

Winchester synagogue revamps its space

By Jacqueline Hyman -- October 3, 2019

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Since doing major renovations in 2013, Beth El Congregation in Winchester has continued to make changes to its building, which was erected in 1954.

Now, finishing touches are being put on the last big project, the social hall.

Member Ken Lauterstein undertook much of the construction and work on the

The relatively new lounge is used for adult classes and meetings – Photo by Jacqueline Hyman

social hall and other parts of the synagogue.

The social hall, which is on the lower level, received new paint, new electrical fixtures, new outlets and an upgrade to a door to the kitchen. Lauterstein also added wainscoting around the entire room. This project took between three and four months.

“This is all Ken, it is kind of amazing,” said Ellen Zimmerman, the congregation’s president. “He’s a woodworker, and he loves doing this stuff.”

Lauterstein has also upgraded the building for security purposes. He’s a former government worker, and the recent rise in anti-Semitism has worried him. He’s installed locks, shatter-resistant window film and peepholes on doors.

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“The most important thing, no matter how much work you do, and what you do physically, is that people know what the security plan is,” Lauterstein said.

The synagogue uses the social hall every week, and members appreciate the update.

“It’s nice to see people come in and see the new look that it has. I think everybody appreciates that,” Lauterstein said. “I’m sure we’ll be using it the same way we always have, but now it looks a lot better.”

Before working on the social hall, Lauterstein completed the renovation of three classrooms — electrical work, dry erase boards, new furniture and air conditioning units make the rooms have a bright, clean feel.

“It is an opportunity for us to refresh,” said Rabbi Scott Sperling. “While the physical space is now considerably improved, from my perspective, that was a wonderful opportunity for us to say, ‘We have great space, and now let’s fill it with a great curriculum and well-trained teachers.’”



The 2013 renovations added an elevator to the building, which consequently has people entering from the parking lot side of the building. What had been the front entrance, where a large Magen David sits above the door, is now the back of the synagogue. So, Lauterstein also added exterior lighting for extra safety in the parking lot.

The office mailbox that member Ken Lauterstein built –
Photo provided

In the last six years, the synagogue has also gotten new chairs, a projector in its sanctuary and century-old stained glass for its ark. It added a children’s library, put in new bathrooms and created a lounge area also used for adult education classes.

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Even though the major projects are wrapping up, Lauterstein said, “I don’t think I’ll ever be done.” “There’s still more work to be done,” he added, “and I enjoy doing it very much. It’s a work in progress, let’s put it that way.”

He has also created several pieces for the building, such as a large bookcase for siddurim, a 10-slot mailbox for the office, and a table with wheels on which the rabbi uses a television for adult education. Other volunteers, Zimmerman said, have planted flowers and done weeding to make the outside of the building more appealing.

She said, “It’s about having a congregation of people who’ve given their time and talent to make us better and stronger.”

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