

## **Greenburgh Hebrew Center Celebrates Its Diamond Jubilee**

### **Introduction**

**By Naomi Feinkind and Alan Kravitz**

The last quarter century, from 1997 to 2022, has seen Greenburgh Hebrew Center (GHC) continue to adapt to a changing environment.

We have updated our prayer books for all services, from weekdays to Shabbat, to the High Holidays, replacing Sim Shalom with the new Lev Shalom Siddurim and Machzor. We also are now using the Etz Hayim Chumash, which has replaced the Hertz Chumash. We have explored different configurations of the sanctuary during services. Our Religious School moved to a two day a week model with monthly Junior Congregation Services. Our Nursery School morphed into an Early Childhood Center, which continues to thrive and has been enhanced with wonderful PJ Library events.

We have said good-bye to beloved clergy and welcomed new ones to carry on GHC's mission "to be a vibrant egalitarian Conservative Jewish community in Westchester County, embracing our traditions while actively participating in our changing world."

We have made adaptations to our facility by adding energy-conserving solar panels to our roof. Our building is now more accessible to those with limited mobility, as we provided ramps both outside the building and inside the sanctuary and created dedicated parking spaces. Our large print texts and hearing assisted devices are available for the visually and hearing impaired.

Our constitution has been amended several times over the past 25 years to recognize our ever-evolving community, incorporating technology and security, as well as striving for inclusivity. We welcome individuals from all walks of life, singles and families, traditional, interfaith, blended and LGBTQ.

The last quarter century has brought countless changes and innovations to GHC, certainly too numerous to mention. Perhaps the two most significant events of the past 25 years have been our continued transformation to an egalitarian congregation and our merger, in 2004, with the Midchester Jewish Center of Yonkers.

### **The Merger**

**by Michael Taub**

I was honored to serve as GHC President from June 1, 2003, to May 31, 2005. There were two main highlights of my term as President. One was the opportunity to work with then Executive Vice President Dr. Eliot Lazar, z"l. I relied upon Eliot's friendship, wisdom, and guidance (often three or four times each day) to weave my way through the various issues that one confronts as synagogue President.

The other highlight was the marshalling of GHC's merger with The Midchester Jewish Center. Prior to my term, GHC had been approached by various Midchester members, led by The Honorable Cecile Singer, with a merger proposal. That proposal created an opportunity for GHC to shore up its membership, and to secure its immediate future. GHC formed a Committee, which consisted of Eliot, Saul Singer, z"l, Larry Ecker, (The Honorable Lawrence H. Ecker, but he'll always be "Larry" at GHC), our current President, Jeff Liss, and our former member Jonathan Siegel. We were guided along the way by Rabbi Barry Kenter. We tried our best to approach the merger discussions in a dignified and sensitive manner. GHC was, after all, to be the acquiring corporation; Midchester would be joining us. Jon Siegel was a non-practicing attorney with a corporate background, but the prime reason for his participation was that his grandparents had been Midchester members, and his participation provided the Committee with an understanding of the many issues that Midchester members were about to experience in moving from their spiritual home.

There were significant issues to discuss and finalize, and it was done in a spirit of respect and cooperation. Committee members were involved in numerous phone calls and meetings. The Executive Committee and Board of Trustees approved the recommendation of the Merger Committee for The Greenburgh Hebrew Center to merge with The Midchester Jewish Center.

The final vote at GHC was taken in August 2004, and the GHC membership unanimously approved the merger. It was my privilege to sign the Merger Agreement together with then GHC Recording Secretary Eileen Robin. Marcia Bernstein and Pearl Meyers, z"l, in their respective roles as Midchester President and Recording Secretary, signed on behalf of Midchester. While the Agreement was approved during my term as President, it became effective during Eliot's term.

GHC's new members quickly assumed leadership roles at GHC – in our services, in social activities, and on the Board of Trustees. The Honorable Hal B. Greenwald (still just "Hal" to GHC-ers) became President a few years later.

