

Shir Ami News

The Monthly Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami
4529 Malabar Avenue, Castro Valley, CA 94546
(call (510) 537-1787 for a recording of upcoming events)

Please visit our website at

www.congshirami.org

Affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism Congregations
January, 2008



Jan 6	School – K through Confirmation	Feb 3	School – K through Confirmation
Jan 8	Rosh Chodesh – 7:30 PM	Feb 6	Rosh Chodesh – 7:30 PM
Jan 11	Shabbat Shira Service – 8 PM Led by Bekah Stern	Feb 8	Children’s Shabbat – 6 PM Potluck – 6:45 PM Shabbat Services – 8 PM Led by Bekah Stern
Jan 12	Adult Ed – 2 PM	Feb 9	Adult Ed – 2 PM
Jan 13	School – Preschool through Confirmation	Feb 10	School – Preschool through Confirmation
Jan 17	Board meeting – 7 PM	Feb 17	No School
Jan 20	No School	Feb 21	Board meeting – 7 PM
Jan 20	Tu B’ Shevat Seder & Dinner – 5 PM; Led by Diana Zankowsky	Feb 22	Shabbat Services – 8PM Led by Carla Fenves Women’s Retreat (2/22-2/24)
Jan 25	Shabbat Services – 8 PM Led by Carla Fenves	Feb 24	School – Preschool through Confirmation
Jan 26	Religious Committee Mtg – 10 AM Adult Ed. – 2 PM	Feb 22-24	Women’s Retreat—see flier
Jan 27	School – Preschool through Confirmation		

President's Message

Ruth Hartman

Dear Congregation Shir Ami Members and Friends,

In last month's column, I shared a bit about my personal journey toward Jewish connection. During the month of December, I took another big step on that path. Diana Zankowsky and I traveled to San Diego to attend the Union for Reform Judaism's Biennial convention. For four days we worshipped, studied, shared successes, strategized, and schmoozed. I want to tell you about a particular moment that touched me personally.

It's Friday evening, and we're seated in the San Diego convention center for Kabbalat Shabbat worship. We are there with about 4,500 Reform Jews from across the U.S. and Canada, including rabbis, cantors, Jewish educators, temple administrators, and lay people. Because the room is so large, the service leaders and the choir are projected onto huge video screens throughout the hall. The sound system is excellent. Each of us holds a brand new copy of Mishkan T'filah, our new siddur, with the promise of new worlds of prayer in its pages. This is a prayer experience unlike any other.

As we move through the service, I experience the familiar difficulty in praying. What is my relationship to God, or to the idea of God? Can I connect to the piety of my ancestors while staying true to my rational, independent-thinking core? I love the cadence of the ancient Hebrew poetry, but part of me stands apart, observing. Suddenly I stop struggling. I look around the room and decide to claim these people as my own, to not just stand here among them, but to really own my place as one of them.

I think that as members of a very small congregation, we sometimes nurture a feeling of being set apart from the wider Jewish world. Some of the ways that Shir Ami is different from larger synagogues are really positive—it's easier to form personal connections, each member is empowered, and there's relatively little political wrangling. But I realized at the Biennial how important it is to notice and remember that we are part of the much bigger Jewish world.

Our children understand this when they go to Camp Kadima, Camp Newman/Swig, Midrasha, the Jewish Community High School, and NFTY. We adults can experience it by attending regional URJ conferences, by participating in social action programs (www.rac.org), by signing up for one or more of the URJ's online listservs (www.urj.org/egroups), and by participating in the many Jewish cultural and educational programs available around the Bay Area (and often posted on the bulletin board in the Shir Ami kitchen).

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the President of the URJ, put forth some bold initiatives for Reform congregations to explore over the next two years. You can read about these at www.urj.org/biennial, and I hope to discuss them in future columns. Meanwhile, I wish you a very happy secular New Year and look forward to finding shared meaning and belonging in our worship and celebrations at Shir Ami in 2008.

