bounty: tomatoes, lettuce, fennel and squash. To replace what they had harvested, they drew lines in the soil and dropped in tiny seeds of carrots, beets and the Middle Eastern herb za'atar.

The idea for the garden, the first that has bloomed at Temple Israel in two decades, came from Leora Mallach, 37, and Becca Weaver, 26, co-founders of the new nonprofit, Ganei Beantown: Beantown Jewish Gardens.

Mallach said similar programs are popping up in cities around

the country, where people tend to know little about where their food comes from. At Temple Israel, the garden is being used, among other things, as an educational tool for Hebrew school students.

"When you start working with urban or even suburban kids, they don't recognize a tomato plant, or a cucumber plant, and you can't fault them for that," she said.

By growing food and herbs in the city, "you can have a very large impact by doing something very small."

The garden is a congregation-wide effort. High school students constructed the raised beds and began the planting. On the temple's Mitzvah Day, second-graders planted cucumber seeds in yogurt containers, which they later trans-

planted to the garden. On August 15, Ganei Beantown and Temple Israel's Riverway Project are hosting Harvest 'N' Tonics, where young adults will gather in the garden for drinks and Tu B'Av learning. The group will then harvest vegetables for a vegetarian dinner.

Last week, Weaver led a small group in composting browning vegetables, harvesting the ripe foods and planting new seeds. Hanna Guimaraes, 27, said she had never gardened before, but now comes to the garden every week. She said the work is relaxing, and she likes bringing home the fennels, squash and kale she picks herself. "It feels like you're an actual farmer," she said.

Some of the harvest is being donated to Food for Free in Cam-



Second graders plant vegetables at Beantown Jewish Garden.

bridge, which serves people in need, and the rest of the produce is going to garden volunteers and to people who have made a financial donation.

In addition to overseeing the Temple Israel garden, Ganei Beantown runs a series for young adults on food, sustainability and Jewish law. At a recent session, participants learned how to brew beer and talked about the counting of the Omer, the period between Passover and Shavuot when Jews each day brought barley to the temple as a sacrifice. "It is encouraging Jews to realize the agricultural traditions inherent in Judaism," Mallach said.

The Temple Israel garden was planted in the space once used for a Biblical garden. It was abandoned about 20 years ago when the synagogue's garden club – a group of women who tended to the plants and made flower arrangements for Shabbat services – disbanded.

Anita Bender, who was a member of the garden club, said fellow congregant Alice Sherman came up with the idea for the garden, which was made up of plants mentioned in the Bible, like bitter herbs, grapes, figs, ferns and prawns.

Bender said the Biblical garden served as a model for others all around the country. During the High Holidays congregants would sit in the garden to meditate, and congregants held wedding receptions there. Garden club members became fast friends.

"This was a way people who had something in common could get together and work together, and it built a community within a community," Bender said.

"It is nice that it is being rejuvenated in a different way," she said. "I think gardening is making a good comeback."

For more information, visit beantownjewishgardenprojects.wordpress.com.

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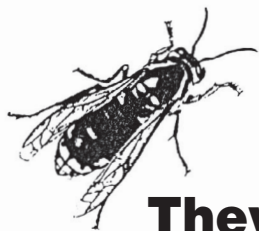
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Jewish fundraisers report upswing in giving

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nection, as well as CJP's programs for families with young children and its Israel advocacy work.

CJP will be funding Birthright support staff on 11 campuses to work on recruitment and post-trip engagement. This fall, Amherst, Wellesley, Williams, Brown and MIT are being added to the roster.

A major new CJP initiative is a program to put young adults with disabilities in jobs, which received a \$2.5 million donation from the Ruderman Family Foundation.

Preuss said improvements in the economy might have played a role in the campaign's success, but he also noted that the Boston campaign outpaced those in other Jewish communities.

Joe Berkofsky, a representative of the Jewish Federations of North America, said the Boston campaign is among the top five in the country. The 157 federations in North America raised a total of \$925 million in 2010, the latest campaign year it tracked, down 2 percent from the year before. Berkofsky said the campaigns are stabilizing, as the 2009 campaign was down 13 percent from the year before.

CJP is not the only local Jewish organization raising more money this year. The Anti-Defamation League's New England region has raised 11 percent more than what was raised at this time last year, said director Derrek Shulman. It aims to raise \$3,030,000 in unrestricted funds this calendar year.

The group is still recovering from a drop in fundraising during the recession: In 2007, the regional ADL raised more than \$5 million.

Shulman said donations have been bolstered by efforts to reach beyond Greater Boston. The ADL added board members from Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Central Massachusetts, and is increasing its programming in Northern New England and Central and Western Massachusetts. In addition, board members are donating more, increasing their total giving by about 11 percent. Honorary dinners are also generating more contributions.

The New England region of the Jewish National Fund also expects to raise more money this campaign cycle, which ends Sept. 30. The local office has already raised \$3.3 million and expects to finish out with \$3.5 million, said Sharon Freedman, national campaign director. Last year, the New England region raised \$2.6 million.

Why the spike in donations? Freedman said many of the donations came in response to the Carmel Forest Fire in December. Also, the number of people on the board of directors is now at 46, an increase from last year. There is now a waiting list to get on the board.

Nationally, JNF, which raised \$46 million last year, aims to raise \$60-\$62 million. So far it has raised close to \$55 million.