

## **President Susan O. Singer's Address to the Congregation**

**2009 Annual Meeting ~ April 27, 2009**

Two years! In January of 2007 when Rabbi Fish and Steve Stein asked me to consider taking on the presidency of Beth El, two years seemed like an endless amount of time and a huge commitment. Somehow, though, those two years have simply flown by and here I am, about to turn the gavel (and the key to the office) over to my successor, Hy Pomerance! How did that happen so fast?!

It has been a fantastic and exciting ride. After hibernating as a full time mom during almost all of my two daughters' growing up years, this position gave me a wonderful opportunity to come back to my professional self. It felt great to do that, and it felt great to introduce my kids to that part of myself!

I have learned and grown immeasurably from the experience of serving as Beth El's President. I have had an opportunity to get to know so many of our members, both veteran and new. I have had challenges that required patience and creativity. I have had successes and failures. But throughout the two years, I have never felt that I was "in it" alone. I always felt that my fellow volunteers had the same ultimate focus and purpose; to build a community. To create a haven in a difficult world. To do that with the best of intentions. Not every synagogue president can say that as s/he leaves office and I feel fortunate to be able to do so.

I want to take this opportunity to review a few of the highlights of my administration because I am so proud of them and because you all should be aware of the hard work that went into accomplishing them. Most of the time, it was not MY hard work. I had the honor of serving with some simply amazing and very dedicated people who were on the front lines for all of these projects. They are the ones who really need to be thanked and believe me I do thank each and every one of them from the bottom of my heart.

First of all, I am hugely gratified that this year we are submitting FIVE Solomon Schechter Award nominations to the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. These nominated projects exemplify the innovative programming and materials that we have developed over the past year. More than anything else, this abundant harvest of nominations illustrates the fact that we have many volunteers who are actively and creatively engaged in making Beth El the best it can be. These volunteers are rightfully proud of the products they have produced; enough to want them nominated for one of these coveted awards. Regardless of who ultimately receives the Solomon Schechter awards, Beth El has already won!

Over the past two years, at a time when Conservative synagogues are shrinking, our membership has had a net growth of about twenty families. That speaks to the warmth and the welcoming feeling that we as a congregation radiate to prospective members when they come "shul shopping". Our Shabbat Greeter and Bimah Officer program has been put in place and every Shabbat our leadership takes turns playing a role in the Shabbat service which enhances that warmth. Each of us can take pride in the growth that has resulted from these efforts.

We have stabilized our office staff and can now provide a firm foundation and ongoing support for our Rabbi, for our programming efforts and for our volunteers. And in our schools we now have two VERY capable and strong directors in Beverly Stein at Nitzan and in Rabbi Liz Rolle at Navasky. In turn, they have each built a talented staff of teachers and aides. While there continue to be challenges, we have made great progress and

we are committed to improving our schools even more as we go forward! You will hear more about that in the coming months as we launch our new Education Advisory Council.

We have increased Tot Shabbat and Junior congregation from once monthly to two times per month. We have added a wonderful music program to our Shabbat kids' program. We have also strengthened and enhanced our youth programming. We have finally connected our teens with regional USY and Kadima, and we have put charismatic and strong staff in place to work with our teens and pre-teens!

We have also implemented several meaningful GREEN initiatives including the launch of a beautiful and constantly up-to-date new website ([www.congbethel.org](http://www.congbethel.org)). We are no longer mailing paper flyers via "snail mail", using tons of paper and expensive postage. Rather, we are now regularly sending Constant Contact emails with flyers and Weekly Announcements. We are the recent recipients of a grant from CL&P. Because of this grant, all of the lighting in the building has been changed and on/off sensors added in order to be more energy efficient and cost effective in our use of electricity. We are stepping up our effort to recycle bottles and cans and we are teaching the Nitzan and Navasky kids to do the same. We are even offering families the chance to choose CLEAN sources of electricity through another program of CL&P. (Information on that initiative can be found on our website.)

We have run several successful fundraising programs over the past two years, including our High Holiday appeals and our Spring fundraising events. It is not an easy time for fundraising now, but in planning and executing these campaigns, we have taken the opportunity to focus not just on dollars raised, but also on developing our volunteer outreach efforts and our volunteer base. We consistently make a conscious effort to include more and more new members in program planning and committee work. The new Board members being elected tonight are part of the product of those efforts!

We have had, and will have again next year, a strong and dedicated Executive Committee. Without them, NONE of this could have happened. We all owe them a debt of gratitude! In addition, we have continued to build a knowledgeable and energetic Board of Trustees. Our Board is made up of experienced veteran leaders as well as newer members who have stepped up to leadership positions. We have had the opportunity for some wonderful Board development activities and I would like to think that our meetings have been increasingly meaningful and "meaty" over the past two years.

As I have said, there are so many people to whom I owe my most sincere thanks. Please forgive me if I do not list all of the names of the people who have contributed to the significant changes and innovations I have outlined above. You know who you are, and I have personally thanked each and every one of you privately for your hard work and your accomplishments. Having said that, I do have to take one moment to thank Rabbi Fish without whom, of course, this would have been a much different and much less rewarding experience! Ron, when I began my presidency, you told me we'd be dance partners. I have tried not to step on your toes too many times, and I think we did find a wonderful rhythm to our work together. It has been a pleasure! Thank you.

And, again, thanks to all of you! It has truly been my honor to serve as your president. I wish my successor, Hy, much success and fulfillment as he embarks on his adventure. May we all go from strength to strength.