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Community Directory

**STORIES IN THIS ISSUE****FEATURES**

Expressing ties to Israel
Jewish history down under
Israeli smiles

COMMUNITY

Establishing a new home
New rabbi at Temple Kol Ami
Local attorney joins Israeli army

HOLIDAY

Fast day recalls history

NATION

Kerry considers running mates
New U.N. ambassador

WORLD

E.U. Parliament

ISRAEL

Israeli athletes prepare
Settlers threaten to resist

OPINION

Editorial - A house divided
Commentary - When governments are anti-Semitic

Commentary - Hitler images play on our fears

Voices - Unfinished business

In the Mail - Letters to the Editor

BUSINESS

Kosher market opens
People on the move

COMING UP

This Week

MILESTONES

Births
B'nai Mitzvah

JEWISH NEWS

of Greater Phoenix



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Establishing a new home

Buchori Jewish Community welcomes rabbi, plans new facility

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The Buchori Jewish Community in Phoenix has obtained city approval to demolish its buildings at 1002 E. Glendale Ave., and has applied for a permit to proceed with plans to build a Jewish community center at that location.

Demolition has not yet been scheduled, according to David Goldstein of Hymson & Goldstein, P.C., an attorney representing the Phoenix Buchori Jewish Community. Synagogue leaders filed a preliminary site plan with the city in May and attended a June 22 pre-application meeting to discuss plans with the city.

"We haven't made the final decisions about that site, but I'm fairly certain that we'll be able to work out our problems and then move forward," said Goldstein. One issue the congregation faces is finding ample space for parking.

Bucharian Jews come from the city of Bukhara, Uzbekistan, and the Central Asian countries of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that surround it. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many immigrated to the United States, Canada and Israel.

Outside of New York City, Phoenix is home to the largest Bucharian Jewish community in the United States, said Rabbi Zvi Holland of the Phoenix Community Kollel, an organization that has provided organizational support.

"There's an estimated 500 families here - the number's always changing, people are always coming," he said.



The Buchori Jewish Community in Phoenix hopes to turn its property at 1002 E. Glendale Ave. into a Jewish community center.

Photo courtesy of the Phoenix Community Kollel

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SINGLES

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Members of the Bucharian community have "very strong beliefs and commitment to their culture and to Judaism," Holland said. "It's a real tight-knit close community."

Synagogue members dedicated the Glendale Avenue site in September 2000 and have gathered there for Shabbat services, daily minyans, holiday celebrations and other programs.

According to Robert Gawry, a citation investigator for the City of Phoenix, the city notified the synagogue on Aug. 22, 2003, that it was in violation of a Phoenix construction code. The main synagogue building, a former house, was zoned as a single-family residence, and members hadn't filed a permit to operate a synagogue on that property.

"What I basically told them was that they are illegally occupying the building for their use," Gawry said.

A second notice was sent Sept. 18.

A city inspection revealed that a shed on the property was structurally unsound and had unsafe wiring.

"I did not condemn that building," Gawry said. "I just made them aware of unsafe conditions that existed there and that they were in violation of the Phoenix construction code for occupying a space without the proper certificate of occupancy of that use."

On April 23, after the synagogue failed to file for a new certificate of occupancy, the city issued a citation. It was dismissed and the case resolved on May 19 after the synagogue obtained the demolition permit, Gawry said.

A chain-link fence now surrounds the property, as synagogue leaders plan their next moves.

Since the congregation vacated the 17,688-square-foot property in early June, the congregation has held daily and Shabbat services in a makeshift synagogue in the lunchroom of the Phoenix Hebrew Academy.

"We certainly wanted them to have to have a place to pray so we offered them one of our buildings," said Rabbi Harris Cooperman, principal of the school.

"They're fellow Jews. We have to welcome them (and) make them feel part of the community."

The congregation, led by Rabbi Boruch Kochen since May of last year, soon will move to temporary quarters in an office suite at 12th Street and Maryland Avenue.

In addition to Central Phoenix, members of the Phoenix Bucharian community live in two areas of town. Rabbi David Plishtiyov came here from Israel on June 28 to serve families living near Northern and 50th avenues. A third group of families live near Bell Road and Seventh Street.

The Kollel's role has been that of a facilitator, Holland said. "Our mission is to help the Bucharian community be a Bucharian community and bring them rabbis and leaders to help them follow their traditions."

Both Buchori rabbis study with rabbis from the Kollel.

Rabbi Dan Hayman, head of Chabad Russian Programs, and Rabbi Laibel Blotner, head of the teen Mishmar Program at Chabad of Arizona, have also provided support.

For more information, call the Kollel, 602-433-0300.

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[Home](#)