

Synagogue shares 'beauty of Judaism'

AJC 11/15/03

Congregation Beth Jacob
1855 LaVista Road N.E.
Atlanta

- **Phone:** 404-633-0551
- **Services:** 7 a.m. weekdays; 15 minutes before sunset Friday; 8:30 a.m. Saturday
- **Membership:** 600 families
- **Senior rabbi:** Ilan D. Feldman

Mission

Rabbi Ilan D. Feldman describes Beth Jacob as an "outreach" congregation with a focus on Orthodox Judaism. "Very often, people who are not raised Orthodox are very inhibited about entering an Orthodox synagogue," he said. "So we like to try and make it easy and explain Orthodox Judaism in inspiring terms and make it accessible."

History

Beth Jacob's 60-year history has been marked by both visionaries and pragmatists who worked together to create Atlanta's foremost Orthodox congregation.

"It has become, over the years, a synagogue with a diverse congregation," Feldman said.

But a thoroughly written history of Beth Jacob explains the synagogue's founders rejected any diversity that distracted from an Orthodox way of worship.

In 1943, eight men formally associated with Ahavath Achim Synagogue established a place of worship in northeast Atlanta because of Ahavath Achim's Conservative leanings. A year later, Beth Jacob received its charter, elected Morris Gavronsky as its first president, and began holding services in a small two-story building at 562 Boulevard.

Plans in 1960 to erect a Jewish house of prayer in the predominantly Christian LaVista-Toco Hill neighborhood sparked protests. But in late 1962, Beth Jacob dedicated its new synagogue at 1855 LaVista Road amid a supportive crowd, which included Connecticut's Jewish

Sen.-elect Abraham Ribicoff as well as U.S. Sens. Richard Russell and Herman Talmadge of Georgia.

Rabbi Emanuel Feldman retired in 1991 after 39 years, then moved to Jerusalem where he lives most of the year. Ilan Feldman took up where his father, now Beth Jacob rabbi emeritus, left off. His focus has been on meeting the membership's social, educational and cultural needs at a place he describes as "the largest Orthodox congregation between Baltimore and Miami."

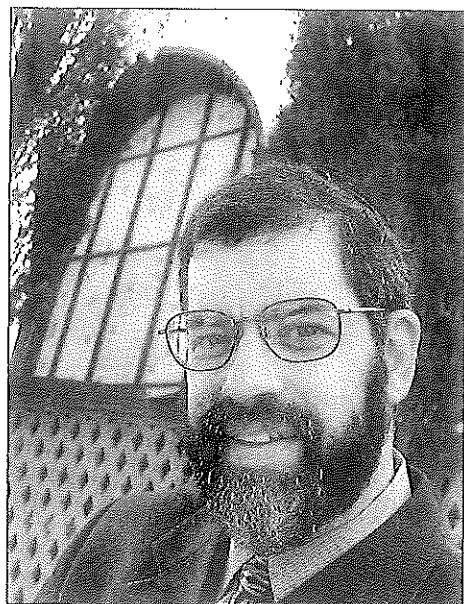
Rabbi's path

"I'm one of the few rabbis in the country who is serving the congregation in which I was raised," Feldman said. In addition to his father, the 49-year-old Atlanta native grew up around a family of rabbis. His grandfather and father-in-law were rabbis. A Feldman cousin is now Beth Jacob's assistant rabbi.

Ilan Feldman's rabbinical journey began with a formal Hebrew grade school education. When he reached high school, his parents sent him to Talmudical Academy of Baltimore. From there, he entered Baltimore's Ner Israel Rabbinical College, where he received his ordination in 1980. During his studies at Ner Israel, Feldman visited Israel and determined there exactly how he would serve. "I was not at all sure that I wanted to be a public rabbi," he said. "My experiences there convinced me that I wanted to serve American Jews through a pulpit."

Feldman, who also holds a master's degree in counseling psychology from Loyola College in Baltimore, first began assisting under his father in 1980. Since becoming senior rabbi 12 years ago, he has focused on outreach and maintaining Jewish culture. "That's the struggle for American Jews — how to be involved in American culture and political life and still retain Jewish consciousness — and that's exactly one of the issues that I deal with in my ministry," Feldman said.

Feldman serves in a variety of leadership positions in the Jewish community. Most recently, he was one of 15 rabbis throughout the country invited



JOEY IVANSCO / Staff

Rabbi Ilan D. Feldman calls Beth Jacob an "outreach" congregation.

to visit President Bush in Washington.

A self-proclaimed Braves fan, Feldman is married to Miriam. They have eight children, including four sons. "They're very involved in Jewish academics," Feldman said. "The question is where will they go [with it]."

