

## Tu B'Shevat celebrated at Kol Ami



During the Tu B'Shevat Community Celebration at Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El in Plantation on Sunday morning (Jan. 12), Senior Rabbi Howard Needleman said during a short introductory service: "To plant anything is to say, we will overcome our problems. The world will get much better."

Needleman said Tu B'Shevat is also known as the Jewish Arbor Day, the "Festival of Trees."

"It's a day on the calendar to think about the world we live in," Needleman said. "To think about how God is the source of our food. How God plays into the cycle of our environment. It's a wonderful holiday that makes us aware of all that abounds on Planet Earth."

The introductory service also included music by Cantor Mark Goldman. It took place at the temple's Gan Shalom ("Garden of Peace").

Following the introductory service, there was a 90-minute program for the temple's Religious School, Gesher and Early Childhood students, including planting seedlings in the organic herb garden; working on an arts-and-crafts project and playing dodgeball and kickball with GetFit4Kidz.

Josh Simon, the youth director of TKAE, said: "This was a real treat for the kids instead of a normal Sunday of religious instruction. We learned about the holiday for the first hour of the morning, then we came outside to do the plantings, arts-and-crafts and games. It's more fun sometimes to learn outside of a classroom."

Other aspects of the celebration were free fruits, veggies, nuts and drinks: a Hip Pops Food Truck, featuring natural, gluten-free kosher frozen pops; tasty and healthy food truck munchies; a station from the Humane Society; as well as sign-ups for various temple events and causes.

Highlighted among those temple sign-up stations was one for Endlessly Organic, a temple-wide, organic produce buying club starting at Kol Ami on Jan. 22.

Said Dvir Weiss, the temple's executive director: "It was a great event, showing the commitment to being green that our temple is all about."

Parents of the students much appreciated the event.

Craig Packer of Davie, father of Ariella, 8, and Avi, 5, said: "This was an excellent example for the temple to show what a vibrant community of families we are right now."

Hal and Francine Weiner of Plantation were among the many temple volunteers pitching in at the event. The couple helped out with the organic garden. Francine is the temple's Sisterhood president.

Said Jennifer Kapp, a member of the temple's environmental action committee: "Our temple's organic garden started five years ago. We started small and now are up to 12 large beds. We plant a large selection of vegetables and fruits that are all grown from organic, non-GMO seeds. We teach the kids lessons from our religion as well as lessons about how to grow organic sustainable produce. In addition, we teach them how to properly irrigate and care for the plants."

Needleman said the temple's religious school uses its organic garden during the school year to teach the students the process of how food ends up on their plates at home.

"We plant on Tu B'Shevat every year and the food grows," Needleman said. "It's not just a matter of going to Publix."

Needleman said the garden is shared with the Imagine School at Plantation, a charter school on the grounds. A new fruit tree was planted around the garden during the introductory service, dedicated to Jean Tiernan, the mother of Jean Reilly, Imagine School at Plantation principal. Tiernan passed away in October.

During the introductory service, Needleman paid tribute to the late Ariel Sharon, the former prime minister of Israel who died on Saturday.

Needleman said: "On this day when we turn our attention to the land of Israel, we pay tribute and honor to Ariel Sharon and all the leaders of Israel who protect its people from the forces around it."