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## Young Israel raises funds for ritual bath

By Stephen Stirling

**The New Hyde Park Orthodox Jewish community held a fund-raising block party Sunday that featured games, pony rides and a little bit of "Jewgrass."**

Highlighting Young Israel of New Hyde Park's second annual July 4 weekend block party, a fund-raiser to support the construction of a Jewish ritual bath, was a group of Orthodox Jewish musicians called White Shabbos. The band, from Long Island, blends aspects of traditional Jewish music with more contemporary influences like punk and reggae. Rabbi Binyamin Hammer of Young Israel said the intermingling of cultures was a theme for the event.

"We're trying to focus on the community, not just ritual, with this event," he said. "We've invited our friends from Nassau County all the way through Queens because this isn't just a Jewish event, it's a community event."

The block party featured extensive sets from White Shabbos, who stopped only briefly for water breaks during the six-hour event. With the sun beating down 90-degree heat on their backs, the group played both original music and covers, including an entire two-hour long set of Grateful Dead music. White Shabbos infuse rock and bluegrass with their own traditional Jewish music influences for a unique sound fans of the band affectionately dub "Jewgrass."

"They're awesome. They play really well together and it creates a nice atmosphere here. It's just a great way to spend the July 4 weekend," said Eileen Goldman, a Glen Oaks resident. "I like that there are people here enjoying everything that aren't of the faith. That kind of community feeling is great."

The block party also featured carnival games, pony rides, a bouncy castle and a petting zoo. Goats, rabbits and roosters lounged in the heat as children took their turns feeding or petting them.

Larry Barth, who coordinated the event, said that he was happy the event had turned out so well. He said the block party should be a large boon to the funding needed to construct a Jewish ritual bath, or mikveh, at the temple.

"We're getting closer and closer to being able to build it. We need about \$200,000 total and after today we should almost be there," he said.

A mikveh is a large pool of water used for immersion in purification ceremonies in Judaism. Traditionally used by women once a month, Rabbi Hammer said it is an integral part of the Orthodox Jewish religion.

"This new addition to our building is something that will bring a part of Jewish ritual to the area that has been lacking in northeastern Queens," Hammer said.

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