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Editor **Tom Auchterlonie**: Covering the Town of New Castle and the Village/Town of Mount Kisco

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News

Temple Beth El Marks New Space With Interfaith Thanksgiving

Hundreds attended the dedication of 20,000 square feet of new space, with reflections of tolerance.

By [Tom Auchterlonie](#) | [Email the author](#) | 5:30am

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Hundreds came to the Sunday dedication for the doubling of [Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester](#), which was followed by an interfaith Thanksgiving dinner.

The reform synagogue, which has jumped from 20,000 square feet to 40,000, was not only blessed for its addition, but served to host a gathering of many faiths. The temple is one of eight houses of worship - Jews, Christians and Muslims - that is part of the Chappaqua Interfaith Council, a group whose activities include philanthropy, biblical studies and giving chances for kids of different religions to meet.

Rabbi Joshua Davidson likened the human task to becoming the angels on Jacob's ladder.

"Rung by rung, we are called on to draw our Earthly reality ever closer to that heavenly vision," he said. "So we are here, not simply to dedicate a building. We are here to rededicate ourselves to that work, which we undertake in partnership with our wider community."

The ceremony included several prayers, songs by the temple's choir and the affixing of the [Mezuzah](#) right above the right door to the new entrance.

The large addition of space, which is connected from the west to the original 1972 structure, comes as much needed relief for the temple. According to Rabbi Geoffry Mittelman, prior to the addition, the outer parts of the sanctuary were being used for nursery school classes in the morning and religious classes in the afternoon.

"So it got a lot of wear and tear," he said.

With the space, the nursery school and religious education will have separate space, while the sanctuary will return to its original standalone purpose. The addition also contains a large social hall and library.

According to temple President Harry Cohen, the planning took several years, including a process to decide what the needs were, a capital campaign and forming a building committee to plan for the expansion. Groundbreaking [happened in May 2010](#).

Once the dedication ended, attendees proceeded inside to the new atrium hallway, went to the second floor and across a new, bridge-like structure and into the sanctuary for interfaith prayers. Congregants from all houses of worship that are part of the interfaith council said words of prayer, with an emphasis towards community and tolerance.

"We have much to be thankful for as we approach Thanksgiving this year," said Rev. Tom Lenhart of the First Congregational Church of Chappaqua. "This is a nation of great ideas, especially the commitment to freedom of speech and of religion. This is a land where a church and a synagogue and a mosque can stand side by side, affirming the importance of the other."

Rhonda Khalifeh spoke for the Upper Westchester Muslim Society.

"It would be naive of me to stand in front of you today and deny that Muslims, both as individuals and as communities, are being discriminated in various parts of the country and globe," she said. "However, I am thankful and blessed to have grown up in a community that has not forsaken the very principles of justice, freedom and equality that this country was founded on. Incidentally, these are the same principals that my faith of choice, Islam, was built upon."

The society, a member of the interfaith council, is hoping to build New Castle's newest house of worship, with a proposed mosque on the West End. The society's wish to build in town has the backing of Temple Beth El officials.

Support was also noted for two local charities, Millwood-based Food Bank for Westchester and Hope's Door, which helps victims of domestic violence.

Once prayers concluded, the new social hall's tables were filled and folks helped themselves to turkey, stuffing and other trimmings for the Thanksgiving feast. The dinner is rotated each year among the interfaith council's different religious groups.

While the temple's chance this year was coincidental, Mittelman explained, he added that they knew they wanted to do a dedication and to invite the community.

"It worked out very nicely," he said.

Highlights of the dedication ceremony are attached here as a video.

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