

His is a walk of faith

By Philip Sean Curran
Staff Writer

On a recent Saturday morning, Jonathan Factor began the 30-minute walk to his synagogue.

The trip would take less time by car, but as an Orthodox Jew, the South Orange man observes the prohibition about driving on the Sabbath. Neither rain nor snow has kept him from walking, he says with an athlete's bravado.

Not even cerebral palsy.

The 34-year-old has suffered from it since birth. "CP," as he refers to it, affects the entire left side of his body.

"It's been a struggle," Factor said. "You do what you got to do."

That much is obvious to anyone who has seen him over the years walk to and from Congregation Beth Ephraim Maplewood Jewish Center.

Every Saturday, he follows the same route. He begins from his condominium on Muse Lane, walks up to Valley Street and turns left.

It is his weekly journey of faith, to a place where he goes to read from the same Scriptures that his ancestors have for generations. The synagogue is located at the intersection of Parker and Prospect avenues, a distance of about half a mile.

To get there, Factor first must nav-

igate the streets of South Orange and Maplewood. His path takes him up hills and along roads that slope.

On Saturday, the air was cold and hard on the hands.

At times, Factor had to hold on to his yarmulke to prevent the wind from blowing it away.

But compared to other days, this was a walk in the park.

On the Sabbath, his ability to carry is limited to inside the home and the synagogue. That means on rainy Saturdays, his umbrella stays home.

But money is being raised to erect an Eruv, a symbolic boundary that would ease that restriction for him and others. Officials in Maplewood and South Orange have given permission to have one erected in their towns.

Along the journey, Factor keeps to a rapid gait. He talks about his life's story, one that has a familiar ring to it: a transplanted New Yorker who came to South Orange within the past 10 years.

He works in the city for the New York Department of Education, catching an early train into Manhattan.

As an advocate for the disabled, he fought New Jersey Transit to install an elevator at the South Orange train station. Thanks to him, others with disabilities will never have to look at a



Johnathon Factor, who suffers from cerebral palsy, walks from his South Orange home to a synagogue in Maplewood each Saturday.

flight of stairs as an obstacle to going to work every day. The train station is behind him now, as Factor is halfway to Beth Ephraim. He walks past the A&P on Valley Street, while some lacrosse players are practicing on the field behind Columbia High School.

The big hill is coming on Parker Avenue. A motorist wanting to make a turn gives Factor the right of way.

Asked if he was tempted to take a cab, he answers "never."

"It's good exercise," he said. "It's commitment, it's everything."

Factor gets to service and takes a seat toward the front with another journey complete and one to go.

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