

## **President's Report to May 21, 2014 Congregation Meeting**

Since this was a very long President's Report, I decided to place the more detailed version on the Temple web site. I thought you'd want to get out of here tonight!

Welcome everyone and thank you for attending tonight's Congregational Meeting. This is my 3<sup>rd</sup> and last "State of the Temple" address. I've really enjoyed the high points of my term as President, as well as the challenges of the position. I couldn't have done it without the many Temple members who volunteer their time to run important committees, which provide many services for the Temple for many of the ritual, educational, publicity, SCRIP, social action and social activities that occur at the Temple. In addition, there are many passionate, intelligent people who provide great counsel, whom I thank very much.

I'd like to start by extending my congratulations to Art & Marge Groten on receiving the Vassar Temple Founders Service Award. Art & Marge have been active in the Temple for many years, engaging in various forms of Temple leadership, as well as enhancing the Temple library and music at Services. Congratulations Marge & Art.

This has been a very busy year with a number of great accomplishments. The temple is alive and well, playing a visible role in the community, and working toward the future. We are fortunate to professionals among our ranks, including Rabbi Golomb and Dr. Joel Hoffman who, in addition to their regular duties, have each brought new and creative ideas on Jewish education at the Temple.

But we all know running the Temple is not just about a Board conducting Temple business. Our committees contribute to help make our Temple a pleasant place to meet friends and enjoy ourselves. Just as was done last year, each of the committee chairs built a summary report of accomplishments, which I laid out on the table in the back of the room.

We started the year with transition in the office, with Sherrie Geisler becoming our new temple Office Manager. Sherrie has been doing an excellent job handling bookkeeping requirements, handling congregant and guest calls, and helping us keep the operation running smoothly. We also

hired a new handyman to replace George, who resigned, and a new cleaning service. Alvin came on board very quickly and has become a valuable member of our staff. The cleaning service has been great ... someone commented “The bathrooms have never been cleaner!”

Membership is, without a doubt, one of the most important committees of the Temple. We had 8 new families joining the Temple this year. While Perla Kaufman runs the committee, and contacts each interested family, we are all membership committee members. We found that the best time for a prospective member to tour the temple is on a Sunday when the building is bustling with energy!

The House Committee has had one of its busiest years in recent memory. We took advantage of a Central Hudson energy assessment, and had new lighting installed, which produced better light, and should save the temple considerably on energy costs. That project was followed by (the realization that we needed to immediately) replacing the old, rusting boiler with a new one. Bob Ritter led that project, obtaining bids and working with the committee to select a vendor to install a more efficient boiler. The result brought heat to our building when we needed it most. It was a wonderful feeling to step into the building and feel the warmth of the heat. Many thanks to our members who were flexible when attending presentations & Shabbat services accompanied by space heaters!

We also had to deal with some serious flooding in the downstairs classrooms and the social hall due to heavy rain. The next big House project will be to address drainage issues in the downstairs areas, as well as remove and replace water-damaged sheetrock from prior flooding. Very preliminary ideas being discussed, and you’ll hear more on this topic in the weeks to come.

In the meantime, we painted walls and had new flooring installed in 3 offices. There were also a number of kitchen repair projects.

The Ritual committee, under the leadership of Ron Rosen, has had a very busy schedule, once again coordinating the High Holiday and arranging for our lay-led summer Shabbat services last summer and in the coming months. Three Saturday morning Shabbat programs were sponsored with programs that included a physician panel, a special New Paths interview with Rabbi Arnold via Skype, and a presentation on “Seeing the World Through Jewish Eyes”. The committee arranged for guest speakers at 3 Friday night services.

The committee also worked with Rabbi, Joe and Elisa to present a “Shabbat Shirah” special service, with a guest cellist.

The Ritual committee also oversees the Torah Rolling activities, organized by Jeff Brenner, and focused on re-rolling the Torah scrolls to ensure that they remain usable for a long period of time. This year, Torah Rolling was taken “on the road”, with a special event at the East Fishkill Library.

Sandra Mamis and her crew brought a huge sense of community with the very popular Break-Fast at the conclusion of Yom Kippur and the wonderful second annual Vassar Temple first night Passover Seder, attracting over 90 people!

This year our publicity committee has increased the presence of the temple in print and Social Media. Our biggest challenge in this area was in distributing many of Doi’s former publicity responsibilities among several volunteers, bringing the state of "Publicity" at Vassar Temple to a whole new dimension. Improvements included several color membership and Hebrew school ads in the Voice, color postcards advertising our new Hebrew school program, Voice holiday greetings, and Facebook ads. Our website, press releases and accompanying photos, and notices we place on the Federation website all proved to be successful means of bringing the general public to our temple for events and membership at no significant cost to us. Our Facebook page has presented over 50 Facebook events and has been shown to increase member attendance at these activities. The number of fans who "liked" the Vassar Temple Facebook page has grown over 50% this year, to over 300!

The current temple publicity team includes Sue Lesser and Donna Loshin as Bulletin Editors, Marianne Abrams as Bulletin Publisher, Joel Kelson as WebMaster, CJ Kelly produces the Friday Night Flyer, Bob Ritter handles Facebook, FB Ads, Blog, and Press Releases; Perla Kaufman handling Congregational E-mails/Facebook/Federation Website; Susan Hecht handling Mid Month Reminder & Flyers, Muriel Lampell for Poughkeepsie Journal Religion Page, and Marian Schwartz handling the Voice, Print Ads/Bulletin. As you can see, it’s a large team. Special thanks to Rachel Mamis for her on-going assistance with the website.

