

Search:

Last updated: December 3rd, 2007 9:16 AM

Columbus' Award Winning Jewish News

- Home
- Columbus & Ohio
- Beyond Columbus
- Chai-Lights Around Town
- Editorial and Opinion
- Arts & Entertainment
- Feature Columns
- Obituaries
- LifeCycles
- Torah
- Directory
- Calendar

**Login Form**  
Username   
Password   
 Remember me  
  
[Lost Password?](#)  
[No account yet?](#)  
[Register](#)

Advertisement

[Home](#) > [Columbus & Ohio](#)

[Printer version](#) | [E-Mail article](#) | [Post Comment](#)

## As synagogues grow, so do green responsibilities

Miriam L. Segaloff :: [The New Standard](#) :: [Other Articles by this author](#)

Posted: **Wednesday, 24 January 2007**

Several Columbus-area congregations are moving the responsibility of environmental stewardship beyond planting trees in observance of the Tu B'Shevat holiday.



Photo courtesy of Torat Emet

This is a rendering of the synagogue Congregation Torat Emet plans to build on Main St. in Bexley.

But Jewish scholars, both locally and nationally, say caring for the environment is a year-round charge for Jews that extends beyond planting trees and into the buildings in which they meet, study and worship. It is being celebrated this year on Feb. 3.

Making synagogues environmentally friendly, or "green," can be traced to the late 1970s, when a Massachusetts rabbi installed solar panels on his synagogue's roof to power the ner tamid (eternal light).

After that, a few synagogues worked to make their buildings ecologically responsible. But efforts were sparse until the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as Earth Summit.

The following year, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life was created to carry out a Jewish response to the global environmental crisis.

In 2004, the coalition piloted its Greening Synagogues program in New Jersey with four synagogues representing different denominations.

In Columbus, efforts to create green synagogues have been less coordinated, but are influencing the way some congregations operate.

"One would expect any synagogue or house of worship to be sensitive and keyed into one's environment and both the moral and physical impact of one's actions," said Rabbi Howard Zack of Congregation Torat Emet/The Main Street Synagogue. "Isn't that what religion represents? To me, it's a no-brainer."

The congregation looked into utilizing a number of green features in planning its new synagogue, Rabbi Zack said. Unfortunately, he said, it hasn't worked out as well as he had hoped.

"One of my goals when we first started to plan the synagogue was to use some active green technologies, the most obvious of which would be solar panels," he said.

To learn the signs of autism

visit [autismspeaks.org](http://autismspeaks.org)

**AUTISM SPEAKS**  
It's time to listen.

**Ad Council**

[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

"The problem is, being in central Ohio where the days with sunshine are outnumbered by the days without sunshine, we're lucky if we see the sun between now and March. As much as we would have liked to, the investment just would not have worked."

The congregation also looked into using geothermal systems to heat the building, but that would have required more land than is available, Rabbi Zack said.

Instead, the building will use a number of passive green energy features to boost the congregation's conservation efforts, he said. They include many windows on the building's southern exposure and energy-efficient glass coatings to maximize natural light and retain as much heat as possible.

Also, natural stone will be used because it provides better insulation than synthetic materials, and water conserving fixtures will be installed.

At Congregation Agudas Achim, Rabbi Jason Miller said he is hoping green technology is something the synagogue's recently formed social action committee will embrace.

Miller was a rabbinic intern at one of the New Jersey synagogues in the environmental coalition's 2004 pilot program. He said he is familiar with what it takes to earn standing as a green synagogue.

While Agudas Achim has a long way to go, Miller said, the congregation already is taking steps in the right direction. Recycling is strictly enforced, and the building's heating and cooling system is adjusted to minimize use during less active times.

A recently installed playground will be landscaped with native plants in accordance with the coalition's recommendations, Miller said.

"The environment is important," Miller said. "In the creation of the world, humans were God's partners. We also have to be partners with God in making the world a better place. We know taking care of the environment is part and parcel of that."