

Annual Meeting 2015 – Executive Director’s Report

Tonight we are going to play trivia. We are not actually going to play although I wanted this piece of the evening to be interactive but throughout my report this evening, you will hear some amazing facts. It might be trivia but as you will hear, nothing is trivial.

Please try to remember a few of them because they will make great conversation starters at our Open House for new members on August 30, at the next Kiddush, or at the upcoming holiday celebrations.

Ok, are you ready for the first fact?

Al Capone's business card said he was a used furniture dealer.

There is a group of people in this room who make the business of Kol Shofar work each day but whose presence is certainly not trivial - our staff.

Many of you have had an opportunity to speak with them on the phone or through email but you may not have been introduced face-to-face. I invite you to meet them tonight and come into our admin office area and say hello. As you heard earlier in the evening from our Treasurer, we have once again restructured our staffing so that we hold our budget in place.

Our amazing staff is the backbone of our organization, the people who keep gears well-oiled, the team that takes on extra work with unqualified dedication and zeal. This team is no longer in the background - they are the faces of our organization. Let me introduce them in alphabetical order:

Rachel Denrich - administrative assistant to education. Rachel will be moving back to Baltimore next week where she will be the Director of a synagogue religious school.

Jonathan Emanuel - Director of Youth Education and Family Engagement - if you want to know about religious school and family programs, he's the guy

- Jason Herzl - Membership and Operations concierge -if you have questions about membership, have a potential member, want to throw a party - he's your man
- Jordan Hopstone - Teen programs coordinator, he's cool and smart and is growing an amazing teen program
- Kirk Kim - Facility manager - he knows everything about our building
- Jack Klassen - maintenance staff - Jack helps to set up our programs
- John Mason - maintenance staff and electrician, John is helpful with many building tasks
- Valerie Poettgen - Marketing and Communications Manager - from Facebook to website, from kolnections to flyers she is the person who will professionally help get the word out
- Ricki Singer - Clergy Executive Assistant - Ricki supports the extensive work of our rabbis, B'nei Mitzvah program and in between makes sure that all the food that comes into the kitchen is kosher.

- Jenni Sutton, Director of Finance - doing the work of two people, Jenni not only helps to strategize but makes sure that your credit card is working
- Elena Tallerico - our Kitchen Manager and chef - prepares kiddushes, Wed night teen meals, Board dinners and keeps our kitchen organized and clean.

And of course, I thank our rabbis for a wonderful and creative working partnership. This is an amazing staff and I am honored to be working with each person.

Ready for the 2nd piece of trivia?

It is impossible to sneeze with your eyes open.

In the broader Jewish world, there is constant talk about the meaning and depth of Jewish engagement. All major studies confirm that Jews take pride in "just being Jewish" - 62% believe that being Jewish is a matter of ancestry and culture, while just 15% say it is mainly a matter of religion. Even among Jews by religion, more than 55% say being Jewish is mainly a matter of ancestry and culture and two thirds say it is not necessary to believe in God to be Jewish.

This is nothing to sneeze at and we need to look ahead with our eyes wide open.

From rubbing shoulders with other Jews to being involved in community action, from eating a bagel to saying prayers, stuffing envelopes to making a donation, we are Jewish. At Kol Shofar, we know that the way in which we provide Jewish experiences for everyone who steps into our community, drives our capacity to transform lives.

Every action that we take, both personally and as an organized community reflects and impacts a positive celebration of the Jewish experience.

At Kol Shofar, encounters with young families both inside and outside of our shul, provide an influential role in introducing families to Jewish life. Our rabbis and our director of education teach in the JCC preschool program every week, engage families in Shabbat at the JCC Side by Side toddler program held at Kol Shofar and purposefully initiate contact with each family.

Since 2010, the number of memberships of preschool families who have joined Kol Shofar has doubled - much of that growth is due to the strong presence of our staff and also to the flexibility and invitation of our new self-assessed membership program. We are saying - we want you to be included.

In 2010, 14% of the preschool families were members of Kol Shofar (9 families), this year 20% of the families are members of Kol Shofar (18 families). Bringing young families into the synagogue life-cycle from preschool, engaging them in religious school and encouraging parents to become active leaders on committees and task forces keeps our community vital. Our preK- K class will have 15 students in it this fall. Our staff, including myself, are present at community events at the JCC, Brandeis, Rodef Sholom, and home hosted events in the community all year round.

Beit Binah and Tichon are steadily growing with 175 happily engaged students in the program including 55 teens – 21 more than last year.

Our teen programs are beginning to drive movement of the Marin teen social scene to be active at Kol Shofar and in the Conservative movement. For the first time in many years, we sent 5 teens, along with our teen

coordinator to the USY Convention. Next year, thanks to a grant from the Sophie and Milton Meyer fund, we will start the implementation of a formalized teen leadership program. We had 25 of our students become b'nei mitzvah this year and over 15 in our Madrichin program.

In addition, through a board approved motion and starting this fall, following b'nei mitzvah, teens will be considered a member in their own right, have a nametag, receive a certificate from our board president, may be asked to help on committees and at various events.

We still have much harder job to do to keep our teens engaged when they leave us for college and the rest of their adult adventures. We must begin to ask ourselves, how strongly have we instilled the gift of a Jewish journey in our teens, how can we keep them better connected to our Kol Shofar community as young adults?

