

Before I begin my remarks, on behalf of our Board of Directors, we want to wish you and your family a happy, sweet, peaceful, and most importantly, a healthy new year.

I've truly enjoyed and I continue to feel honored to serve you in this role as President of Congregation Beth Jacob's Board. It's hard for me to believe a year has gone by. This past year has been so amazing that when I step back and try to summarize it, the only word that comes to mind is "inspiring." It was truly the most inspirational year of my past three years that I've served as President. I would like to tell you a few stories that might paint a picture of some of the inspirational moments for me.

The first that comes to mind is extending Rabbi Ezray's employment contract. Last year on Kol Nidre, I explained my views about this important task that was in front us. I'll be honest: I was not all that confident that we could go through the process of extending Rabbi Ezray's contract without creating some heartburn in the community. For those of you that have participated in other synagogue communities, you know it is not uncommon for rabbi contract negotiations to become difficult. My goal was to do this in a professional manner that respected Rabbi Ezray for his amazing 15 years of leadership and skills as an outstanding Rabbi, and, at the same time I recognized that we were still in tenuous economic times, in the middle of a capital campaign, and in the process of reinventing our Religious School program, which would have a cost increase.

When the Pupil Committee launched its work to negotiate the contract, we had many long discussions with the Board, the Executive Board, and several interested congregants. When we presented the

negotiated contract to the Board, I have to admit I was a bit surprised that after a long and through discussion we obtained unanimous support. During the month of May we started the process of explaining the contract to our membership. It seemed from those discussions that we had support for the contract. So my confidence level started to rise. When we presented the contract to the membership at the Annual Meeting for the membership vote, I was anticipating it would pass, but I never expected a unanimous vote of approval. Talking about being inspired and excited—I was on cloud 9 that night driving home. It was clear to me that our community was prepared to invest in our future in spite of the current economic headwinds and other big goals on our plate.

While we were in the midst of contract negotiations, it also was becoming clear that we would be initiating a search for a Religious School Director. Our leadership for our education program knew exactly who we wanted for this role: A person we knew very well, and who really understood our vision. However, we were not sure if we could get her to consider us, since she was not looking to change her current job. So we put Rabbi Ezra on the case and asked him to meet with her to see if she would be interested in talking about joining our team. I told Rabbi Ezra, “Don’t come back until you get a “yes.” And when we got word that she said yes, we were so thrilled. We knew that we had a lot of work in front of us to properly vet her out with our community, but we knew that we were starting with the very best. The rest is history, since we now have Michal Braker on our staff, and we are so excited about the upcoming year. Our vision for our Religious School program is coming to reality this school year. It is hard for me to

articulate how fortunate we are to have such a strong Religious School Director.

As parents we know how hard it can be for our kids to discover the importance of Jewish values, learning, and community. Having a “best in class” Religious School program is an essential component to help guide our kids. I’m confident that we will become a “best in class” school under Michal’s leadership. If you're a parent of a Religious School student, then I hope you are as inspired as I am about having Michal on board.

My next story is the Solomon Campaign. As all know our campaign and building effort have been simply a smashing success. That alone would be enough for any community. I have to tell you that I never expected that participating in a capital campaign would be so inspiring. I could tell you over a dozen stories that would make you say “wow.” One story that I would like to tell you is about a solicitation that Rabbi Ezra and I did together. It was a family that I didn’t know—a very busy family that was navigating work and family life. We tried several times to set up a meeting. After several attempts we finally got a date and time. Let me just say this: Oh my god . . . what an amazing family. And for a family that I didn’t know, I was blown away by how much CBJ meant to them. We had a wonderful discussion about the campaign, and it was clear they were planning to make a pledge. So I made a suggestion for a “stretch” gift that would help us move the dial toward our fundraising goals. They understood it and said they would think about it and get back to us. After the meeting, Rabbi Ezra said to me that he thought they will do better than I asked. Then in a few days, my wife and I were visiting our son at UCSB and then heading to visit family in Southern California. Nancy was driving, so I checked my e-mail, and sure enough I

got an e-mail from this family. They said that they were not only going to give, they were going to pledge double the amount that I had suggested. I was so inspired by that gift that I could not stop talking about the campaign for the next four hours in the car. I knew at that moment that we could pull this off.

I have to tell you that while that was a great story about the campaign, there are so many more. There are many families that have pledged the largest gift of their lives. They have stretched themselves beyond anything they would have expected. The part that makes me most proud is that our campaign has made our community stronger. I'm not alone in this view; the 143 families that have made a pledge have said they are inspired by it as well. At the same time, the part that we didn't get right this year is we were not able to reach out to all families. There are a number of reasons why we came up short; however, our plan is to continue the campaign throughout the construction. Our goals are to raise the final five percent, increase the participation levels, and hopefully get lucky to allow us to add some of the important items that we had to pull out because our budget is fixed. I'll be honest: As much as I would like to reach out quickly to all the remaining families, I know it will take time. If we have not contacted you and you are interested in participating in the campaign now, please contact me.

My final inspirational story is about our dear friend and Board member Mimi Arfin, who lived with cancer for five years. Mimi was on our Board for the past three years. Being a leader in our CBJ community was very important to her in spite of the many challenges she faced. Last year she was on the Pulpit Committee that negotiated Rabbi Ezray's contract. While her health was becoming more of a challenge during the negotiations, she continued to be an active and engaged member

of the team. Toward the end of the negotiations, Mimi could only participate by phone. She not only participated in those long meetings, she and I worked together on the contract language over many phone calls. And immediately after each negotiating meeting, I had to report back to Mimi about the outcome of the meeting because Mimi had to know how it was going. There were many times after my phone calls with Mimi that I would tell Nancy how in awe I was with Mimi and how much she inspired me on so many levels. Mimi is so missed—in our community, on our Board, and in our hearts. Our Board is dedicating the remainder of the year in honor of her and for her inspiration to our whole community. In most people’s lives, it is rare to know someone as inspirational as Mimi. We have been so fortunate to have had Mimi in our life.

Let me close by saying that I hope that you’re inspired like me. There is much more to this story of inspiration at CBJ that I didn’t have time to cover today, including our many volunteers and incredible professional team.

We have so much to be proud of and a lot to look forward to in this coming year. Our successes give us new ideas and inspiration to raise the bar even higher. On Kol Nidre, I will talk about some of those ideas, and I will acknowledge the many people who have made our Kehillah Kedoshah so inspirational.

Shana Tovah.