

Growing moustaches for a good cause



Rabbi Howard Needleman of Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El in Plantation, talks about men's health issues during the "Moustache Shabbat" on Nov. 22. The event recognized "Movember," a month-long happening where men grow moustaches to raise awareness of men's health issues. (Staff photo/Todd Roller / November 25, 2013)

By Randall P. Lieberman, Staff Writer

A couple of Shabbats ago, Senior Rabbi Howard Needleman of Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El in Plantation, a Reform temple, had to reassure his congregation that the moustache he was sporting wasn't because he was changing his theology.

"I wanted to let my congregants know that the moustache I had grown didn't mean I was becoming Orthodox," Needleman joked.

So what was up with the new facial hair on Needleman and other senior staffers at Kol Ami, the largest temple in **Broward County**?

Well, Kol Ami became the first temple in South Florida to celebrate Movember, a movement that urges men to grow moustaches in November to create greater awareness for men's health issues. The temple urged all male congregants to participate in its special "Moustache Shabbat" service on Nov. 22.

Not wanting to be left out, a number of women at the temple showed up with fake moustaches to take part in the service.

In its announcement about the event, the temple stated: "Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El is the first in South Florida to align Movember with spiritual health, as the 'Moustache Shabbat' will touch on all aspects of wellness. Members are encouraged to participate with any variation of the moustache they desire: The Handlebar, Fu Manchu, Salvador Dali, the original Tom Selleck — or participants can create their own personal style."

Needleman first heard about Movember last year, and was determined to implement the program this year in his first year as senior rabbi of Kol Ami.

Needleman said: "I had a number of people coming up to me to say that we were doing the same thing that Matt Lauer and Al Roker are doing on the *Today* show."

The real purpose of Movember, which is an international charity, is to raise funds for male-specific mental and physical health issues and to create conversations about these topics. To that end, Dr. Eric Chenven, a local urologist, was a guest speaker during the "Moustache Shabbat."

"The number-one goal of the service was to teach men to be regularly tested for prostate cancer," Needleman said. "That's not a phrase you normally hear in a temple service, and it made everyone a little bit uncomfortable. But, prostate cancer has become a treatable disease, especially with early detection."

Other temple staffers growing their moustaches for the cause included Josh Simon, youth director, and Dvir Weiss, executive director.

"It was very difficult for me," Weiss said. "I'm not such a hairy guy. A lot of people were asking me why I was doing this. They thought something happened in my family. But, then I explained what I was doing and why. These men's issues are not something we usually talk about, so I think this was a good experience."

Added Simon, "It was odd, but it wasn't too bad after I got past the itchy part. The longest I'd ever gone without shaving before was like on a weekend trip. But it raised awareness in all the people who asked me what I was doing. It definitely was a talking point throughout the congregation the whole month of November."

Rabbi Needleman said it was important for the synagogue to take a stand that it is as concerned with men's health issues as it is with women's health issues. He pointed out that the American Cancer Society estimates that 2013 will see 238,590 new cases of prostate cancer and 232,340 new cases of breast cancer.

Needleman said "In October, we wear pink ribbons for breast cancer and hold a 'Pink Shabbat' service, while in November we grow our hair and hold a 'Moustache Shabbat' service. You know, we must take both of these challenges equally seriously."

And while Needleman very much appreciated the purpose of Movember in raising awareness about men's health issues, when December rolled around, he was back to being clean-shaven.

"I didn't have a choice," Needleman joked. "That's what my wife wanted."

For more information about Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El, visit <http://www.tkae.org>, or call 954-472-1988.