Ruth Hartman
president@congshirami.org

Rabbis' Corner
Bekah Stern
Carla Fenves

Dear Congregation Shir Ami,

As Jews we are blessed with many opportunities for reflection. Of course our High Holy Days are the most notable and memorable of these times, but there are others. Chanukah and Passover are certainly times for reflection, remembering past heroism and miracles, which hopefully motivate us to act heroically on behalf of those less fortunate than ourselves in our world today. We are doubly blessed because we do not only live in a Jewish world, we also live in a secular American world in which there are also times ordained for reflection. Perhaps the most significant of these is the New Year.

And so, with our good fortune to have this dual identity, I ask you at this time of year—almost halfway through the Jewish year and now just entering a new secular year—what positive change do you want to make in your life? We talk a lot about positive social change, environmental change, *tikkun olam*, making the world a better place. I do not wish to downplay these important commitments. But I strongly believe that the motivation for the commitment to make those positive changes originates in a deep place inside each of us. Without first taking the time to rest and reflect on our personal lives, we cannot possibly hope to look outward to effect positive change in the world around us.

Accordingly, I would like to draw our communal attention to an often-overlooked Jewish time for reflection. At the end of every week, our Jewish calendar offers us a time to stop, to rest, to reflect, to take stock of the week that has been and to recharge ourselves for the week that is coming. Taking this time—even if it is only 5 minutes in the 25 hours between sunset on Friday evening and seeing the first three stars on Saturday night—is one of the holiest *mitzvot* (commandments) that we can engage in as Jews. Judaism recognizes that we are at our best when we commit to taking this time for ourselves and for our families.

One of Judaism's modern philosophers, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (z'l), wrote extensively about the importance of Shabbat. Here is a small excerpt of his writing:

“Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time. Unlike the space-minded man... the Bible senses the diversified character of time. There are no two hours alike. Every hour is unique and the only one given at the moment, exclusive and endlessly precious. Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals...”

In the new calendar year I encourage you to enter those great cathedrals more frequently, to breathe deeply in the quiet moments that only you can set aside for yourself, to experience the way that the Shabbat candles light an entire evening, to feel the release of shared song and prayer. Setting aside this time is not easy. Our lives are full. But wouldn't the world be a better place if we all took time to rest and reflect at the end of each week; if more of us were better in touch with the things in life that truly matter to us? After all, if God took a full day to rest after creating the universe, what could possibly be so important in our lives that we couldn't take a break too? Here's to a restful and reflective 2008!

Rebekah Stern



The Israel Corner

Featured Location *Tsfat (Safed)*



The Kabbalists of Tsfat made a lasting impression on Judaism as we know it. We have these 16th and 17th century mystics to thank for our Kabbalat Shabbat service--the beginning of our Friday evening Shabbat service--as well as the Tu B'Shevat Seder--the festive tree-honoring feast held at the moment of transition between winter and spring.

On the road between the Golan Heights and Jerusalem, we'll stop in the mystical mountaintop city of Tsfat, the cobblestone town that was the birthplace of Kabbalah. In April we'll wander the narrow alleyways, explore the Sephardic synagogues built by the refugees of the Spanish expulsion of 1492, and enjoy a program on art and Kabbalah led by a local artist.

Featured Writing

The following is an excerpt from an English translation of the famous poem by Shlomo Ha'Levi Alkabetz, written in Tsfat in the 16th century. The tradition of greeting the Sabbath Bride with this poem at sunset on Friday evening began in the hills of the Galilee outside of Tsfat. This is L'cha Dodi.

Beloved, come to meet the bride;
beloved, come to greet Shabbat. Keep
and Remember: a single command,
the Only God caused us to hear; the
Eternal is One, God's name is One,
for honor and glory and praise.

Come with me to
meet Shabbat,
forever a fountain
of blessing
Still it flows as
from the start:
the last of days,
for which the first
was made.

Awake, awake,
your light has
come! Arise,
shine,
awake and sing;
the Eternal's glory dawns upon you.



