

Sixty years ago, Plainview was still dotted with potato fields. But houses were going up everywhere. People from Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and even Manhattan flocked to Plainview, Long Island's newest suburban frontier.

One spring day, one of Plainview's newer residents, Rita Newborn, hung a sign up in a local real estate office. The sign invited Jewish residents of Plainview to a meeting, to discuss holding services for the upcoming High Holidays. Rita only expected about ten families to come to the meeting. Forty families turned out. They accepted an offer from Plainview's only Jewish farmer, Dave Weltz to hold High Holiday services in the Plainview Firehouse. They used Dave's barn on Southern Parkway, for Shabbat services. These services led to the creation of Plainview Jewish Center.

As we celebrate our congregation's sixtieth birthday this year, we can look back on our beginnings and say, with real satisfaction, that we have come a long way since that first Rosh HaShanah in the firehouse. We now sit in the third expansion of Plainview Jewish Center; which moved from the barn to what we now call the Evan David Wein Youth Corner, then to this building, whose original footprint ended at what is now the the middle of the main sanctuary. The building was then extended to its current size in 1970. Today we will be hosting well over 1000 people, in three different service spaces.

A lot of people deserve credit for Plainview Jewish Center's success. Our congregation has been served by a dedicated group of lay leaders, beginning with our first president, Sol Newborn, and continuing today with our current president Bruce Elowsky. These lay leaders: presidents, officers, board members, committee members, and leaders of Sisterhood and Men's Club, devoted countless hours to building and maintaining our congregation, providing both a vision for our future and a firm direction for the here and now. Plainview Jewish Center has also been blessed with strong, stable, long term leadership from its clergy, including Rabbi Julius Goldberg, who served our congregation for 34 years, and Cantor Morris Wolk, who is celebrating his 40<sup>th</sup> year at Plainview Jewish Center.

Even more important, Plainview Jewish Center has been sustained and energized by our dedicated, passionate members. Amazingly, there are people here with us today who celebrated that first Rosh HaShanah in the firehouse. I'd like to ask all of you who were at that first Plainview Jewish Center service to please stand up (or if you can't stand, please raise your hand). There are many more people here today who have been part of our Plainview Jewish Center family for at least 50 years. I

would like to ask you to stand up as well. I think all of you deserve a round of “tov, tov, tov.” If you would, please remain standing, as I ask all those who have been with us for at least 40 years to stand. . . 30 years. . . 20 years. . . 10 years, and now all of our members, please stand up. Thank you all for your commitment, for your devotion, for your support of our Congregation. Plainview Jewish Center is a vibrant, successful synagogue because of you; because you are Plainview Jewish Center. Please join in saying. . . “tov, tov, tov!”

Sixty is a milestone birthday for congregations, just as it is for people. Turning sixty means we have been around a while now. We have named hundreds of babies, celebrated thousands of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, and rejoiced at dozens of weddings. Including our daily minyans, we have probably held over ten thousand services in this building. We have enjoyed countless social programs, enriched our minds and spirits in numerous adult education offerings, and engaged in lots of projects to help support Israel, oppressed Jewry and people in need. We have brought together people who became lifelong friends through their involvement in Plainview Jewish Center, and even helped bring together a few couples in marriage. This building holds a lot of wonderful memories; memories of the some of the high points of our lives, memories that we cherish every time we enter Plainview Jewish Center.

So how should we celebrate such an auspicious birthday? Of course, we should celebrate our achievements and re-visit our treasured memories. Looking back at the past, appreciating how far we have come, and celebrating the journey we have shared are essential to any celebration. I look forward to the events we will hold this year that will pay tribute to our rich history and all those who helped create it.

But sixtieth birthday celebrations, for people and for synagogues, should involve more than just looking back at the past. Sixty is not the right time to give ourselves over to nostalgia. On our congregation's sixtieth birthday, we need to be looking forward as well as looking back. And what better model can there be for looking forward while also looking back than Rosh HaShanah.