Adult involvement is also at an all time high since 2010. The high is not only in the numbers but in the energy within the classes and the vigor of the many volunteers who help to create and coordinate events.

Taught by the rabbis, visiting scholars, and volunteers, our programs including morning minyan and Torah study, Philosophies of Judaism, Lunch and Learn, Breakfast with Attitude, Judaism 101, and Shabbat afternoon study sessions are packed with members and the public. Special speakers through the Bridges To Israel Programs drive the conversation about Israel. The unique performances, and speakers through the newly developed Kol Shofar Arts Salon have drawn hundreds to each event. Chai Lights 50+ adult activities plans hikes, outings and home hosted events and the tickets are sold out. Our newly developed Adult Engagement committee meets regularly to discuss and find ways to evaluate and measure our success and to improve our shul experiences.

Did you know that **Butterflies taste with their feet?**

And today, there is no accounting for taste ...so said an article in the New York Times Style section of Feb 15, where the author noted that the "look" of the season is a thing of the past. The fashion world is embracing the odd, the different. We are more tolerant of the girl whose outfit is intentionally gawky and who, in her wildest dreams, wants to look like a Comme de Garcons flower. It used to be that hemlines and lapel widths stayed the same for years. Now, every morning you can choose from a variety of styles - high, midi, long , wide/thin. Everything is accepted. There is no single trend that governs our attention or buying power - we live in a supermarket of choices.

This is also true of our practice of Judaism. We live in that supermarket when it comes to religious and spiritual choice.

Rabbi Leider and Rabbi Levy offer many doors to our tent. Doorways go two ways - in an out. On High Holy Days, you can begin your spiritual journey in the Tot Yontif or Musical meditation and walk **out** to the traditional service. On Shabbat, you can start your journey in a traditional service and walk **in** to mindful meditation. You may choose to come to a short Friday night service, a holiday dinner or a morning minyan. Whatever you do, it's your Judaism. Last high holy days approximately 5800 people of all ages attended our services, walking in and out of differing experiences.

As Steve mentioned earlier, to assure our diversity and inclusiveness we continue to build and sustain our partnerships with other community organizations. We want many people to have the opportunity to walk in through our doors, not only to pray with us but to ask questions and to experience life with other Jewish people.

Volunteer liaisons work to assure that Brandeis and JCC participants know about what we do at Kol Shofar.

Staff work in partnership with Rodef Sholom and Beth Sholom, Jewish Learning Works, Keshet, Keshet, and JFCS throughout the year.

We build strong communities with Drake Terrace, Dominican College, Marin Interfaith Council, the Marin Organizing Committee, Mill Street Shelter, the Blood Bank and with churches and public and private schools throughout Marin. One Sunday each month, we provide food in our Beit Am purchased and prepared for the homeless by volunteers and we are starting a reading advocacy program with the Marin County School Volunteers Adopt a School program.

If you have a new and interesting idea for building our partnerships, please come see me at any time.

There is no Betty Rubble in the Flintstones Chewable vitamins.

Knowing this now, I personally would not buy them because they are obviously not egalitarian.

Every synagogue, like other businesses, is focused on creating their own brand, creating its own universe. We all struggle with what is chic or cool in a given city or moment, and how to fold that into the program planning and communications to the populations we hope to attract. Sometimes we may feel like a complete stranger among the competing styles or tribes out there - Urban Adamah, the Kitchen, the Mission Minyan, reform, reconstructionist, renewal.

But we are not strangers – we are a leading part of the big, chic, cool story - it is **our story** that makes us unique. What are the stories that we tell each other about our relationships and experiences at our shul? How many times does your child run into the shul to see his friends on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening? How do you feel when members express love and caring by cooking a meal when you are ill or sit *shiva* with you? What is your life all about and how do we share it with each other? Check out the flyer in your information packet about our upcoming Ketubah exhibit – we'd like you to share your ketubah and your story.

Our success is not only reflected in the number of people and the energy we feel but in the financial support that we receive. We met and exceeded our annual budget for the annual campaign this year. We met and exceeded our budget for mitzvah donations in memory or honoring people. We netted over \$100k at our gala. We had fewer scholarships to Beit Binah this year. We had over 41 new member families join Kol Shofar. Our families stretch to give as much as they can and more to support Kol Shofar.

In 2013-14 the average dues for new members was \$578 – this year, the average dues for new member families was \$1075. We have a community that supports us with time and money to sustain what we do, for this and future generations, and we cannot thank everyone here enough for everything that you pour into all of our lives at Kol Shofar.

And, I want to extend a special thanks to our board leadership for helping to drive this success - they are all amazing.

The last piece of trivia is this:

Tigers have striped skin not just striped fur.

At Kol Shofar, you get far more than what you see at your first encounter - which is a pretty spectacular thing - a magnificent building, a happy crowd of people and serious learning and praying.

For over 50 years, Kol Shofar has been creating and extending the framework for being Jewish by giving deeper significance to traditions and ritual blended with a contemporary understanding of Judaism and your place in it.

We have a vision and we give life to it.

At our shul, I believe, and hope you can see - that the stripes are strong, and the roar is powerful.