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Needleman installed as Kol Ami senior rabbi

By Randall Lieberman, Staff Writer

Since July, Rabbi Howard Needleman has been the senior rabbi of Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El, a Reform congregation in [Plantation](#) which is the largest synagogue in **Broward County** (with more than 700 families).

However, it wasn't until the weekend of Nov. 1-2 that Needleman was formally welcomed by the congregation. Festivities included an enhanced Shabbat Installation Service on Friday, Nov. 1 and a Welcome Gala on Saturday, Nov. 2.

"The weekend was a wonderful experience," Needleman said. "My wife, Beth, and I had a lot of fun, and we got to meet some new temple members."

At the installation, there was a passing of the torch from Rabbi Sheldon Harr, Kol Ami's senior rabbi emeritus (who retired in June), to Needleman. Harr was the founding rabbi of the temple in 1976 and spent 37 years as its senior rabbi.

As part of a very funny video that was shown to kick off the Saturday night Gala (which can be seen on the temple's website, <http://www.tkae.org>), Harr gave Needleman the following advice: "Don't forget, irrelevant of golf, irrelevant of exotic vacations, the most important thing for you, and for our congregation, is to teach and learn and study Torah and to apply its ethics and values to our lives."

Temple officials were excited to bring the 45-year-old Needleman on board and have been doing their best to make him and his family (wife Beth, Noah, 13, and Abigail, 9) feel comfortable.

"Everyone has just been so wonderful," Needleman said. "The congregation has been very welcoming to my entire family. We feel warmly embraced by the Kol Ami community. I truly love my new religious home and could not be more excited about the future."

Temple officials are as enthusiastic about Needleman as he is about the temple.

Said Calvin Helitzer, temple president: "We welcomed Rabbi Needleman and his family to our temple family this weekend. The excitement of moving forward and building a strong Jewish identity for Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El was apparent. I am sure that the wisdom and warmth Rabbi Needleman brings to our temple will continue to allow us to be an integral part of the Jewish community."

Added Dvir Weiss, the temple's executive director: "I look forward to working with Rabbi Needleman to build on the vibrant and meaningful community we have established over the past 37 years."

At the Friday night Installation Service, the evening started with a reception at 6 p.m. before the 7:30 service. The Friday night service was free and open to the public. There was an Oneg Shabbat afterwards. The rabbi and his wife greeted people during the reception, followed by an uplifting, spiritual and inspiring service, which was livestreamed over the Web for those who could not make it.

"The Friday service was more than just an official installation," said past temple president Saul Kravec. "We had the cantor, volunteer soloists and choir singing beautifully, and both Rabbis Harr and Needleman delivered heartfelt positive messages about family and our synagogue community. The service celebrated the strength of our temple's traditions and simultaneously revealed new opportunities for spiritual fulfillment and learning under our new senior rabbi."

The Saturday night gala consisted of a cocktail reception at 7 p.m., followed by dinner, dancing and entertainment at 8 p.m. There were 256 tickets sold for the gala. There was a live auction, a DJ playing music in one room, a live band in the other room, dueling pianos, food and drinks, and one-on-one interaction with the Needleman family.

About the Gala, Rabbi Harr said, "Spirits were high, friendships were enhanced, the celebration was joyful, and the strength, values and ideals of our congregation and our faith were strengthened."

Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El is located at 8200 Peters Road in Plantation. For more information, visit <http://www.tkae.org>, or call 954-472-1988.