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one is asked to share something good that has happened to them during the past week, such as a couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary or a six-year-old with a wobbly tooth anticipating a visit from the tooth fairy. The congregation then sings the *Shechecheyanu*, expressing communal gratitude for these and other personal milestones and blessings. And now that people know something meaningful about each other, “there is a buzz of interaction at the *oneg*,” Miller says. “Rabbi Alan Freedman and his wife Lori are always mixing and introducing folks, and Cantorial Soloist Abby Gostein never misses this opportunity to visit with everyone. Often you hear folks making plans to continue on to dinner together.”

Miller explains that “Creating a warm, welcoming religious home is an integral part of our culture. Our values statement reads: ‘We foster enduring relationships and mutual respect among our members by providing opportunities to support one another in times of challenge, by engaging in social activities, and by creating a sense of connectedness.’”

Member Joan Edelstein affirms that Beth Shalom lives up to its values statement. “When my husband and I first joined, we were still pretty new to Austin and had not yet developed friendships,” she says. “We never had to initiate a single hello. Every time we attended a service or temple event, we were welcomed and asked to join people where they were sitting. Soon we felt so at home that we became ‘welcomers’ instead of ‘welcomees.’ It is truly a blessing to be part of such a wonderful congregation. As our membership grows in numbers, we are working very hard to keep ‘warm and welcoming’ as the hallmark of our community’s culture.”



This past year, the largest (2,000 member households) and oldest (founded in 1874) synagogue in the Rocky Mountain region made internal changes to

build membership and keep people enthusiastic about congregational life. “For the first time in 60+ years our congregation hired a new senior rabbi, so it was a good opportunity to celebrate,” says Janet Bronitsky (photo #4), executive director of Temple Emanuel in Denver (emanueldenver.org). “We came up with a ‘Celebrate Being Jewish’ theme, and have been incorporating the theme in our music, education, and social activities, creating a buzz about Jewish life that makes both old and new members more excited to be a part of the congregation.”

Member Mitchell Brodsky believes that “our services really reflect the theme because they are extremely joyous, moving, and spiritual. We don’t just observe Shabbat; we celebrate it!” February’s “Shabbat Unplugged,” in which the clergy led the congregation in singing Debbie Friedman’s songs, was “the most incredible service I’ve been to.”

Before the High Holy Days, the temple sent “Celebrate Being Jewish” name-tags in lieu of tickets and encouraged members to wear them throughout the year. And whereas “in the past, we had ‘gatekeepers’ asking for tickets,” Bronitsky says, “this year we had ‘greeters’ who met people in the parking lot and welcomed them to the temple, either by name or by offering nametags to those who didn’t have [a tag].”

From August to December 2010, membership increased by 57 households—which Bronitsky attributes to “a welcoming atmosphere, an identifiable brand, and enthusiastic congregants.”

“During the past five to six years of being an active member of Temple Emanuel, I have seen us grow into a more welcoming and vibrant congregation,” says member Fredi Novin. “The Shabbat ambassador program has initiated a friendlier, more welcoming atmosphere during services, and not only has the nametag initiative made it easier for our rabbi to quickly get acquainted with a large number of congregants, it also has helped to initiate a

positive and caring sense of community amongst the members. Simply put... strangers become friends.”



At Temple Judea Mitzpah in Skokie, Illinois (www.templejm.org), “members and leaders are considered ‘unofficial ambassadors’ at services, *onegs*, and temple events and are asked to make sure that no one is ever sitting alone,” says former temple president Arlene Berke (photo #5). While the process is not formal, any member who sees someone new or sitting alone at any synagogue gathering will quickly come over to introduce him/herself and also encourage other members to make the newcomer feel welcomed. “Several new families have said that the fact that we were so welcoming, and remembered their names when they came back to visit, made them join and feel a part of the congregational family.”



Brooklyn Heights Synagogue in Brooklyn, New York (bhsbrooklyn.org) hosts a “Welcoming Shabbat” program for toddlers in the neighborhood every Friday morning. Rabbi Serge Lippe (photo #6) sits on the floor with the children, strumming his guitar and singing Shabbat songs and blessings while temple staff members meet and greet the adults. Challah and grape juice follow. At least a dozen families have joined in the past two years as a result of the program. The new members then are invited to a New Member Shabbat, during which they are introduced and honored with an *aliyah*—“a recognition that leaves them feeling welcomed into the community with open arms,” says Executive Director Randi Jaffe.



To assist member congregations in implementing innovative projects designed to attract and engage both new and existing members, the Union for Reform Judaism recently awarded