Of course, we need to all thank Doi Cohen, for sharing her technical expertise and general wisdom, always with a gracious touch, to guide the numerous volunteers who have taken on their new publicity roles this year.

Sisterhood is also active in Temple life, hosting dinners, the twice-annual rummage sale, and raising funds. The recently-launched “Chai Tea” program brings together members of Sisterhood every month. Tiny Temple continues to offer programs to families in the community with very young children, with fun projects for the kids and a chance for parents to meet other Jewish parents. This year Tiny Temple also served as our Kindergarten Religious School program. Last Sunday, Sisterhood Sunday hosted the Doris & Fannie Berlin Lecture featuring Dr. Lila Corwin Berman, a wonderful lecture titled “The City and the Jew: Reflections on Leaving & Returning”.

Our Religious School continues to evolve, offering Sunday, Hebrew and High School Jewish education, all under the guidance of our Education Director, Dr. Joel Hoffman. The new Hebrew program was well received, with a lot of excitement about learning Hebrew. Our Sunday morning and Wednesday evening classes continue to be well attended.. In addition, students and parents prepared and served meals at the Lunchbox, a wonderful Social Action experience allowing the kids to assist in serving meals to the homeless. Thanks to Alan Kaflowitz for chairing this important committee.

Speaking of Social Action, this year started on a high note, as Vassar Temple was honored with the Community Partnership Award from Dutchess Outreach, presented to us at their annual luncheon, for the congregation’s long term commitment to social action. A few of these activities are Temple Tzedakah box, Lunch Box, CanJam, and Hillcrest overnight shelter, just to name a few. A new project is our involvement in the recently formed Poughkeepsie Mothers Group, which gives both English and Spanish speaking new mothers the information and support they need at this vulnerable time.

And finally, let’s not forget the After Hours social event, and the many Shabbat dinners hosted at the Temple. They provide us opportunities to enjoy ourselves by mingling with other members. Many thanks to Bob Ritter, Perla Kaufman, and others who made that evening such a great success!

This year we started our Rabbi Search, with Bob Ritter and myself setting an overall framework for the Search and Transition roles, with Sandra leading Search Cmte and Perla leading Transition. The Search Committee is well under way, having just completed 3 congregation input sessions. The committee now needs to study the input, build a profile of our ideal

candidate and work with the CCAR office to obtain resumes. Continued information about the Rabbi Search will be included in the Temple web site.

There are so many people I can thank for keeping Vassar Temple so vibrant, and I apologize in advance for anyone I miss:

Bob Ritter, president-elect, for bringing significant improvements to our temple building and the temple's social scene! He spearheaded many building improvements, oversaw the bids and installation of the new boiler, and coordinated cleanup after recent flooding, painted, sidewalk repair, and the list goes on. Bob also coordinated two well-attended After Hours events, with beer and Italian food themes.

- Brian Silverman, who is stepping down as Treasurer and Finance Committee chair after serving in those roles for many years. Brian also served as unofficial Temple Administrator, providing direction to Sherri in the office and Alvin our custodian. Brian provided guidance and direction that resulted in the Temple running like a well-oiled machine!
- Marge Groten, who achieved a challenging role of chairing the Nominating committee. Marge did a wonderful job keeping the committee on track, resulting in a great slate, which we will vote on shortly.
- Marianne Abrams for designing and creating Temple publications, including the current temple logo.
- Susan Hecht, for coordinating the Reyut committee, which attends to members of our Temple family who are ill, in the hospital, or have recently lost loved ones,
- The Gala committee, chaired by Andi Ciminello and Jen Dahnert, which honored the Seth Erlebacher Religious School and created the Hineni Fund.
- Joel Kelson, who whipped the new Temple web site into shape, and has been keeping it up to date with the help of Rachel Mamis.
- The Purim Spiel team, writer/director Art Menken, costume designer Carol Menken, and co-sub-directors Barbara Greenberg and Dave Wolf. We also have a great group of actors, including Kurt Quackenbush, Andy Chernack, Dave Wolf and Anna Metzger, among others.
- But the one person we really need to thank is Sandra Mamis. Sandra, in her 2<sup>nd</sup> term as immediate past president, is outstanding in the ways she has benefited everyone at the temple, both behind the scenes and in very visible roles. As our SCRIP Queen, she expanded our SCRIP

offerings to include many businesses beyond the local supermarkets, and with everyone's efforts, raised significant funds to help balance the operating budget. Sandra also led the Break-Fast, the Passover Seder, and is chairing the upcoming Gala, as well as the Rabbi Search committee. Thank you Sandra for being an excellent role model, for creating and leading events that many temple members enjoy, and for leading the search to locate our next spiritual leader!

So thank you everyone for all of your support. I am confident that our new leadership, led by Bob Ritter, will steer the temple down some very exciting paths and will also work to ensure that Vassar Temple maintains its presence in the Dutchess County Jewish community into the future. As always, we welcome your thoughts, your ideas and most of all, your interest in helping to make Vassar Temple the vibrant place that it is throughout the coming year.

Bob Abrams, President