

From Robert Kaiser, President  
7/25/2010

We are at the beginning of a momentous building project. Members have stepped up to the plate to support the project and have worked through the countless and seemingly endless number of details. Committees have met, and met, and met, and still meet---capital campaign and building design, raising funds, mapping out the building and its intended usages, what do we take from the current shul, and how do we take it. Plans have been drawn, and redrawn, by a skilled architect, Alvah Levine. In Ficon we believe we have picked a fine and honest contractor who understands our needs and limitations, and has worked with us for so long that it is hard to believe that we haven't already built a building. Monies have been raised (and borrowed). Some members have stepped forward as financial guarantors. Decisions have been made, and continue to be made.

And here we stand today on this piece of very carefully chosen property proudly looking at---a hole in the ground--exposed earth and a big earthmover. Look around. Each one of us, beaming, celebrating, with a common comment—"I can't believe we're finally here." So what is it that we are so proud of, what is that we are anticipating, what is it that we are celebrating? What exactly is the "here" that we celebrate. Let me suggest that it is not the walls or the carpet or even the beautiful stained glass windows. Those are all nice and we appreciate every brick and nail. But when all is said and done, it is the space we are creating, and more to the point what it is that we hope and plan and dream about doing in that space.

We stand here today understanding that with all the work and money, it is not merely a building that is the source of our hopes and dreams. What all of us see in our mind's eye is an exciting opportunity for the entire Jewish community, not only a reenvisioning of our own synagogue, but indeed a reenvisioning of the whole synagogue model. Who can look at the community today and deny that the dynamics in our community have changed, and that we need address new realities. And the forefront of that new reality is making our religious institutions accessible on every single level.

We can and must create space that is accessible to all. I mean accessible in the physical sense in that it is in a prime residential neighborhood, with all manner of housing options. Accessible in sense in that people can, according to their own set of priorities, choose to send their children to any of the Jewish Day schools, or choose to send them to one of the finest public schools in the U.S., and one that coincidentally happens to be the only public school in the state in which you can take Hebrew as a foreign language. It will be accessible in the physical sense in that it will be accessible—from the bathroom to the bima—to those with disabilities. It will be accessible in the sense that it will have the appropriate space for people to share their simchas and celebrations, both large and small in style.

But more than any other form of accessibility, we are building holy space that we can make spiritually accessible, a center for the entire community. The committees, and our architect and our builder can deliver a useful tangible product. But it is the challenge to each and every one of us to provide spiritual access that reaches out to every corner of the Jewish community, regardless of level of observance, knowledge level, purported denomination, or prior involvement in the community. It is our challenge to not only do that but simultaneously stay true to traditional observant Judaism. That is our responsibility and privilege.

I will end as I started. We are at the beginning of a momentous building project. Over the course of the next many months we will see this small hole made bigger. We will drive by and see a building erected. But more than anything we will work to see that the holy space that we are creating will meet the hopes and aspirations of our beloved synagogue, and our whole community.