Want to Come to Israel in April? Send in your Registration **Today!**

If you're still thinking about spending this coming Passover in Israel, **the deadline for registrations and deposits is only a few days away: January 4, 2008.** If you have been considering joining us on the trip and have not yet sent in your application and deposit, it must be postmarked by January 4th! If you have any questions or concerns that are keeping you from signing up, please take this opportunity to contact Student Rabbi and trip



coordinator Rebekah Stern at rabbi.rebekah@congshirami.org. To download the registration form, click on http://www.congshirami.org/Attachments/SABE_Trip08.Reg.PDF. For more information about the trip click on http://www.congshirami.org/Pesach_Trip.html. We hope you'll join us for Passover in Israel!

January 6th Kindergarten – Confirmation
January 13th Preschool – Confirmation
January 20th No School Martin Luther King Holiday
January 27th Preschool – Confirmation *Tu B'Shvat*

Happy New Year!!! I hope all of you have had a most relaxing holiday break. I am taking a break from playing "Guitar Hero II" with the kids to write this column. I think that means we are doing enough relaxing around here.

I've been thinking about what to write about for the last couple of days (since Harriet sent an email with the deadline), and somehow (I think in the spirit of New Year's life evaluation type thinking) I keep arriving at the topic "Why Did I Take This Job?" My decision to agree to take over the administration of the religious school at Shir Ami certainly didn't seem sensible at the time. I am the mother of three busy children. I already have a challenging career as a research scientist. I've never been able to stay on top of the laundry or keep my closets organized. It was a conference call with Ruth Hartman, Diana Zankowsky, Harriet Skelly and Maryann Leshin regarding this gap we needed to fill --- when I think it was Ruth who said, "we need someone to be the main point person for the school." Somehow, I heard myself say, "okay, I'll do it. "

Here is why..... One day this fall, Sophia had a late morning eye doctor appointment. She finished her appointment too early for lunchtime at school, but too late to go back to her last class before lunch. I suggested going to the Castro Valley Village, but she was nervous that it would look odd if a teacher saw her out of class. Since I had packed her a lunch anyway, we decided to go up to Shir Ami. It was a nice sunny day, and we went out and sat in the back yard so she could eat lunch. We were just chatting, and all of a sudden she looked at me and said, I really like it here, it gives me such a warm feeling. She wasn't talking about the sunshine – she was talking about the people of Shir Ami. This is my growing up sixteen year old daughter that I'm worried about sending into the world properly, and **you**, the families of Shir Ami, make her feel cared about. She understands being part of a greater community. It is even more than that though. Shir Ami is a place where my family has been able to expand their knowledge about the world around them far more than they ever would have just through school and neighborhood events. It is a place of thoughtful ideas, and also many fun times.

Thanks to all of you for being part of this special place. Thanks for the opportunity you've given me to wear a completely different hat than I ever could have imagined. Join us starting January 6th for more thoughtful, fun, and fabulous religious school programs in 2008.

As Always, Jodi Switzer Blum

2007-2008 Religious School Schedule
9:15 – 10:30 Hebrew for grades 3 to confirmation
10:30 – 10:50 songtime for all
10:50 – 12:45 Religious School for all
11:45-12:00 Oneg break

Adult Education *Diana Zankowsky*

In January, the adult education class, facilitated by Diana Zankowsky, will meet on the **second** Wednesday, January 9th at 7pm, at Diana's home. We will continue to study from Yearnings by Irwin Kula (Rabbi), published in 2006. This book is available in hardcover, paperback and audio.

This will be our fourth meeting and it will cover the next section of the book, called "Yearning for Love." If you are interested in joining the class, or for address and directions, please contact Diana at dzankowsky@aol.com.



Please join our rabbinic interns, Rebekah Stern and Carla Fenves, as they continue to provide an adult education session on Saturday afternoons. These classes meet at Congregation Shir Ami, from 2 to 3:30 pm. On January 12th, Bekah will begin a three-part class on a deeper understanding of Shabbat. The first class will look at preparing for Shabbat and the Kabbalat Shabbat service, including how this service can be an entrée into mysticism. On January 26th, Carla will look at the Shabbat liturgies and the role of prayer taking the place of the ancient Temple sacrifices.



A Tree Grew At Shir Ami

Until a windstorm blew it down, we had a loquat tree on the East side of the parking lot, near the street entrance. Now, thanks to David and Fred Zankowsky, there is a small pile of firewood in the same location. Once it is seasoned, this wood should burn well. Please help yourself to it!

