

Maplewood synagogue celebrates first bar mitzva in 30 years

by Johanna Ginsberg
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When Moss Cohen celebrates becoming a bar mitzva on Shabbat, June 9, it will be the first bar mitzva at Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center in 30 years.

"It's so exciting, and they're making such a big deal about it — it's fun," said Moss. "They're talking



Moss Cohen studies his Torah portion while on winter break last December. On June 9 he will become the first bar mitzva celebrant at Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center in 30 years. Photos courtesy Sharon Cohen

about it all the time."

His mother, Sharon, put the occasion in context. "It's thrilling," she said. "It's wonderful to see this shul coming to life and know Moss is part of that."

The community sees the celebration as a marker of its progress. Just five years ago, the congregation had about 10 members. Today, it is still small, but growth is obvious, with membership hovering around 35 members. The three-year-old preschool, begun with just three children, now has 20 enrolled.

And while Moss' is the first bar mitzva in decades, Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky pointed out that it is not the first *simha* at the synagogue involving youngsters.

"We've had baby namings and *britot*," he said. "It shows people are interested in this shul. They're willing to come even though there are other shuls in the area that are larger and fancier. That they're willing to share their *simhas* with us means a lot."

Maplewood-South Orange has four other synagogues: the Reform Sharey Tefilo-Israel and the Conservative Oheb Shalom Congregation and Congregation Beth El in South Orange, and Congregation Ahavath Zion, an Orthodox congregation, in Maplewood.

Bogomilsky is affiliated with the



Moss Cohen, far right, with his family — from left, Rina, 17, Arnee, Judd, 19, and Sharon — on a trip to Ohio. The year-old will be the first bar mitzva at Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center in 30 years.

Chabad-Lubavitch hasidic outreach movement, but the synagogue is identified simply as Orthodox.

When Bogomilsky first arrived 12 year ago, he said, he couldn't stay. "I had to leave to find another way to make a living." However, he returned six years ago.

Now a CPA, he still doesn't earn a living from his position at the shul but is happy to lead it. He

looks forward to a day when the congregation will support him, he said — "Maybe someday."

The Cohens, who live in South Orange, joined Beth Ephraim when Rabbi Jehiel Orenstein retired as the rabbi of Beth El. Their two older children, Judd, 19, and Rina, 17, celebrated becoming b'nei mitzva at Beth El.

Like other b'nei mitzva before him, Moss is more focused on the

personal meaning of the day. He acknowledged that he's "a little nervous about forgetting everything." Still, he's excited about the Torah portion, Shelach, because it includes the story of the spies sent in to scout the Promised Land.

"I'm a big James Bond fan," said.

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