

# A ceremony 30 years in the making

By Philip Sean Curran  
Staff Writer

Although they did not know his name, the members of Congregation Beth Ephraim waited 30 years for Moss Cohen of South Orange to have his bar mitzvah Saturday.

It had been that long since the last bar mitzvah for the Orthodox synagogue on Prospect Street in Maplewood.

All that changed shortly after 11 a.m. on Saturday as Cohen stepped forward to take his spot at the bimah, or altar, to read from the Book of Numbers.

Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky, the spiritual leader of the congregation, announced that Cohen was going to "help us out with reading the Torah."

Dressed in a dark suit, the bespectacled Cohen admitted being a little nervous leading up to Saturday. He said he had been preparing for the past six to seven months with the aid of a tutor.

His mother, Sharon, said her son had said this was the most important day of his life.

It was a pretty important day in the life of the synagogue, too.

The gap between bar mitzvahs was due in large part to the changes the congregation went through. Founded in the mid-1960s, its membership began to get older.

No young families were moving to fill up the seats and the young men who had attended there later moved away as adults. As a result, the synagogue has struggled to have a quorum of 10 men.

That began to change as MidTown Direct helped lure Jewish families



Moss Cohen, of South Orange, holds the Torah after his Bar Mitzvah on Saturday at Congregation Beth Ephraim in Maplewood, the first in 30 years.

across the Hudson. Today, the membership has tripled to 30 member families, said Steve Bauml, president of the synagogue.

Cohen is the youngest of three children. His older brother, Judd, had his bar mitzvah at the family's old synagogue, Congregation Beth-El,

located in South Orange.

But three years ago, the family switched to the Beth Ephraim. So it was only a matter of time before the long streak without a bar mitzvah would end.

The bar mitzvah is the traditional rite of passage into adulthood for Jewish males. It requires months of intensive study to read the Torah in the Biblical Hebrew, a form without vowels or punctuation. Cohen's role in the service started when the Torah was removed from the ark that holds the Scriptures. In a symbolic gesture, his father, Arnee, handed the Torah to his son.

Moss Cohen then walked through the sanctuary carrying the Torah.

When his turn to read came, he spoke in a low voice, leading the rabbi to gesture with his palm up for him to speak louder.

Once Cohen finished reading, members of the congregation gently pelted him with small plastic bags containing raisins, nuts and candy — "a sign of the sweetness of his accomplishments and the hopes for a sweet life," according to the program for the event.

The congregation knows now that they will not have to wait another 30 years for the next bar mitzvah. New families have young sons waiting in the wings.

Bogomilsky's son, Yosef, is due to have his next year.

"It's like a rebirth of our synagogue," Arnee Cohen said.

Philip Sean Curran can be reached at 973-763-0700, ext. 110, or at [newsrecord@thelocalsource.com](mailto:newsrecord@thelocalsource.com).

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