Sisterhood/Rosh Chodesh Group

Jan Dombrower



Sisterhood:

The Chanukah party for Sisterhood was great fun. We met at Jan Dombrower's home in Pleasanton and had a dinner of salad, soup, hot apple cider, and latkes. Several cooks and helpers assisted in preparing the latkes, which were delicious. We spoke of our favorite Chanukah memory during dinner.

We had 10 menorahs lit for the last night of Chanukah creating 90 candles ablaze. Following the blessing, was a beautiful candlelit sight.

There was lots of laughing and joking during the Chanukah stealing gift exchange. Several gifts changed hands to the maximum. But everyone ended up with a nice gift.

We ended the party with ice cream sundaes, coffee, tea, and more chatting. A good time was had by all.

Next month we will meet for Rosh Chodesh on Tuesday, January 8th at 7:30 at the home of Diana Zankowsky. We will bring in the new month of Sh'vat. Diana will lead us in a discussion about an aspect of Kabbalah. Stay tuned for an email as we near the Rosh Chodesh date.

Please join us at Diana's home:

17276 COLUMBIA DR.,
CASTRO VALLEY, CA 94552
510 881-8466

It's time to send in your registration for this year's wonderful Women's Retreat! Please see the flier in this Bulletin. Contact Ruth Hartman, 510-582-3379 with any questions.

Youth Group News
Leah Hartman



Hey teens,

It's January and our Tri-Regional event, "West Coast Party," is here! This is going to be an amazing event with teens from the regions of SoCal, North West , and our own Central West. It also functions as a reunion for all Camp Newman high schoolers. It'll be on MLK weekend, January 18-21, which gives us an extra day of NFTY awesomeness. We've been fighting to bring back our Tri-Regional event for a long time, so don't miss it. Forms are online at nfty.org/cwr and registration closes January 7th. The site login is "nftycwr" and the password is the 6-letter name of our retreat location.

Even sooner is PARTY's Black and White Ball, a NFTY winter formal in Burlingame . This is happening on January 5th from 6:30-11:00 at Peninsula Temple Sholom. This event is open to all Bay Area Jewish teens and is a good way to meet regional members without committing to a whole weekend. The cost is \$25 and mandatory emergency forms to be turned in at the door are available online at www.sholom.org/kids/party/. I hope to see you there!

Your Religious and Cultural Vice President,

Leah Hartman

The Tzedakah Box
A Social Action Column
Sara Lamnin
Daryl Berman

Martin Luther King Day is on its way. Join congregation and community members to stand up for equality and to walk for peace. Gather at Hayward City Hall on Monday, January 21st, 2008 at 9am.

Anyone who is interested in participating in a Shir Ami reading or song during the event please contact Sara: (510) 733-5114 or ledorvdor@yahoo.com.

SHIR AMI BULLETIN BOARD



Start the Year with a Song!

Mark your calendar now for this joyous event – **January 8th**. Bay Area Midrasha in Oakland will again start the year with rousing and inspiring Jewish music. They will host the delightful and talented singers of Magevet, the Jewish Chorus from Yale University, in a concert made possible by generous sponsoring donors with the help of the Cantor's Music Fund of Temple Sinai. The Magevet concert will begin at 8:00 pm in the Sanctuary of Temple Sinai. The community is invited to join with Midrasha students and families in this continuing celebration of Oakland Midrasha's 18th year! Bring your guests, family, and friends. General admission is \$9.00; advance tickets are \$7.00. All Midrasha students are free.

Film Festival at TBS

The members of Temple Beth Sholom in San Leandro invite the Shir Ami community to the 2008 TBS Film Festival. Each night they will show two films, some with time for discussion.

Saturday, January 26th & Sunday, January 27th

Saturday February 9th & Sunday, February 10th

On Sunday, February 10th, there will be a Kids Film Festival featuring a great film for the whole family.

For film listings and other details, visit www.tbssanleandro.org.

