

# Synagogue celebrates 120th anniversary

The Congregation Sons of Israel Synagogue held a reception Sept. 10 in honor of the 120th anniversary of its founding, the 30th anniversary of its present synagogue building, and the rededication of the stained-glass windows in the sanctuary.

The small synagogue, located at 355 Guy Park Ave., Amsterdam, has members ranging in age from 14 to 96. Some members of the synagogue were born and raised in Amsterdam, and others come from surrounding areas, Mayfield, Fort Plain, Rexford, Scotia, Schenectady, Albany, Fonda, Niskayuna, Pattersonville, Northville, Gloversville and Johnstown. The synagogue's present student rabbi is Rabbi Geoffrey Claussen, a fifth-year student at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. He comes to Amsterdam twice a month, and for the major Jewish holidays.

Synagogue president, Sande H. Zirlin, opened the sanctuary part of the celebration, welcoming those present and giving a brief history of the congregation. In the early 1880s, Jewish families from Eastern Europe arrived in the area. They were very observant and practiced the Orthodox form of Judaism. According to the earliest records, the first arrival was a man named Benjamin Singer. In 1887, two Jewish children died during a diphtheria epidemic in the City of Amsterdam. This event galvanized the growing Jewish community into establishing a formal religious congregation.

Weekly services were held in people's homes and the high holiday services were held in rented quarters, on East Main Street and later on lower Church Street. Congregation Sons of Israel engaged its first rabbi in the late 1890s. In 1908, a house at 83 Grove St. became the congregation's first permanent home. In 1914, the congregation became the owners of the Germanic Hall, located on the corner of Grove and Teller Streets. This building served as the congregation's home until they moved into the newly-constructed building on Guy Park Avenue in 1976. The stained-glass windows in the current sanctuary came from the Grove Street Synagogue. In 1945, the once-Ortho-



Photos submitted

**Amsterdam Mayor Joseph Emanuele III, center, talks with worshippers at Congregation Sons of Israel Synagogue, which recently celebrated the 120th anniversary of its founding. BELOW: Guests at the celebration had the opportunity to view an historical display set up in the Hebrew school classroom.**

dox synagogue changed its affiliation, and became a member of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

There were over 100 people in attendance at the synagogue's 120th year celebration. Guests included current and former members, Hebrew school students, local clergy, City of Amsterdam Mayor Joseph Emanuele III, Assemblyman Paul Tonko, and individuals from the community. Both Emanuele and Tonko read proclamations recognizing the role the Jewish community of Amsterdam has played in the history of the city. The mayor proclaimed Sunday, Sept. 10, Congregation Sons of Israel Day in the city.

After the sanctuary service concluded, those in attendance went into the social hall, where a reception was held. The Capital District's Covington String Quartet filled the hall with the sound of traditional Jewish melodies. Guests also had the opportunity to view an historical display set up in the Hebrew school classroom.



Letters of congratulation were received from Gov. George Pataki, Senators Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer, Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, the director of the Empire Region of United Synagogue, of Conservative Judaism, The Women's League of Conservative Judaism, several of the synagogue's former student rabbis, local members of

clergy and former members. Congressman Michael McNulty sent a flag that flew over the Capitol and State Sen. Hugh Farley sent a proclamation.

After 120 years, Congregation Sons of Israel remains an integral part of the community and continues to serve the spiritual needs of Jewish families throughout the region.