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FEATURES: Amicable Change

Adat Shalom caterer now to be supervised by Rabbi Jason Miller, not Vaad.

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On the heels of a new partnership and a name change, A&J Kosher Catering - formerly Rosenberg Kosher Catering - has taken on a new kashrut supervisor.

Conservative Rabbi Jason Miller will provide kosher supervision for the business, inside Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills.

Rabbi Jason Miller The change came following a new directive of the Council of Orthodox Rabbis of Greater Detroit (Vaad) in Southfield, which for many years provided the catering business's kashrut supervision.

"The Vaad has instituted the requirement that a full-time mashgiach [kosher supervisor] be present from opening to closing at every single caterer we supervise in the city," said Rabbi Joseph Krupnik, kashrut director at the Vaad.

He verified that all other local kosher caterers supervised by the Vaad have a full-time Vaad mashgiach present, including Chef Cari and Jewel Kosher Caterers, both in Oak Park, Sperber's Kosher Catering and Elite Kosher Catering, both in West Bloomfield, and Matt Prentice Restaurant Group, which offers kosher catering out of the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield.

Krupnik said because A&J often caters more than one function on the same day, it is not feasible for them to pay for a full-time kashrut supervisor, which would include supervision during the time they are not preparing for an event, but are still open.

A&J owners Al Kovalenko, chef at Rosenberg Catering for 19½ years, and Jeffrey L. Rosenberg, whose grandmother Cecil and parents, Al and Sarah Rosenberg, preceded him in the business founded in 1946, became partners last August and changed the catering name.

"We provide catering on days and at times that do not coincide with other events and parties," Rosenberg said.

"We cater programs like lunch and learns three times a month, our monthly Friday night Synergy service and the Alliance for Teens in Detroit's [ATID] Monday night school. It did not pay for us to have a full-time mashgiach when we only need one during the actual preparation and serving of the food."

"A&J Kosher Caterers will be under my hashgachah [kosher certification], with oversight from Rabbi [Aaron] Bergman, who is the mara d'atra [Jewish law authority] of Adat Shalom where A&J is located," Miller said.

"There will be supervision by a mashgiach in the Adat Shalom kitchens whenever food is being prepared."

"The Vaad is an important and indispensable agency in our community," Miller said.

"I have consulted with Rabbi Krupnik in the past on kashrut matters and I value and respect his opinion and guidance," he said.

"I am not competing with the Vaad in the arena of kashrut supervision. Rather, I recognize that the Orthodox need not have a monopoly on kashrut. Any caterer or proprietor has the right to decide who will declare his establishment kosher. The Vaad recognizes this."

Miller says he is providing the supervision as a service for the community. "I want kosher food to be readily available to our community," he said.

A member of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, Miller has served as a mashgiach at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and has studied privately with kashrut expert Rabbi Joel Roth. He is currently rabbi and mashgiach at Oakland County-based Tamarack Camps and, on a part-time basis serves as the director of ATID and as the part-time rabbi of Congregation T'chayah in Oak Park.

Added Rosenberg, "Our decision to make this change, came from more than the cost of having a full-time Vaad mashgiach." A bigger concern, he said, came from the Vaad's request that to assure their complete supervision during all business hours, they must be given a key to the business. "We, along with the synagogue, did not want to do that. We want to remain our own bosses, not the Vaad."

In spite of the change, Rosenberg continues a longstanding relationship with the Vaad, in which his grandmother was a founder and charter member. "We made our change under the guidance and cooperation of the Vaad, and we will always have a connection."

Added Krupnik, "The decision to leave our supervision was very amicable."

The Vaad will have a continuing presence at A&J, providing kosher supervision on a contractual basis for families and organizations requesting it. Rosenberg said the caterers will absorb the cost of hiring the Vaad as opposed to Miller for such events.

"The additional cost is not much, but it will be totally covered by us, with no charge to the client," Rosenberg said. A&J will provide this service to any client, even if it is to accommodate only a single guest.

"We have separate dishes that will be set aside for use only with Vaad-supervised functions," Rosenberg said. He doesn't see this as a big concern, citing that almost all functions cater to Conservative clientele.

"All of the products we bring in will have the same kosher certification as they did when we were solely with the Vaad," Rosenberg said. "We will continue use glatt kosher meat and poultry only from Morris Kosher Poultry in Hazel Park."

A letter sent to members by the synagogue maintains that the kashrut level of the synagogue and its kitchen will not change with the change in supervision.

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