Programs

Feldman rattled off a long list of Beth Jacob programs when asked about the synagogue's offerings, including a range of children's programs, including a preschool, and a wide variety of Hebrew classes for youth and adults throughout the day and evening.

Other programs include the Purim Parade and Festival held each spring along LaVista Road; the Scholar in Residence project, which features a national Jewish intellectual to speak to the congregation periodically; and Soap Box, an opportunity for members to celebrate their diversity and share their unique personal experiences with the congregation.

In addition, there are a variety of special programs for men, women, seniors, families, empty nesters, singles and retirees. On Dec. 13, Beth Jacob will be host for the Israeli group Schlock Rock to perform their trademark rock 'n' roll tunes with Jewish-related lyrics.

Thoughts from the rabbi

"No matter what your background," Feldman said, "we're eager to share the beauty of Judaism with you. Visitors are welcome."

— Kysa Daniels for the Journal-Constitution

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Synagogue

Neighborhood, DOT settle LaVista Road controversy

By Brad Hundt
Neighbor Staff Writer

A long-standing tug-of-war between neighborhoods around LaVista Road, the Georgia Department of Transportation and DeKalb County has come to an end: following an agreement worked out between the three parties.

County Executive Assistant Jim Pierce announced the decision two weeks ago at a special meeting of the DeKalb Board of Commissioners.

Pierce said the county was pleased that we could reason together for the common good.

We came to the table and worked out a plan that is amicable to all of us. Pierce said of the plan.

where LaVista will be widened from North Druid Hills Road to beyond Houston Mill Road.

According to the final agreement, LaVista will be widened to five lanes at North Druid Hills Road, tapering to four lanes at the first residence past Toco Hills II. The road widening will end at Houston Mill Road except for a short taper to end the left turn lane at Houston Mill Road.

The DOT will do all the work and pay for the project, Pierce said, except for the adjustment of utilities.

Several members of the Congregation Beth Jacob objected to the road widening plan, as they walk to services at the synagogue on the

Sabbath and High Holidays, and feared road widening would restrict — if not make impossible — pedestrian traffic alongside the road.

However, the final agreement included an automatic pedestrian crossing signal across LaVista near the synagogue and another signal at a site to be determined later. Sidewalks will be installed on both sides of the road.

We are pleased that we have reached a compromise that is favorable to the neighborhood, said Frank Jenkins, an attorney for the neighborhoods. And I appreciate the work of the CEO, the administration, and particularly Jim Pierce for getting the project approved by the DOT.

DeKalb Neighbor
Synagogue 31, 1990

churches/
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Beth Jacob
Synagogue

DEKALB EXTRA, JAN. 25, 1990

Transportation -
La Vista Road

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DOT agrees not to widen La Vista in front of synagogue

By Anne Cowles
Staff writer

The Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) has agreed not to widen La Vista Road in front of Beth Jacob Synagogue because of neighborhood concerns that added traffic lanes would create safety hazards.

The agreement, finalized Jan. 18, also calls for the DOT to build a sidewalk on the north side of La Vista, beginning at residential property just south of Houston Mill Road to Briarcliff Road, and extend an existing sidewalk on the south side of La Vista from North Druid Hills Road to Briarcliff Road.

"It is an orthodox synagogue. On the Sabbath and the high holidays, they [members] walk to the synagogue," said attorney Frank Jenkins, who represented area residents in the negotiations. "They were naturally concerned about the widened roadway making it more dangerous for the members who walk to the synagogue."

The DOT originally sought to widen the two-lane stretch of La Vista to five lanes from North Druid Hills Road to Houston Mill Road, without adding any sidewalks, according to DeKalb County Executive Assistant James L. Pierce, who helped negotiate the agreement.

The DOT project, scheduled to begin

this summer, will widen La Vista to five lanes from North Druid Hills westward to the first residential property, which is about 600 feet from Houston Mill, Mr. Pierce said.

But, at that point, the five lanes will be tapered to four lanes, consisting of one westbound lane, one left turn lane onto Houston Mill and two eastbound lanes.

From Houston Mill west past the synagogue at 1855 La Vista Road, the thoroughfare will remain two lanes.

A traffic light will be installed at or near the synagogue with an automatic walk cycle operating on weekends and religious holidays. Another light will be erected at

an as yet undetermined location between the synagogue and Briarcliff Road.

"The members of the congregation and the neighborhood would prefer that [La Vista] not be widened at all," Mr. Jenkins said. "But this is a reasonable compromise in which the DOT has agreed to accommodate the neighbors and the pedestrian traffic in addition to accommodating the vehicular traffic."

"Understandably, our hundreds of residents who walk for personal and religious reasons were concerned about this project," Laura Bulbin, president of the North Druid Hills Residents Association, said in a statement released Friday.