

Congregation Wants to Build Synagogue in MH

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After 30 years of wandering from building to building, South County's Jewish population will soon have a temple to call home.

Members of Congregation Emeth will appear before the Morgan Hill Planning Commission tonight to present plans for a 7,743-square-foot temple on a 1.4-acre lot at the intersection of Vineyard Court and Vineyard Street across from the police station.

"This will be our first opportunity to have our own building," said Michael Oshan, a charter member of the congregation, of plans for Beit Emeth. "We haven't had the numbers or critical mass to make it happen."

Emeth is made up of about 60 families, near the high water mark for the congregation that was founded in 1976. Without a temple, Emeth has not been able to blossom. The group doesn't have a rabbi. Oshan said a new temple will attract more members.

"Historically, this is not an area that has attracted a lot of Jewish families, one reason being that there isn't an established facility," he said. "As the community is growing a lot more Jews have moved into the area. Our goal is to unite them into a cohesive group."

The congregation holds services and classes at the Carden Academy, a Morgan Hill private school. The congregation has also worshipped at local churches of other denominations over the years.

Emeth is a reform congregation, which means that members don't adhere to the strict tenets of Orthodox Judaism. For example, its members don't necessarily observe the rules of kosher eating and they believe the Jewish lineage can be passed down from a father as well as a mother.

"It's a branch of Judaism that takes traditional Judaism and Americanized it to a certain extent," Oshan said. "It's the largest branch in the United States."

Emeth is holding a fund-raising campaign to build Beit Emeth. Oshan said the temple could be open in two years. Morgan Hill Mayor Dennis Kennedy said he is pleased to hear of growth in the city's diverse religious community.

"I'm glad to hear that the Jewish community is building a synagogue in Morgan Hill," the mayor said.

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