

Maplewood Jewish Center Completes Renovations

By Sharon Mark Cohen

Maplewood Jewish Center (MJC) put Maplewood on the map—the Jewish map. After 12 years, a dream has finally come true for the members of the MJC community.

Frumie Bogomilsky, MJC administrator, wife of spiritual leader Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky and director of the synagogue's renowned MJC Kinder Gan Preschool, initially tossed out the idea of remodeling the MJC. Rabbi Bogomilsky brought the two-and-a-half-year, \$5.5 million project to fruition. It took much planning, negotiating and fundraising, and Frumie credits her husband with the fortitude needed to stay calm and see it through.



Maplewood Jewish Center from second floor lobby.



Maplewood Jewish Center mikvah.

When the congregation outgrew its original synagogue building, the MJC purchased the brick building down the street. Carol Kimmel and her family donated the property in memory of her husband, Charles Kimmel, who was fascinated by the Bogomilskys' foresight and believed in their dream of buying the larger building. That was in 2008, just in time for the Bogomilskys' eldest son, Yossi, to become a bar mitzvah that June.

"Timing is everything" could not have been truer, as the certificate of occupancy was obtained for the completely renovated MJC building, at 113-117 Parker Avenue, on Friday, September 4, just in time for the start of the school year, the High Holidays and a very special Shabbat.

Following Avremy Bogomilsky's hanachot rebfill in outside earlier in the summer, the fourth son of the Bogomilsky family marked his 13th birthday on Shabbat Parshat Ki Tavo, 16 Elul (September 5) indoors at the com-

pletely remodeled MJC where he was called up to the Torah for his first aliyah during Mincha.

Maplewood, an Essex County city of nearly 25,000 residents, is now equipped to serve every aspect of the Jewish community, with safety and security systems fully in place. Bringing the community together started with a kosher eruv, built in 2007 through the tireless efforts of the synagogue's vice-president, Jeffrey Kingsley, Z"l.

In 2014, the first conversations for expansion started when the Comercher family stepped up to the plate. The Mitran Family Foundation of Myrna and Leny Comercher and their children donated the seed money to enable MJC to offer more to the community. Leny asked Frumie her "ultimate dream" and told her to "start by finding out the costs."

Pleased with the education and care their triplet grandchildren received in "Kinder Gan, Leny revealed, "Sharing a belief with my wife in the future of Judaism ultimately residing with some form of Orthodoxy, we paid for the architect, renderings and part of the construction costs."

Today, the doors for entering the stately building open to a grand spiral staircase leading upstairs. There, the well-designed, comfortable and airy high-ceilinged sanctuary, complete with fabric-cushioned, built-in bench seating for 116, is partitioned by a mahogany mechitza fitted with decorative, easy-to-clean tiled-floor lobby entrance, a Shabbat elevator sits behind a classical mahogany wooden door.

A separate set of hefty, matching lobby doors leads to the four classrooms on the first floor. Frumie has been hard at work as the preschool director for ages 18 months to 5 years, arranging the new classrooms with all their bells and whistles. The school opened on September 8 with a waiting list. Fifty students are registered with two classes meeting in person and two virtually.

On the opposite side of the building, on tree-lined Burr Road, a ramp leads to the fully accessible, brand-new, first-ever kosher mikvah in Maplewood. Housed at the MJC, the female-only mikvah is nothing short of breathtakingly beautiful. An entrance room and preparation room, stocked with spa-style amenities, lead to the ritual bath, where three-dimensional flowing gray-tiled walls and a domed white ceiling are accented by green glass flooring.



Rabbi and Frumie Bogomilsky in front of the shul building.

The handsome brick structure, which nearly tripled in size, sports a newly equipped state-of-the-art kitchen built with attention to detail and functionality. The lower level is complete with a formal, class social hall to accommodate 120 guests.

The picturesque landscaping is encased by bold, black iron fencing, which has the neighbors talking about the improved

neighboring property. Rabbi Bogomilsky said, "We're getting so many compliments on the building that people stop me in Maplewood Village and say, 'Rabbi, you made the rundown property so beautiful.'"

Maplewood realtor and MJC congregant Karen Harris Kingsley added, "From the expanded preschool bringing greater options for the residents, to new opportunities to expand the already diversified community, the renovations at the MJC are expected to have a positive impact on the already booming local real estate market in Maplewood."

The grounds include a large, concrete patio with room for outdoor seating under a tent, which will double as an area for the sukkah. Tall evergreens line the back of the lot with flowering trees in front. An aes-



Avremy and BatSheva Bogomilsky



Maplewood Jewish Center.

thetically pleasing variety of shrubs present the backdrop for an array of colorful seasonal perennials. The curb appeal is further enhanced by a peaceful meditation garden.

In its new larger space, the MJC's growing family will be able to socially distance as part of Maplewood Jewish Center's "COVID Ten Commandments."

There's still work to be done and time to donate. Buildings, rooms and furnishings will be dedicated in style after the COVID-19 crisis. For more information, contact admin@maplewoodjewishcenter.org or call Frumie Bogomilsky at 973-755-4444.