

LOCAL

Southwest Broward temple continues to grow

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A Jerusalem stone wall rises behind the *bima* and sunlight penetrates stained glass windows with scenes from the Old Testament and the Holocaust to light Temple Beth Emet's sanctuary.

The Cooper City Reform synagogue recently celebrated its more than 30 years in southwest Broward County.

Marshall Weinberg, 67, Beth Emet's first president, remembers when the 17 friends eating together after a softball game in 1977 decided to start a synagogue. "The first service was at my house," Weinberg said last week.

Weinberg's daughter Erica was the young synagogue's first bat mitzvah in 1978, he said. Today, Erica Woodham and her family

are temple members.

Bennett Greenspon, a young rabbi who had recently graduated from the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, became the synagogue's first rabbi in the same year.

"He was looking for a place to call home," Weinberg said.

Cantor Jan Sheer was hired after performing High Holiday services. "Everybody fell in love with her," Weinberg said.

The years have been interesting and wonderful, Greenspon, 59, said. He came to South Florida in 1977 because he had family here and started helping out the synagogue, Greenspon said.

"When we got together, we stayed together," he said. "We basically all grew together. We got to change together. As our needs



Rabbi Bennett Greenspon and Cantor Jan Sheer have been with Temple Beth Emet from the beginning. Staff photo/Eric Bojanowski

changed, we were able to morph into what we all needed.

"I came for the people. I ended up staying for the people," Greenspon said.

Beth Emet gave Sheer her first job as a cantor.

"We kind of grew together," she said. Sheer said she grew professionally and met some of her closest friends at the synagogue.

There were very few women cantors 30 years

ago, Sheer, 52, said. She had a degree in voice from the University of Florida and trained with rabbi and cantor Morris Kipper of Temple Judea in Coral Gables. He helped her "merge a love for music and a love for Judaism in one career," she said.

Working with Greenspon has been "a good marriage," Sheer said. "It's kind of rare to find a cantor and a rabbi who have been together for that long."

The synagogue had some austere beginnings, Sheer said.

Over the years services were at a Montessori school in Hollywood, Pembroke Pines Middle School, a hospital annex and at Miramar High School.

After meeting in portables for a few years, the congregation built a syna-

gogue in Pembroke Pines in 1986.

Temple Beth Emet kept growing. A new home opened its doors in Cooper City late in 2000.

Harold Gubnitsky, 47, currently in his second year as president, said the synagogue accepts a wide continuum of beliefs. Services are a balance between traditional and modern Judaism, he said.

The 800-family synagogue is "weighted more to a younger crowd," Gubnitsky said. It has a thriving early childhood education program with a day school for children in 1st through 5th grades, a youth program and a summer camp, he said.

With a 14-acre campus, Beth Emet could add on to the school, Gubnitsky said. "We have the ability to grow."