

## CONGREGATION EMETH CELEBRATES 35TH ANNIVERSARY

In 1977 the South Valley was a much different place: a smaller, less diverse population meant fewer Jews living in Hollister, Gilroy, and Morgan Hill. Stuart Blumberg, a Gilroy resident at the time, reflects back on “how alone South County Jews felt, transplanted from elsewhere and seeking spiritual support.”

Ellen Fuchs, who with her husband owned this newspaper, wanted to remedy the situation. She recalls “calling every Jewish-sounding name in the phone directory” seeking people interested in starting a group. When Blumberg saw a small item in “The Dispatch” mentioning this, he was skeptical, admitting he “couldn’t foresee what a warm, family-like organization would evolve from that humble beginning.

On January 29 members and friends of Congregation Emeth will gather to celebrate the group’s thirty-fifth anniversary. Those present have many accomplishments of which to be proud.

Originally incorporated under the name “South Santa Clara County Jewish Community,” the handful of members met on Jewish holidays in rented space like the Gilroy United Methodist Church, the Gilroy Masonic Hall, Morgan Hill’s Carden Academy, and Grange Hall. They hired different rabbis to officiate as needed, and borrowed a Torah from other synagogues, and soon hired a part-time Rabbi who commuted from his home in the Bay Area.

There have been many important landmark events in the progress of Emeth:

- In 1990 they established an annual Scholar in Residence Program, inviting distinguished speakers to spend a weekend retreat in the Santa Cruz Mountains discussing topics of interest.
- In 1996 a section containing 70 plots at Gavilan Hills Memorial Park was dedicated as a Jewish cemetery for burial of members and friends of the Congregation.
- \*The same year the Congregation purchased its own Torah (the first five books of Genesis) inscribed in Hebrew on a large scroll. A portion of Torah is read at every service, and the logistics of borrowing one were burdensome. The event was marked by a procession through downtown Gilroy and a celebration with dignitaries at Portuguese Hall.



- The following year Congregation Emeth officially affiliated with the Union of Reform Jews, which represents about 900 U.S American Reform congregations.
- 1999 saw participation in an interfaith service to mark Yom HaShoa, Holocaust Memorial Day. They joined with clergy and members of the Gilroy Presbyterian and United Methodist Churches and the Morgan Hill UMC to proclaim that “Never Again” would such a tragedy be allowed to happen.
- In 2005 the Congregation sponsored “The Piece Process” in collaboration with Gavilan College and the South Valley Islamic Community. This seven-session program combined a nationally-recognized art exhibit with panel discussions focusing on cooperation among religious faiths.
- 2008 marked the achievement of a longtime goal: purchase and renovation of a building in downtown Morgan Hill that became their longed-for synagogue.
- Rabbi Debbie Israel’s relationship with the Congregation began in 2006.

It has been an inspirational story: a handful of people coming together to support each other spiritually, slowly amassing resources to become a vital part of the local community. According to past president, Michael Oshan, the Congregation Emeth now offers its members a full range of opportunities: worship, preschool activities, Religious School Hebrew School, education and club activities for high school students, Adult Education, and social activities. However, the Congregation reaches beyond itself through such activities as serving Christmas dinner at the Lord’s Table (so Christians can be home with their families) and regular maintenance of a creek in Morgan Hill.

Rabbi Israel comments on the congregation’s achievements: “Any group or institution builds on its past as it envisions its future. The founders of Congregation Emeth had a dream to provide a spiritual home for Jews living in South County and, at 35 years old, we can see that their vision and intentions were fulfilled. Looking forward, to play on a modern theme, I would say that Congregation Emeth wants “no Jew left behind.” We want all Jewish families, including and especially interfaith families, to know how welcome they are in our synagogue community. We have nearly doubled the number of families affiliating with us in the past five years, especially families with very young children, and there is still plenty of room in our hearts to double yet again. We invite everyone in Morgan Hill and Gilroy to visit us and experience our extended family. As the only Rabbi in this community, I am so proud of Congregation Emeth for all it has accomplished in its brilliant 35 year history, and thankful to the Holy One of blessings for enabling us to reach this day.” For more information see the Internet at [www.emeth.net](http://www.emeth.net).