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# JEWISH NEWS

of Greater Phoenix



March 4, 2005/Adar I 23 5765, Volume 57, No. 27

## A celebration of freedom, unity

### Bucharian Jewish community moves into new home

**DONNA V. COHEN**  
Special to Jewish News

Tamara Abramova left Uzbekistan 16 years ago, but her memories of life as a Bucharian Jew remain tainted.

"Life there wasn't too open," she says. "We couldn't openly celebrate a bar mitzvah or a circumcision ... you could go to jail.

"I saw houses burned and people killed."

On Feb. 20, Abramova and many other Bucharian Jewish immigrants joined together in North Central Phoenix for a festive day of celebration to honor freedom and unity. The festivities were marked by the dedication of two new Torah scrolls, a new synagogue and the Bucharian Jewish Community Center.

The celebration began at about 2 p.m. as families - all immigrants from the former Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan - gathered in front of Rabbi Baruch Cohen's home in Phoenix.

"Today is a big holiday for us," Abramova says, as she waited to join the procession. "We have complete freedom here. We can grow emotionally, intellectually and financially. We are thankful to those who support us."

Some of the crowd of about 200 men, women and children danced and sang to traditional Bucharian-Jewish music during the mile-long procession from the rabbi's home to the new shul and community center



Rabbi Abba Shimonov is a scribe from Israel who wrote a Torah scroll for the Bucharian Jewish community. Here, he sews the parchment to the Torah holder with natural twine at the banquet.

*Photo by Donna V. Cohen*

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Leaders seek momentum on Palestinian reform	at 6516 N. Seventh St. Leading the way were men dressed in traditional costume carrying the three-foot- tall and 180-foot-long scrolls to their new home.
Russian Jews worry about democracy, anti-semitism	Guests included Jews from Bucharian communities in Israel, New York City, Vienna, Austria, Denver and Toronto.
<b>ISRAEL</b>	
Bombing strains cease-fire	Phoenix is home to more than 500 Bucharian families - the second largest population in the United States outside of Queens, N.Y., where the population is about 50,000, according to Rabbi Zvi Holland of the Phoenix Community Kollel, an independent community organization committed to advancing Torah scholarship and community education and development.
<b>HEALTH</b>	
Smoking breaks have healthy aspect	Holland adds that the kollel provides the Bucharian community with organizational support and has "facilitated the arrival of three Bucharian rabbis who study in the kollel and serve the community."
<b>SPECIAL SECTION</b> <b>Good Health</b>	
The right fit: choosing a home care provider	The Feb. 20 celebration was made possible by financial support from the Elishayov family, benefactors who are one of the largest diamond manufacturers in the world.
Paging Dr. Shapiro	
Finding the balance	
<b>OPINION</b>	
<i>Editorial</i> - The view from here	The new community center provides a central meeting place for this closely-knit, religious community whose places of worship up until now had been scattered and temporary.
<i>Commentary</i> - Jews should reach out to Christians	"Arizona is a big state (and) we are all separated from each other geographically," Abramova says. "We want to be united and pray and be together."
<i>Commentary</i> - YWCA USA concerned about accuracy	Most local Bucharian Jews live in neighborhoods in the vicinity of North Central Avenue, Northern and 50th avenues and Seventh Street and Bell Road.
<i>In the Mail</i> - Letters to the Editor	"Prior to May 2000, the local Bucharian community did not have a rabbi, nor did they have a strong communal structure," says Holland. With the kollel's help, the community merged with Shaarei Tzion Ohel Bracha in May 2004. Shaarei Tzion is a network of schools based in Israel that is supported largely by the Elishayov family and includes almost 90 institutions, according to Holland.
<b>ARTS</b>	
Rabbi turned radio host brings 'too Jewish' show to Phoenix	"Shaarei Tzion committed to manage all of the community's affairs, supply three rabbis, start three synagogues and provide a community center," Holland explains. "The community center will be used as a springboard for education and social interaction, to re-involve the younger generation with their heritage."
Oscar's Jewish flavor is subtle	This heritage is as obscure as it is ancient.
<b>BUSINESS</b>	
Make elevator speeches engaging	Carl Goldberg of Tempe, who holds a Ph.D. in Russian history, explains that "Bucharian Jews, although from the Soviet Union, historically are not European Russian Jews, but an ancient and distinct ethnic Jewish community that came to Central Asia from Persia before the fall of the Second Temple.
Coffeehouse becomes kosher	
People on the move	
<b>COMING UP</b>	
This Week	
<b>MILESTONES</b>	
Births	"They are not Orthodox Jews, as we are accustomed to thinking of Ashkenazic Orthodox Jews," he adds, "though many of the Bucharian
B'nai Mitzvah	

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religious traditions are closer to the Orthodox than they are to the Conservative or Reform branches of Judaism."

He says that because of the cultural differences such as language, family traditions, food, music and the role of women - differences formed in isolation from Europe during the last 2,500 years - the Bukharian Jews and the European Russian Jews don't really have much contact with one another.

"In fact, on the rare occasion that a marriage takes place between a Bukharian Jew and a European-Russian Jew," Goldberg adds, "it is considered a mixed marriage."

Goldberg, who also published "Arizonskie Novosti," a Russian language newsletter for all Russian-speaking, mostly Jewish, immigrants in the Greater Phoenix area from 1995-1998, has also taught a Russian language course at Arizona State University.

According to Holland, more than 700 guests attended the Feb. 20 evening banquet that topped off the festivities. The event was held at Monterra at Westworld and included live music performed by Israeli musicians.

Zoya Pilosova-Gilkarov traveled from New York City to participate in the celebration. Her sentiments reflected the feelings of the crowd. "When the shul opened for Shabbat services on Friday night, there were a lot of tears in people's eyes," she said. "We are all joined together in Phoenix for the first time."

They have come a long way from Uzbekistan.

For more information about the history of Bukharian Jews, visit [www.BukharianJews.com](http://www.BukharianJews.com). Donna V. Cohen is a free-lance writer based in Cave Creek.

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