

Maplewood Jewish Center Dedicates New Building on Chanukah

By Sharon Mark Cohen

The Maplewood Jewish Center (MJC) opened the doors of the Charles Kimmel Building on Parker Avenue to capacity on Chanukah. Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky, MJC spiritual leader, spoke of the rededication of the Holy Temple and the purposeful dedication of the newly renovated state-of-the-art building on Sunday, December 5. The long-awaited, COVID-19 postponed opening was celebrated with fanfare and smiling eyes peeking out above MJC insignia facemasks.

Rabbi Bogomilsky said, "With this building we're going to illuminate the public domain." The stately building comes equipped with the first-ever mikvah in the community. As the rabbi explained, the mikvah is at the beginning of the life cycle of the Jewish nation, and as the plaque at the entrance of the mikvah says: "Building

a mikvah takes precedence over building a synagogue or buying a holy Torah scroll."

There are two types of commandments, said Rabbi Yitzchok Bistritzky of Mikvah USA. There are those with reason and those without. The mitzvah of the mikvah is a commandment without reason. "It is really something we don't understand, but we trust God; it will make our lives better and purer. It's all about connecting with God, and avoiding a disconnect," he said, noting that MJC was the recipient of the 98th kosher mikvah that Mikvah USA has helped to build.

The start of the renovations was a huge process, said Rabbi Bogomilsky. He laughed as he told the story of a couple who was picking up their triplet grandchildren from the Kinder Gan Preschool at the MJC. They asked the Bogomilskys: "What is your dream?" Rabbi Bogomilsky joked that "the question weighed nothing but turned out to be a ton of bricks. ... Careful what you ask for and who you ask it of."

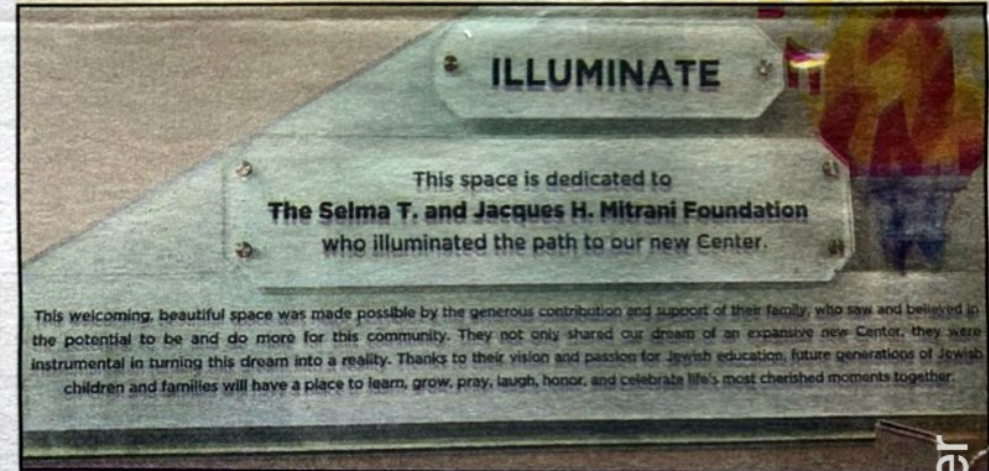
Rabbi Bogomilsky called upon his wife, Frumie, head of MJC's renowned Kinder Gan Preschool, to present a gift to Lenny and Myrna Comerchero, the grandparents of the triplets. "The Comercheros' lives," Frumie noted, "passed many places in Judaism." Frumie asked Lenny why they chose to donate the money from The Selma T. and Jacques H. Mitrani Foundation to the Orthodox institution. Lenny, who runs the foundation with his wife and children, which his aunt started in memory of her late husband, chose MJC because he said Orthodoxy is the future of Judaism. "They are the cornerstone," Frumie added as she presented the Comercheros with an engraved plaque as a thank you.

Myrna Comerchero said this was the first endeavor of their aunt's foundation since her passing, and she was startled by the award and very appreciative. Lenny added how "incredibly proud" they were

and felt "the final product went well beyond [their] expectations."

Maplewood Mayor Frank McGehee addressed the congregation, complimenting the dedication as fitting on Chanukah, as he introduced Deputy Mayor Dean Dafis who joined the festivities.

Rabbi Bogomilsky noted that the congregation was in the sanctuary dedicated by past president of MJC David Wise and his wife, Debra Chudnow. Wise remarked that Rabbi Sholom and Frumie are "mission-driven natural leaders," calling Sholom the producer and Frumie the artistic



The plaque reads, in part: "This space is dedicated to The Selma T. and Jacques H. Mitrani Foundation who illuminated the path to our new Center."

Seth Antiles, synagogue president, remarked: "The construction of this shul and preschool are truly inspirational. Rabbi Sholom and Frumie had—and have—a vision to shine a bright light into our Maplewood Jewish community, and we overcame plenty of obstacles to bring this project to fruition. I have no doubt that this is just one step, albeit a giant step, along the way of continuing to build an active, vibrant Jewish community in Maplewood."

Antiles emphasized the rabbi's example and advice to "think positive, take massive action and trust in Hashem." He added the rabbi's words "If you don't say it, don't believe it, it's not going to happen," and emphasized, "God put us here to build our world and ourselves—to grow." He continued, "This building is where we grow our lives," imploring the congregation to follow the rabbi's advice.

director. "While the project took twice as long as expected and cost twice as much," Wise said, "it all came to fruition because of Frumie and Sholom, and they in turn, give credit to God."


After receiving a plaque for their help, Wise and Chudnow each hung a mezuzah on the sanctuary door posts. Glass-engraved plaques highlight the generous donations of mezuzot, classrooms and various artifacts in the synagogue building. The Ner Tamid in the sanctuary, donated by Isaac Ostrovsky, z"l, and Barbara Ostrovsky, was handcrafted by artist Claude Riedel in 2018.

A video presentation of the history of the MJC featuring Rabbi Bogomilsky and past presidents Jacob Sturm and Steve Baum followed the acknowledgment of others who played a crucial role in the



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reconstruction of the MJC, including the contractor and architects who also received thank you plaques.

Acknowledging the forerunners of the new building, realtor David Cooper, z"l, and the Kimmel family, among others, Rabbi Bogomilsky and Frumie announced the names of congregants who were missed.

With a standing ovation for the Bogomilsky children, Rabbi Bogomilsky handed out dollar bills to the congregation in recognition of the Rebbe's gesture with the intention that the recipient should give the money to charity. Asking everyone to bring their friends and relatives to the newly renovat-

ed MJC, he followed by proudly inviting everyone to tour the building before joining them downstairs for refreshments in the social hall.

Jonathan Factor, a congregant, noted the importance of accessibility with an elevator to every floor; Steven Eisenberg, another member, invited all to "come experience it for yourself" and "see the culmination of the hard work with wonderful spacious, inviting, light space." David Azarch was "very impressed that it came to be," adding that "the happiness in the room during the presentations was tangible."