On this Rosh HaShanah, we look back at 5774 years—according to the Biblical count--as we celebrate the birthday of the world. Rosh HaShanah is Hayom Harat Olam, the anniversary of the day the world was created. During the holiday of Rosh HaShanah, we remember the first day of creation, Abraham and Sarah and the origin of the Judaism, the giving of the Torah, the conquest of the land of Israel, the building and destruction of the Temples, the exile from the land, and the suffering,

persistence and creativity of generations of Jews who kept Judaism vibrant and vital wherever they went. We review and remember our own actions during the past year. And we remember God's judgment, compassion and love.

All this remembering helps remind us of just how far we have come, and how many blessings we enjoy in our own lives. But remembering also helps us prepare to move forward in the coming year. Our goal is to build on the foundation of the past a new and even better future. We call this process *hitkadshut*—renewal. On the first night of Rosh HaShanah, we dip apples in honey and ask God,

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתְּחַדְּשׁ עֲלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוֹקָה.

“May it be Your will, Our God and God of our ancestors, to renew for us a good and sweet new year.” Notice that we do not ask God to simply “bless us” with a good and sweet new year. We ask God to “renew” for us a good and sweet new year. The “re” in renew reflects our desire to carry forward the good things from the past, and return to those good things from which we have strayed. The “new” in renew reflects our desire to continue to learn, to grow and to change in response to the new opportunities and challenges that will arise in the coming year. On Rosh HaShanah, remembering is not an end in itself, but a tool we can use to help us create a new and better future.

Just as we think of Rosh HaShanah, the birthday of the world, as a time for renewal, so too, we should think of our congregation's milestone birthday as a time for renewal. We need to look back at the past to reflect on the positive experiences that define our congregation, and to see where we might have strayed. We also need to look to the future to see how, using the benefit of our experience, we can continue to learn and grow and change in response to these very challenging times.

There are so many things from our history that we can use to help build our future. After all, Plainview Jewish Center has been a vibrant and vital congregation for sixty years now—we must have done a lot of things right. But I would like to highlight one aspect today that I think has been the foundation of our congregation's success.

When I speak with the people who were around in the early days of Plainview Jewish Center, they often tell me the same story. They came out to Long Island from strong Jewish communities in New York City. When they came to Plainview, they wanted to connect with other Jewish people. They

wanted to make Jewish friends. But they also wanted to share Jewish life with other Jews; to be a part of holiday celebrations, to mark important events in their lives together in a Jewish way. The early members of Plainview Jewish Center were not just looking for High Holiday services and a Bar or Bat Mitzvah for their children. They were looking to become part of a social, religious and cultural community. And it was this drive to form community that gave birth to Plainview Jewish Center.

Sixty years later, we face very different challenges in Plainview. Jewish resources are plentiful. Yet there is a growing perception that Jews in Plainview want less. More specifically, that what is important to Jews these days is being able to purchase Jewish experiences as cheaply as possible. Synagogues bid against each other to see who can require the fewest hours of Jewish education, who can charge the least for religious school and membership, who can offer the lowest priced High Holiday tickets. The Jewish Week ran a story about this phenomenon last week with the unflattering title "The Synagogue Wars of Central Long Island." The story made the competition among synagogues seem as intense and contentious as the competition between Cablevision, FIOS, Dish Network and Direct TV to provide us with television, phone and internet service. Members are increasingly regarded as customers; services, education and lifecycle events as commodities for sale to the lowest bidder.

The actual situation, of course, is a lot more complicated. But I think it is fair to say that a lot more people these days look at membership in a synagogue as a commercial transaction like any other. And, we, the synagogues, have to shoulder some of the blame. We have too often stressed the commodities that synagogue membership can "buy"; instead of the sense of belonging, meaning and fulfillment that comes from being an active and supportive member of a synagogue community. We have adopted a business model for an entity that is much more than a business. We have sold ourselves short. And when we start to relate to our members as simply customers, we should not be surprised when they start shopping around.