A Night of Illusion Theater

On Saturday night, **January 26**, 2008, Fremont's Temple Beth Torah proudly presents "A Night of Illusion Theater" featuring renowned Bay Area magician/illusionist Michael Stroud. This will be an entertaining evening of thought provoking grand illusions for ages 3-103. For more information including great bargains on advance purchase pricing as well as online ticket orders, please go to <http://www.tbtevents.com>.

***The Community Page
January, 2008***

Yahrzheits:

January 11, 2008

***Joseph Bressler, father of Florrie Finkle
Peter Rosenberg, uncle of Alex Druker
Helen Rosner, long time active member of Shir Ami
Charmion Stein, mother of Karen Gelender and Shoshana
Bennett***

January 25, 2008

***Tyler Brooke, father of Toni Schulberg and uncle of
Sidney Simpson
Cecilia Kramer, grandmother of Marion Kramer
Arthur Permison, father of Joel Permison
Rolf Weinberg, husband of Ingrid Weinberg; a charter
member
and mainstay of Shir Ami for many, many years***

Kaddish List: (to be read at both services in January)

***Georgie Brooke, mother of Toni Schulberg and aunt of
Sidney Simpson
Moshe Vanous, long-time member of Shir Ami
Hyman Abraham Rebotsky, grandfather of Jonathan
Zimmerman
Gordon Greenfield, father of Julie Greenfield
Keith Carter, brother of Bruce Carter and uncle of David
Carter
Leon Meier, long-time member and one of the founders of
Shir Ami
Syd Kramer, uncle of Jan Dombrower***

May their memory be a blessing...

Ever wonder how the names read out loud for Yahrzeit and Kaddish at Friday night services get on that list? If you are a member of Shir Ami, and want a personal reminder for the Yahrzeit of a loved one, just send Toni Schulberg the following information: the name of the deceased; the relationship of that person

to the member of Shir Ami; the full date (month, day, year) that person died; and whether you want to use the Hebrew or English calendar for their Yahrzeit (Toni will look up the Hebrew date for you). Questions? Call Toni at 278-1695 or e-mail her at toniaps@comcast.net



TODAH RABAH TO OUR ONEG HOSTS

*For December 7th: Harriet Skelly
For December 14th: Rose & Hillie Levine*



TODAH RABAH FOR THESE GENEROUS DONATIONS:

- *From Marlene Balmforth: in Honor of her parents, Ann and Sam Blank at Chanukah.*
- *From Alex and Irina Druker: In Memory of the Yahrzeits for: Joseph Druker, Isaac Rosenberg, Dora Alperovich, and Meshka Druker.*
- *From the Heimowitz family, dedications of two new prayer books, in Honor of Deborah Heimowitz, Master's Degree, Stanford University, 8/07 and in Honor of Michael Heimowitz, B.S. Degree Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, 6/07.*
- *From Nancy Storch: a dedication of one of the new prayer books, in Loving Memory of her mother, Harriet Troy.*

A contribution to Shir Ami is a great way to honor, remember, or show appreciation for someone special. It's easy. Send a check and note to:

*Florrie Finkle
18730 West Cavendish
Castro Valley, CA 94552*

Florrie will send a card to the person you are honoring and your dedication will appear on this page.



TODAH RABAH

To everyone who came and helped to make our Chanukah Party a great success! With special thanks to Barb Haber for making her amazing Sufiganyot, Angie Ross, Cheryl Solomon along with her mom, and Danielle Keil for running stations, Judy Brackin who provided overall station support, and Rachel Brott for contributing a fabulous Oneg complete with latkes and applesauce. It takes a village, as they say, and we have a great one!!

What's Nu?

- ***Ruth Levin has a new grandson and Zak has a new brother! Reece Donovan Myers, born on 9/30/07, is a delightful child, has a wonderful disposition and is sooooo cuddly.***
- ***The new Jewish Club at Castro Valley High School held a Hanukkah party on December 11th. The club was formed thanks to the determined efforts of Sophia Blum and others. Future activities are being discussed.***
- ***If you happen to be at the Castro Valley Public Library during the first week in January, check out the "Holidays in the Holy Land" display in the glass case in the lobby area. For the past six years, the Castro Valley Citizens for Middle Eastern Awareness has mounted a display of Jewish, Christian Palestinian, and Muslim holiday articles at the library. The Jewish items are from the collections of Ruth Hartman and Judy Ganz. Contact Ruth for more information.***



