

# New rabbi, president attempt to revive Maplewood's Congregation Beth Ephraim

by Johanna Ginsberg  
NJN Staff Writer

When Steve Bauml was considering moving to Maplewood two and half years ago, he attended services at Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center. He was surprised at the dearth of young families but, said the 53-year-old former resident of Manalapan, he assumed they just didn't happen to be there that day.

He did buy a home in the town, within walking distance of the train station and the synagogue, only to discover when he began attending services that, in fact, "there weren't any young people" in the congregation.

At that time, the synagogue, located at the corner of Prospect and Parker Avenues, was a faded green building with overgrown bushes, haphazard lighting, and a large white sign in front.

Since it was founded in the early 1960s, its membership had aged and, according to Bauml, the Orthodox shul, which had operated without a rabbi for seven years, was headed for oblivion. It was frequently impossible to scrape together a Shabbat morning minyan, and Bauml often was forced to attend services by walking to a shul in the Ivy Hill section of Newark or to Congregation Beth El in South Orange.

But he remained committed to Beth Ephraim. When its president Kuno Roth stepped down shortly after Bauml moved to town, Bauml took the job. In his new role, he decided the congregation needed a rabbi. "The rabbi plays an important role in setting the tone, creating a focus, resolving religious questions, and being a source of teaching," he said.

When he found the Bogomilskys — Rabbi Sholom and his wife, Frumie — he knew it was a match; they offered something "we couldn't turn down," he said. The couple, who are both enthusiastic, firmly committed to

'97, Maplewood was an old town getting older." Now, he sees people who "came for the neighborhood, to raise the children in the suburbs, but they're not affiliated. I want to get them affiliated."

But the first person they seem to have influenced was not even Jewish. A little boy in their neighbor-

They're the kind of people you want to be friends with. Our children play with their children." A family that helped bring the Marmours, who are also members of Ohav Shalom Congregation in South Orange, to Beth Ephraim. Although they never pictured themselves at an Orthodox shul.



Congregation Beth Ephraim at the corner of Prospect and Parker Avenues in Maplewood has a new coat of paint — and a new rabbi.

hood, after watching the Bogomilskys build a sukka, went to his mother and said, recalled Frumie Bogomilsky, "Ma, I think I want to be Jewish." She told the mother not to worry. When Christmas came around, the Bogomilsky youngsters watched the neighbors put up a Christmas tree and decorations and said to their mother, "Ma, I think I want to be Christian." The families have been friends ever since.

The rabbi and his wife have made a more serious impact on their Jewish neighbors. Sharon Marmour, who lives around the corner from them, told *NJ Jewish News*, "They're really great people.

they feel very comfortable there. "We like being at the shul," said Marmour. "It's very welcoming to children — the kind of place you can come with your kids, and you don't have to shush them."

Bauml believes the shul's future rests on bringing in more people like the Marmours, people who will eventually take over leadership of the congregation. In addition to reaching out through personal relationships, Bauml noted, the shul is also raising its visibility in the community with events like the recent Hanukka menorah-lighting in the town's Ricalton Square along

See BETH EPHRAIM page

## Coming for Maplewood rabbi

moving out. A younger generation strictly religious day school



larly.

She likes the idea of creating a Jewish community in Maplewood. "There are a lot of Jews in Maplewood.... I like to see people walking to shul on Saturday. I like that feeling."

So do the Bogomilskys, who have a vision for the town. "We want to make a very nice, more religious Jewish community," Rabbi Bogomilsky said.

More religious Jews have come to look at Maplewood, but most buy houses elsewhere. Allie Rimer and David Stokar were drawn by the character of Maplewood's houses and the inviting downtown commercial district. They even met with the Bogomilskys. "Come and be *halutzim* [pioneers]," Allie recalled the rabbi saying to them. But they settled in Highland Park instead. "I need an *eruv*, a shul. We didn't want to be *halutzim*," she said. (An *eruv* is a boundary that allows observant people to carry objects and push carriages outside their homes on Shabbat, actions otherwise prohibited.)

Today, the Bogomilskys might have a different response for people looking for an *eruv*. In the last few weeks, recounted the rabbi, eight or nine people have suggested that he install an *eruv* in the town.

The idea took the Bogomilskys by surprise. "I didn't think people were sitting at home on Shabbos in Maplewood for lack of an *eruv*," said Frumie Bogomilsky.

"I got stopped in the strangest places," Sholom Bogomilsky said. "Even the post office." He recalled, "I asked them, 'Are you *shomer Shabbos* [Sabbath observant]?' 'No,' they responded, 'but I'd feel much more comfortable.' Or, 'When my children come to visit, they'd feel much more comfortable.' Or even, 'It will bring more religious Jews, and that will raise our real estate values.' Everyone has an interest," he said. They are investigating the idea and have set up a meeting with an expert in Tenafly, where the issue ignited passions recently.

Although many people in Maplewood welcome the idea, some did raise concerns.

"An *eruv* would be good for the town," said Allison Ziefert, village manager, Maplewood Village Alliance, and a member of Oheb Shalom. "It would add another dimension to the Jewish community and attract young professionals who need to live close to [New York]," she added. "Maplewood strives to be a town that appeals to different people at different economic levels."

But Brian McNamara, who