In the midst of all this upheaval, it's important to remember that what brought our congregation into existence in the first place, and what has sustained us for sixty years, is the quality of our community. Plainview Jewish Center continues to be a place where people connect with each other, form lifelong friendships, support each other in bad times and celebrate with each other in good times. We see heartwarming examples of this kind of community every day; from the way our

daily minyan regulars provide support and comfort to new mourners who come to say kaddish to the tremendous enthusiasm with which our congregation celebrated last spring's 14 adult B'nai Mitzvah. We saw a dramatic demonstration of the strength of our community during last fall's Hurricane Sandy. Our synagogue became an emergency shelter, offering warmth, light, food and companionship for people without power in our neighborhood. And I personally experienced the strength of our community when my mother passed away this spring; when I was overwhelmed with visits, good wishes and offers of support from our congregation.

Above anything else, it is our sense of community that keeps so many of us coming back long after our kids have celebrated their B'nai Mitzvah. We come back because Plainview Jewish Center is home. We come back because we feel connected to each other. We come back because we want to be a part of a community that promotes Torah, Avodah (a relationship with God) and Gemilut Chasadim (acts of lovingkindness).

It is important to note that we are a community for the well-off and the struggling, and everyone in between. If we were simply selling a service, only those who are able pay full price could purchase it. Anyone who could not afford our service would simply be left out in the cold. But we are a community, committed to caring for everyone. We know what it takes to sustain our community and the level of services we provide. We ask everyone to contribute an amount each year that will sustain our community. But we know that some people—these days quite a few--cannot contribute at this sustaining level. For these people, we offer a discrete process that helps determine an appropriate contribution. No one is ever turned away. How do we do this? Because we have enough community members who are willing to extend themselves at the sustaining level and beyond; because they believe in what we are doing and that our synagogue should be a home for all people. We are extremely grateful to those who can support us at this level. We are proud that we can be a community that takes care of each and every person; joining together to make sure everyone can access the benefits of belonging.

Being a warm, caring, inclusive community is a vital part of who we are; a real strength. We must continue to keep to this core idea in focus as we chart our course into the future. As a synagogue, there is a place like Plainview Jewish Center on every corner in this town; a place where you can buy a Jewish education, a Bar Mitzvah or High Holiday tickets. If we focus merely on being like

everyone else, we risk becoming redundant and betraying our own core values. But if we focus on maintaining and strengthening the quality of our community; a community that fosters connections, offers support, encouragement and caring to everyone; a community that brings us closer to each other and closer to God and a community that actively works to make our neighborhood, our town and our world into a better, more just and more peaceful place—we will always have a unique and vital role to play in the future.

We have made numerous changes at Plainview Jewish Center over the last four years. We will have to make many more if we want to continue to meet the needs of our community in the future. The world we live in is changing, and we will need to keep changing in turn. We will, for example, need to continue the process of educational change; to focus our children's education on the experiential as well as the cognitive, to make sure that our kids don't just know Hebrew and Jewish holidays, but also feel a deep connection and love for Judaism—that they don't just learn about Judaism, but also live it. As fewer and fewer of our members come from traditional Jewish backgrounds, we are going to have to look for more ways to make Jewish prayer an engaging and inspiring experience. We can't afford simply go ahead and do what we have always done. If more and more people find that our traditional services don't speak to them, we are going to have to explore new formats that will resonate with them. We have taken some interesting steps in this direction with our Klezmer service and our Mishpacha service over the last couple of years. We will need to continue to expand and develop these experiments while still serving the needs of those who love our traditional services.

These are only a few of the areas in which the renewal of Plainview Jewish Center requires “new” kinds of thinking. As a congregation, we are going to have to be ready to try lots of new approaches. We are also going to have to be prepared for some of these new approaches to fail, and to learn from our mistakes. Renewing our congregation means pro-actively moving into the future; and understanding that the future is uncertain. The key to our success will be to stay true to our core value of community while continuing to learn, to grow and to change. Our congregation's sixtieth birthday represents a milestone in our history; an achievement we can be proud of. But our sixtieth birthday also places us at a critical point in our history. Just as we as individuals find ourselves in need of renewal as we enter a new year; so too we as a congregation are in need of renewal. We have a wonderful foundation; whose cornerstone is a unique, warm and supportive community. Let's

dedicate our anniversary year to celebrating and strengthening this foundation; even as we build upon it to chart a new direction for Plainview Jewish Center.