Midchester members led committees, and became a vibrant part of the GHC family. GHC members who joined us from Midchester will always remember the synagogue on the hill, and the beauty of its sanctuary. Today, the Midchester memorial plaques hang in their new home at The Greenburgh Hebrew Center.

During the merger approval process, I often stated to GHC members that it would soon become clear that the Midchester merger would change the course of GHC's history. Nearly twenty years later, it's clear that I was right.

What a privilege it is to celebrate GHC's 75th Anniversary as one united synagogue family.

### **Becoming Egalitarian by Deborah Jagoda**

Our mission statement, our website, and our letterhead proudly describe GHC as a vibrant egalitarian Conservative Jewish community. While GHC has always been a Conservative Jewish community and undoubtedly has always been vibrant, we were not always egalitarian. Becoming egalitarian was a process that spanned decades. Each step came with some controversy, but each paved the way for the next.

It was not until 1973 that a woman was permitted to sit on the bimah. Although sitting on the bimah with the Rabbi during High Holiday services was an honor offered to officers of GHC, in 1973, when Dr. Lenore Katkin became GHC's Vice President of Education, the Honors Committee did not offer her that honor. Rather the committee offered two honors, including sitting on the bimah, to her husband. (Her husband declined the bimah-sitting, writing a letter that it was Lenore who deserved the honor). Nevertheless, on Yom Kippur, when Lenore arrived at GHC after having first gone to the hospital to see one of her patients, as she made her way toward the pew near the front of the Sanctuary where her husband was sitting, GHC's rabbi, Rabbi Emmanuel Lubliner, z"l, announced that there were plenty of seats on the bimah and invited her to sit with him there. Although Lenore was not aware of it at the time, the reaction of others in the congregation was palpable. Within the next couple of years, Lenore and 4 other women joined the GHC choir, which also had not been permitted.

In 1981, Fran Singer became GHC's first woman president. She was told that she may also have been the first woman president at any U.S. Conservative synagogue. That Simchat Torah, she also became the first woman at GHC to carry a Torah. At Simchat Torah services, when leaders and past leaders were called up to carry the Torahs, Fran went up and took a Torah. People were stunned, but no one stopped her. In subsequent years, Sisterhood presidents and past Sisterhood presidents also went up to take Torahs.

In approximately 1987, a congregational committee was formed to study the role of women in services. It was a multi-year process. The committee studied halachic texts with GHC's rabbi, Rabbi Barry Kenter, and conducted a congregational survey. In early 1988, a letter was sent to the congregation announcing the results of the committee's study. The committee voted that the congregation should follow the recommendations of Rabbi Kenter. During 1988, Rabbi Kenter made two determinations: First, that women should be counted as part of the minyan. Second, that women were eligible for Aliyot. The first service at which women would have Aliyot was publicized and extremely well-attended. The Sisterhood President, Phyllis Feerst, z"l, was the first woman to have an Aliyah, and the Aliyah immediately after Phyllis was given to a woman who was a Jew by Choice, Vicky Grief.

Women's roles in services gradually grew. Saturday morning Bat Mitzvah services became the norm, with the Bat Mitzvah girl having an Aliyah and reading from the Torah, and having the opportunity for greater participation. Cantor Amy Kanarek became GHC's first woman clergy member on July 1, 2005. And as of January 21, 2006, the first and second Aliyot were made available to any Jewish woman or man, replacing the practice of reserving those Aliyot for men who were a Kohen or Levi.

Women are now an integral part of all facets of the GHC Community. GHC is now enjoying the services of the third woman to serve as our Cantor, women volunteers routinely read Torah and have the same other parts in services as men, and GHC has now been fortunate to have had six women, Fran Singer (1981-83), Anita Schick (1998-2001), Deborah Jagoda (2011-13), Sherry Padva (2013-15), Lori Sloane (2017-19), and Naomi Feinkind (2019-21), serve as our President.