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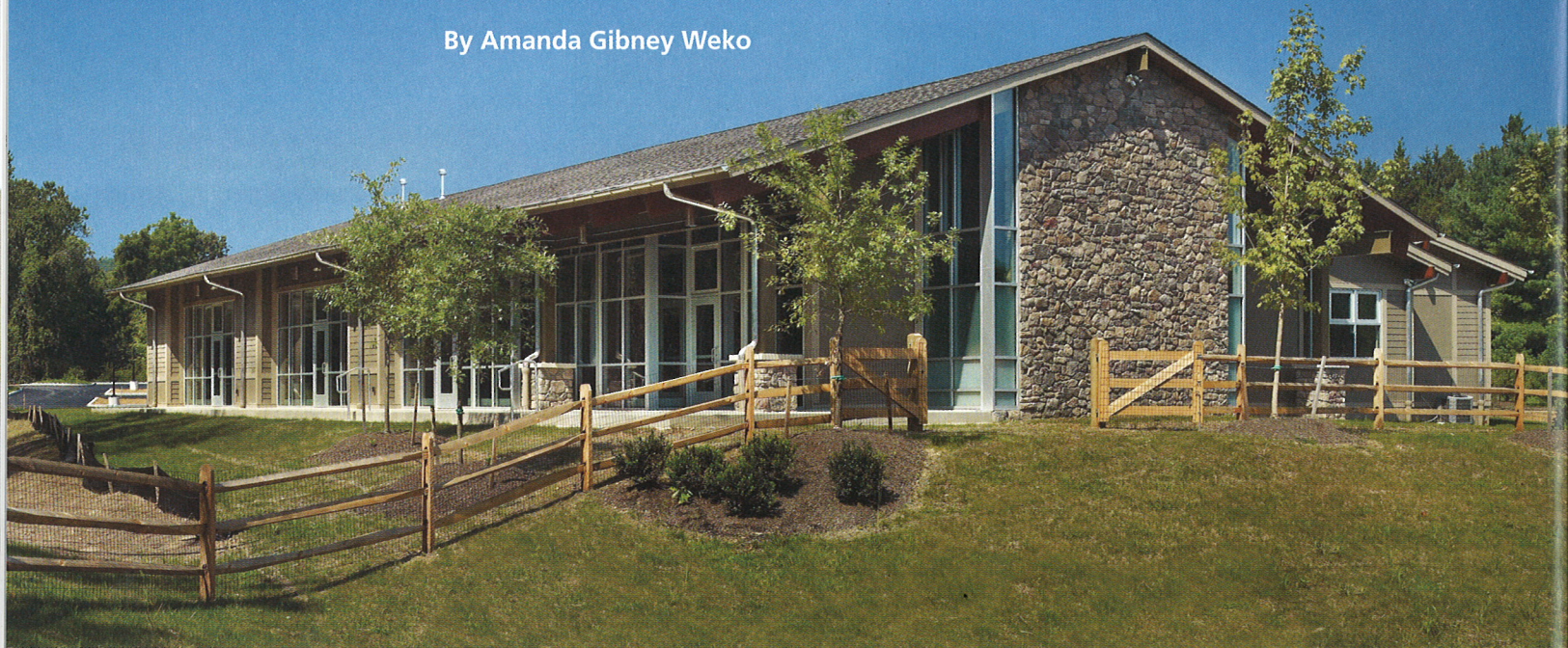
The Knowledge Sector

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THE WALLS AND HALLS
OF ACADEMIA

New Synagogue, Beth Chaim Reform Congregation Brawer & Hauptman, Architects

By Amanda Gibney Weko



The new Beth Chaim Reform Congregation synagogue by Brawer & Hauptman, Architects lives up to the congregation's motto, "Home for a lifetime." The building's simplicity belies the depth of thought and attention to detail of the nine-year project.



Beth Chaim sits low to the ground on a sliver of land in Malvern, Chester County. The traditional-shaped volume is enriched by the texture of stone and a south-facing wall of glass. At just 8,000 square feet, the building contains a multi-purpose sanctuary space with movable seating, commercial kitchen, offices, Judaica shop, and a meeting room. The interiors are at once intimate and expan-

sive. In contrast to worship spaces with an inward focus, Beth Chaim's glass-walled sanctuary looks outward.

The view is of a 6.8-acre wooded and stream-edged site that took years to find. Brawer & Hauptman's relationship with Beth Chaim began in 1999. At the time, the growing congregation shared worship space in a converted barn with a group of Protestants.

As the only reformed Jewish congregation in Chester County, Beth Chaim needed its own building. Together with the architects, the congregation spent several years searching for the ideal site and investigating design concepts, while refining programmatic and budget requirements.

The congregation loved the barn's warmth and wanted to recall its memory in the new architecture. Textures, colors, materials, and quality of light were key to expressing a sense of natural, functional beauty. The synagogue was also meant to encourage people of diverse backgrounds and faiths to become a part of the larger Jewish family. Accommodations for flexible programming and future growth were imperative.

Brawer & Hauptman Principal in Charge Michael Hauptman recalls encouraging the congregation to take advantage of the site. In the sanctuary, a wall of simple aluminum storefront windows captures the view. The room is protected from the summer sun by a deep overhang and exposed to direct winter sun, strongest in the morning during worship times.

Stained pine ceilings, maple veneer paneling, and synthetic stone recall elements of traditional European wooden synagogues. Synthetic stone forms the backdrop for the bimah, or raised center platform. Toli vinyl tile was a luxury used throughout the synagogue to provide a range of complementary colors and textures.

The congregation was involved throughout design and construction. Strong building and finishes committees worked directly with the architects to discuss and evaluate every detail.

Economy was emphasized throughout the project. The design team maximized the congregation's small budget by designing multi-purpose spaces to increase efficiency, and by selecting construction and finish materials with cost in mind. Structural Insulated Panel roofing comprised of roof sub-structure, insulation, and finished interior ceiling was used throughout. Structural steel and mechanical systems were left exposed both for cost and to promote the desired utilitarian aesthetic. HardiPlank exterior siding was selected for its maintenance-free durability.

The design not only looks outward, but allows congregants to flow out into the site.



A terrace was designed along the south side of the building, sheltered by the deep overhanging sunshade and enhanced with built-in benches. An adjacent raingarden was incorporated to mitigate storm water in the stream floodplain and to accommodate protected bog turtles who reside on the site.

The openness of the architecture parallels the congregation's welcoming spirit. "It feels very much like who they are," Hauptman says of the architecture and Beth Chaim.

Project Architect Ellen Pannell describes the multi-purpose nature of the building and grounds. "It has become not just a worship

space but a community space." Expanded programming, more opportunities to come together as a congregation, and increased membership have resulted. A planned second phase will add a social hall and classrooms.



Location: Malvern, PA

Client: Beth Chaim Reform Congregation

Size: 8,000 square feet

Architecture: Brawer & Hauptman, Architects LLC; Michael Hauptman, AIA, Principal in Charge; Ellen Pannell, AIA, Project Architect; David Seaster, RA, LEED AP, Staff Architect

Structural Engineering: The Kachele Group

Civil Engineering: Nave Newell

MEP Engineering: Entech Engineering

Contractor: D. Fickler Construction, LLC

Photography: Halkin Photography LLC