

# Sharing Jewish culture and history at Heritage Park

By **Trudy Cowan**  
For the Jewish Free Press

Restoration of the 1916 Montefiore Institute, as the little synagogue was originally known, is almost complete. After two years of effort by a group of dedicated volunteers, support from a huge number of wonderful donors and contributors, and hard work by experienced professionals and restoration trades, the building will be ready for its first visitors when Heritage Park opens on May 16th, 2009.

Physical work on the building is only part of the project. The building has to be furnished as it might have been during its early years, and there must be interpreters who can tell its many stories to Park visitors of all ages and interests.

This is a meaningful project for all of those working toward preparing the Little Synagogue for its future teaching role. "I am delighted to be part of the team creating the programs that will tell the Jewish story. The

building itself will tell of its history, but furnishings and the work of the interpreters will contribute in a major way," said Sandra Morton Weizman, interpretive planner for The Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project.

Although some furnishings are wonderful historic pieces donated by individuals and institutions in Calgary, Edmonton and even Vancouver, many are being replicated from archival photographs and documents. Each piece has been carefully researched to ensure that this building is true to its history here on the Canadian prairie in the early years of the last century.

Heritage Park is a "living history museum." This term means that the visiting public can become engaged in the day-to-day life experiences of the people who lived, worked, played and even worshipped in the buildings of the Park's historical collection, rather than simply walking past exhibits with labels.

In partnership with the Park's Interpretation

staff, the Little Synagogue Interpretation Committee members (Trudy Cowan, Leslie Levant, Riki Heilik, Marilyn Samuels, Jack Switzer and Sandra Morton Weizman) have created a variety of visitor programs - tours and talks as well as stories, games and crafts. Many have been tested and even assisted by a number of Calgary's Jewish students from both the Calgary Jewish Academy and Akiva. All the program activities are designed to educate and engage the public with Jewish history in Western Canada by focusing on the life of the people who settled at the Montefiore Farming Colony near the town of Sibbald, in southeastern Alberta, from 1910 to 1927.

For instance, Marilyn Samuels designed a wonderful Challah-braiding activity - have you ever braided with five or six rolls of dough, not just three? Also, as well as researching appropriate tales that present a rich variety of approaches to Jewish life and customs, we have

written "Quarantine - Keep Out!" a special children's story about the Montefiore Colony during the 1917 influenza epidemic when the synagogue was used as an isolation hospital.

As people visit the newly-restored Montefiore Institute, interaction with the interpreters will bring this chapter of western Canadian history to life.

"We are excited about adding the Montefiore Institute to the Park. It will add a fresh perspective to the stories we tell - the Jewish story, Jewish history. I really hope members of the Jewish community will help us interpret this story to the greater community..." said Ellen Gasser, Heritage Park's Acting Manager of Interpretation.

"We're looking for Jewish people (15 years of age and older) who would be interested in interpreting Jewish culture and history for our many thousands of visitors," she added. "The Park has opportunities for both paid employees and volunteers.

If you love talking to people, telling stories and sharing your culture, this job is for you."

The Park offers an enjoyable and interesting work environment with opportunities to work with experienced interpreters. Training, costumes and resource information are all provided. Opportunities exist to gain experience in interpretive techniques, customer service, and public speaking as well as to increase your knowledge of the cultural and historic activities of the early Jewish pioneers who joined farming colonies in Western Canada.

Prospective interpreters should be comfortable with sharing their knowledge of Jewish traditions and speaking with visitors of all ages and backgrounds. Familiarity with interpretation and knowledge of Jewish history, culture, Hebrew and/or Yiddish, and Jewish customs and rituals are considered assets. Full-time and part-time (1 to 5 days per week) paid employ-

ment opportunities are available. Volunteer opportunities require a commitment of at least one half-day per week. Heritage Park is open 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., seven days per week from May 16 until September 7, and weekends only from September 8 to October 12.

Make a little history of your own! Forward your resume in confidence to Heritage Park Historical Village, 1900 Heritage Drive SW., Calgary, Alberta T2V 2X3, Attn: Human Resources Dept.; Fax 403-268-8554; E-mail hr@heritagepark.ab.ca. Please apply by March 20, 2009. (Only successful applicants will be contacted for an interview.)

Respond directly to Heritage Park about employment or volunteer opportunities, but more information about The Little Synagogue Project can be found at [www.littlesynagogue.ca](http://www.littlesynagogue.ca)

(Trudy Cowan is Vice President and Heritage Advisor of The Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project Society.)

## 'Radicalism taking root on university campuses'

B'nai Brith Canada has raised concerns with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police over the inadequate policing of university campuses, which have become breeding grounds for promoting hatred against Jewish students.

"We are deeply concerned about events on campuses across Canada that have

included intimidation and harassment of Jewish students, and even cases of assault," said Frank Dimant, Executive Vice President of B'nai Brith Canada. "We are painfully aware of the inadequate reaction of police forces in such instances and seek concrete solutions to immediately remedy the situation.

"We are witnessing clear

and emerging patterns of support for radicalism, civil disobedience, and ultimately violence, on university campuses.

Anti-Israel demonstrations and other recent events have become increasingly vocal and provocative, moving beyond the rhetoric of violence to openly aggressive acts. While we are mindful





of the constraints police face, including reluctant university administrations, this cannot be an excuse for the failure to act.

"Police hate crime units from

across the country must be on high alert, especially in the event that university presidents fail to stop the hatefest known as Israeli Apartheid Week from

coming to their campuses. We seek assurances that emergency measures will be put in place to safeguard students from openly hostile activity."

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