Shir Ami Contacts

Area code is (510) unless specified

President:

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582-3379

Membership:

Barbara Heimowitz
537-2066

School:

Jodi Blum
881-5672

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276-6100

Oneg Shabbat:

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795-0607

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Rosh Chodesh/Sisterhood:

Jan Dombrower
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Social Action:

Daryl Berman
538-6022

Sara Lamnin
733-5114

Yahrzeit Listings:

Tonia Schulberg
276-6100

Donations:

General Funds, Special Funds,
Wall Plaques
Florrie Finkle
538-9660



eScrip Families

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- Visit escrip.com
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If you participated last year, don't forget to renew your commitment to the program to continue receiving Safeway contributions.

If you are not enrolled in the program sign-up today at escrip.com.

Shop Safeway, and earn valuable money for our school or group.

A decorative border surrounds the text, featuring wavy blue and yellow lines representing musical staves. Various musical notes in red, blue, and purple are scattered throughout, along with small colorful confetti-like shapes.

Shabbat Shira

Musical Shabbat Service

led by

Bekah Stern

Friday, January 11 at 8.00 PM

*And, bring a friend to this
musical evening*

Tu b'shevat

Israel's holiday of the trees



Tu b'shevat celebration and Seder at Shir Ami!

Sunday, January 20th at 5:00 PM

Adults \$15.00

Under 12 years old \$10.00

Non-members \$18.00

Services will be led by

Diana Zankowsky

Paresha Yitro: Jethro

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, heard all that God had done for the Israelites and brought Moses' wife, Zipporah, and her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to Moses in the Wilderness of Mount Sinai.



Mt. Sinai Wilderness

Shir Ami Services

Friday, January 25th at 8:00 PM

Led by

Carla Fenves

Remember Shir Ami's Food Basket and bring a friend!

A Special Opportunity Dedicate Shir Ami's New Prayer Books In Honor or Memory



Mishkan T'filah: A New Reform Siddur

Mishkan T'filah, the first new Siddur for the North American Reform Movement in more than thirty years. Including services for Shabbat, weekdays and festivals, as well as other occasions of public worship, and texts for more than a hundred songs, *Mishkan T'filah* reflects the full diversity of our Movement. This new Siddur includes:

- Broad selection of readings including beloved passages from our Reform liturgical tradition and great poetic writings from throughout Jewish history
- Faithful, elegant translations
- Contemporary, gender-inclusive English
- Transliteration following Hebrew prayers
- Theological and stylistic diversity
- Extensive commentaries, source notes and usage guides
- More than 100 contemporary and traditional song texts
- Innovative design in two-page spreads
- Two-color printing enhances usability

Detach and mail to: Toni Schulberg, 16174 Via Arroyo, San Lorenzo, CA 94580

I/we would like to dedicate _____ copies of Mishkan T'filah at \$50 per book.
I enclose \$_____. Please dedicate the book(s) as follows:

1.

2.

3.

4.

My/our name, phone number and/or email address: _____

_____.

**Join Us for the *Twelfth* Annual
Shir Ami Women's Retreat**

“Every Woman Has a Story”

Friday, February 22 – Sunday, February 24, 2008

At the beautiful Sequoia Retreat Center
Ben Lomond, California

You are warmly invited to join in this weekend of connection, worship, creativity, inspiration, and play. This retreat is a great way to get closer to other women of our community in a beautiful and relaxing setting. Newcomers are *very* welcome.

All Shir Ami women are encouraged to attend. Friends are also welcome. Please register by January 20. Questions? Call Ruth Hartman at 510-582-3379 (ruth@wordcraft.com).

Name/address: _____

Congregation: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I enclose a check for \$255 (first price increase in 6 years), OR

I enclose a deposit of \$ _____. I will pay the balance on _____.

I need a ride.

I have the following special needs (mobility, dietary, etc.):

Make check payable to **Ruth Hartman and mail by 1/20/2008 to:**
18850 Cull Canyon Road, Castro Valley, CA 94552