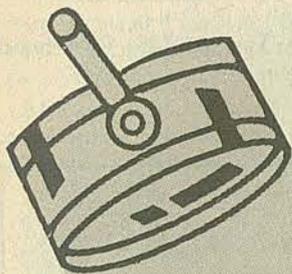


Sisterhoods: Behind the Scenes

By Ellen G. Hyde



Presenting... "Showdown at the Bar B'nai." The setting is a saloon in the old West, where the "good guys" (who labor tirelessly to raise money for the synagogue) meet the villains (who expend equal energy to thwart fundraising efforts). The final, decisive challenge is about to ensue, and the showdown could determine the future of the shul...

So went one of the memorable shows presented at Congregation B'nai Israel, in Pittsburgh's East End. Written and directed by sisterhood members Maxine Horne and Linda Levine, this show (like many others) was in rehearsal for some five months (two or three times weekly).

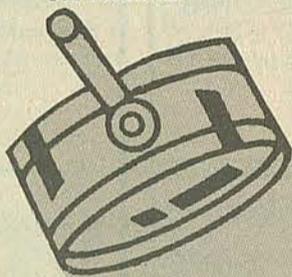
Thus, while "Showdown at the Bar B'nai" was clearly fictitious, it did make two important statements about the synagogue's sisterhood. They know how to have fun. And they also take their activities very seriously: a good deal of money is raised, when these performances are designated only for women who pledge donor in the sisterhood's annual drive.

Sisterhood President Beryll Grinberg stresses that the group's primary goal is to "support the synagogue," as she notes just a few of its fundraising endeavors: flea markets, art auctions and a Purim Shalach Manot project (where gifts of hamantashen and other holiday foods are prepared and distributed, according to the customs of Purim). "All told, we give the congregation some \$10-12,000 yearly," Beryll reveals.

She is quick to point out that sisterhood's "support" of the congregation also reaches into the area of programming. "We sponsor a model seder for the religious school and offer adult education throughout the year, which is open to the entire congregation," she explains. "Several times a year, we have a 'Lunch and Learn' on Saturday, which features a Shabbat lunch and speaker."

The religious school is a particular focus of the sisterhood --and recipient of proceeds from

one of the group's major fundraising projects, the synagogue gift shop. "We feel that education of the children is very important; it's one of our primary concerns," she notes. "We know this is where our future is."



Presenting... A variety show in the tradition of television's finest, a series of short skits spoofing the synagogue --and all else. And starring Pittsburgh's own Marty Allen...

It's been a long time since Churchill's native-son came home to lend his name and talent to the fundraising efforts of Parkway Jewish Center, but founding sisterhood member **Syma Levine** remembers it well (just as she remembers the strategic placement of Marty's sister on the planning committee).

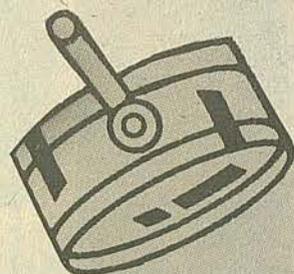
"Marty was just starting out," she recalls, noting that the shows were a tremendous fundraiser. Soon enough, though, the star had "made it big" and was no longer able to participate in the Parkway shows. Then it was on to other means of raising money, such as operating a gift shop, catering for synagogue functions and organizing hamantashen sales, lawn fairs and the sale of Rosh Hashana greetings published in a flyer.

Via such projects, the sisterhood has amassed for the shul more

than \$100,000 over the group's 30-year history--and paid for such projects as furnishing the synagogue kitchen and renovating an all-purpose room. The group has also sponsored educational programs for adults and children, including a model seder which, at one time, catered to 240 children.

Things have changed a great deal over the years since Syma joined with five other women to found the group. Today the sisterhood has about 100 members. But the growth has waned recently. "When Sisterhood started out," she stresses, "most women didn't work. Now women are working, not only after their children are grown, but even when they're small."

Still the group manages to meet monthly and offer diverse programs, ranging from speakers on topics of all kinds to musical programs and fashion shows. And, just to give an extra boost to potential members, the synagogue offers one year's free sisterhood membership to all newcomers to the congregation.



Presenting... A recital by students of the Beth Shalom Dance School, with original choreography by their instructor, a University of Pittsburgh Economics major named Gene Kelly...



Beth Shalom Sisterhood presenting "Seven Golden Buttons," 1962

Anne Greenberg remembers it like it was yesterday--quite a noteworthy feat for a 91-year-old. It is 1931: The Beth Shalom Sisterhood decides to sponsor a dance school for young girls whose families would otherwise be unable to afford such classes. As program chairman, Anne is charged with the task of finding an instructor.

She comes upon a young man, a student at Pitt, who seems capable of taking on the challenge in his spare time. Many years later, her name will appear in the autobiography of one of Hollywood's leading dancer-choreographers, and she will dance with him when he returns to Pittsburgh years later to be honored by the city.

Gene Kelly left his position with Beth Shalom in 1940, headed

campaign '89

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