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Fair Lawn gets new Orthodox shul

By [Josh Lipowsky](#) | Published 12/14/2006 | [Community](#) |

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Fair Lawn lost its minyan of shuls when Cong. B'nai Israel merged with the Fair Lawn Jewish Center, but a new shul is filling the gap.

About six weeks ago, a group of 20 Orthodox families from Cong. Shomrei Torah created Cong. Darchei Noam.

"A number of people felt it was time to establish a new shul and give more choices and hopefully attract more people to the community," said Darchei Noam's president, Nathan Bednarsh.

The new congregation attracts more than 40 men and about 20 women on [Shabbat](#) and meets in Bednarsh's basement, which has been redesigned as a temporary synagogue. His furniture has gone into storage and he personally constructed a bimah. Congregants helped buy and set up the 60 to 65 chairs. Debbie Thau donated the funds for an aron kodesh, which was dedicated to the memory of her father, Myron Mendeles. Leonard Goldsmith, one of the shul's gabbaim, donated a family Torah to the fledgling congregation.

"Our members have been very generous," Bednarsh said. "People are very enthusiastic about this new venture. We've gotten off to a good start."

Darchei Noam doesn't have a [Rabbi](#) but depends on its lay leadership, Bednarsh said. It does have a ritual committee, and one of its members is Rabbi Avram Herzog, a borough resident who teaches Judaic studies at the Moriah School in Englewood. Herzog, who is not a



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pulpit rabbi, chairs the committee and offers his halachic perspective but does not impose it, he said.

One aspect that makes Darchei Noam different from other Orthodox shuls in Fair Lawn is that both men and women are encouraged to give divrei Torah after Shabbat morning services. In the six weeks since the shul's founding, four men and two women have led discussions on the weekly Torah portion.



Nathan Bednarsh, president of the newly formed Darchei Noam, has offered his basement to host the fledgling synagogue until it finds a permanent home.

Rachel Bednarsh presented a d'var Torah on parsha Vaiyera and posed a question about God's message to Abraham about the binding of Isaac. Child sacrifice, Bednarsh said, was the norm at the time, so there has to be a deeper meaning.

"It's always good to get people involved in talking divrei Torah," she said. "There can be a give and take."

The opportunity for women to deliver divrei Torah adds a sense of inclusiveness for the women, Bednarsh said. "It gives them a feeling that they're more involved."

To avoid conflict, the d'var Torah is always delivered after services, a model Bednarsh said she's witnessed in Israel. "There's no reason anybody can't give a d'var Torah after davening," she said. "It's not necessarily just a speech, it's getting people involved and talking about the parsha."

As for the increasing number of people gathering in her basement, Bednarsh is happy to see the new members but knows her house cannot sustain the growth.

"We're going to outgrow it very quickly and need to find a building as soon as possible," she said. "We're very happy to have more and more people joining us."

While stories may differ about why the original families left Shomrei Torah, most seem to be maintaining a positive atmosphere between the two synagogues.

"The people didn't break away," said Fred Samuel, a member of Darchei Noam's board who had previously davened at Shomrei Torah. "They had a different vision. They were unhappy with the status quo."

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin of Shomrei Torah said he wished the new shul well and said members of Darchei Noam, which meets only on Shabbat, are welcome at Shomrei Torah for davening the rest of the week.

"This is not a breakaway," said Herzog, who maintains his Shomrei Torah membership. "It is simply looking to help

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the community grow. Everybody has different tastes and different desires. The more options the community has, the better for the growth of the community and the comfort of those who reside there."

Growing the Fair Lawn community is definitely one of Darchei Noam's goals, Nathan Bednarsh said.

"The community needs to have viable alternatives and choices," he said. The shul's name — which translates as "ways of pleasantness" — is representative of the intended atmosphere of warmth, he added.

This is not the first time new shuls have grown out of Shomrei Torah. Almost 30 years ago, a group of families, unable to walk the two or more miles to Shomrei Torah, met with Yudin and received his blessing to set up a new shul across town.

"Not only did he give us his blessing, but he loaned us a Torah and a mechitza in memory of his father," said Howard Koment, one of the founders of that shul, Cong. Ahavat Achim.

Ten years ago, a group spurred on by disagreements in the shul broke away from Ahavat Achim, though, and formed Young Israel of Fair Lawn. But while there may have been what he called "hostility" at one point, Koment said there isn't anymore.

"There will be cooperation [between all the shuls] over a period of time," he said. "The common goal is the growth of Fair Lawn and the growth of Jewish life."

Growth is the main concern right now for Darchei Noam, Nathan Bednarsh said. The nine families on the board of directors have made it their top priority to expand the membership and find a suitable new building. "We don't want to be limited by the current space we have," Bednarsh said. The board is conducting a building search, but Bednarsh does not expect the situation to be resolved within the next few weeks.

After Darchei Noam finds a new home, the board will turn to issues like movement affiliation and a rabbi, although, Bednarsh said, "in terms of laws and Jewish practices, we have enough guidance and leadership now."

Fred Samuel shares Bednarsh's vision and hopes Darchei Noam will one day offer youth programs, a Hebrew school, daily minyanim, and other programs. Growth has been mostly through word of mouth but the congregation is planning a membership drive, Bednarsh said.

"Our first priority is to grow in our current location and make sure we have a core group of people who are really dedicated and enthusiastic about this new shul," he said.



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