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## New Hyde Park Young Israel plans women's ritual baths

By Howard Koplowitz

**Congregants of the Young Israel of New Hyde Park may soon be able to crack open a bottle of Manischewitz and dance the hora in celebration after their plan to erect a ritual bath as an extension to their synagogue was overwhelmingly approved by Community Board 13 late last month.**

The ritual bath, called a mikveh, is a purification ceremony carried out primarily by Orthodox Jewish women after menstruation, said Larry Barth, president of the synagogue's mikveh committee. The temple will build a water collector on its roof so that rain water—the only type of water that is allowed for the ritual—can be heated and used for the ceremony. Barth said the cleansing allows a woman to have sexual relations with her husband.

"This will be the first of its kind in northeast Queens," said the synagogue's rabbi, Benyamin Hammer.

The mikveh is needed because Orthodox Jews do not drive on the sabbath and the next closest ritual bath is seven miles from the synagogue, Barth said, adding that most of the women who will use the facility live close to the temple on 264-15 77th Ave. Hammer said the 150 families that belong to the synagogue live within 1 1/4 miles from the temple. Barth mentioned that no more than five women a night will be using the ritual bath, which will be about 1,000 square feet and will be built on the grass area in front of the synagogue.

Hammer said the ritual bath has been a staple of the Jewish faith.

"No matter where Jews lived throughout their history, we always built the mikvah, synagogue and school before our own houses," he said.

Jewish law mandates exact specifications for the way a mikveh should be built, and the synagogue is using Rabbi Yirmiyahu Katz, a world-famous builder of mikvaot, as a consultant, according to Hammer.

The temple is still waiting on a date with the Board of Standards and Appeals, Barth said, the next step in the approval process now that CB 13 has okayed the measure by a vote of 28 to 0 with three abstentions. Before the vote, the synagogue's attorney met with CB 13's land use committee April 19 and a representative from Borough President Helen Marshall on June 2, Barth said. He said he expects the plan to be approved, adding that the community board's decision is held in high regard with the BSA.

"We don't expect a problem," Barth said. "The goal is to have a shovel in the ground by the end of 2005."

There has recently been a surge in popularity of mikvaot, with elaborate ones being built on the Upper East Side of Manhattan that resemble lavish spas. But Barth said the synagogue's mikveh will be "middle of the road." He would not disclose the cost of the ritual bath.

Barth said the character of the mikveh will flow into the existing building because the same brick used for the synagogue will be used for the ritual bath. He pointed out that women do not need to be a member of the synagogue in order to use the mikveh and a minimal fee of about \$18 will be charged to use the ritual bath.

If and when plans for the mikveh are approved, he said construction should take about two to three months.

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