

A Hanukkah celebration in Northbrook attracts more than 100

chicagotribune.com/suburbs/northbrook/ct-nbs-sing-spin-shine-hanukkah-tl-1214-20231211-tuj7a4n4knfefflac2aruugm4dq-story.html

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Northbrook

Northbrook Park District and Congregation Beth Shalom of Northbrook collaborate on community Hanukkah celebration

By Karie Angell Luc

Pioneer Press

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Dec 11, 2023 at 3:47 pm



Third from left, Julie Kahn of Deerfield, volunteer choir coordinator with the Selah choir of Congregation Beth Shalom of Northbrook, sings with the choir at the Sing, Spin and Shine, a Community Hanukkah Celebration on Dec. 10, 2023 in Northbrook at the Leisure Center. (Karie Angell Luc/Chicago Tribune)

More than 100 people attended the first ever Sing, Spin and Shine, a Community Hanukkah Celebration on Sunday, Dec. 10 in Northbrook at the Leisure Center (3323 Walters Ave.).

The paid entry event was a collaboration between the Northbrook Park District and Congregation Beth Shalom of Northbrook, who are also next door neighbors on the south side of Walters Avenue.

This year, Hanukkah began on Dec. 7 and continued until Dec. 15.



Second from left, at the board with menorah, is Meghan McCarthy, event coordinator and recreation supervisor with the Northbrook Park District at the Sing, Spin and Shine, a Community Hanukkah Celebration on Dec. 10, 2023 in Northbrook at the Leisure Center. (Karie Angell Luc/Chicago Tribune)

The Hanukkah event combined art, music, food, philanthropy in an opportunity that provided, “coming together as community,” said Meghan McCarthy, event coordinator and recreation supervisor with the Northbrook Park District.

Working with Congregation Beth Shalom resulted in a Sunday afternoon event and holiday memory maker with one goal to, “just get everyone together and have a good time,” McCarthy said.

The Selah choir of Congregation Beth Shalom performed. The choir includes adult singers with disabilities.

Selah choir founder Steven Stoehr of Northbrook, also cantor at Congregation Beth Shalom, was present with colleagues and fellow choir volunteers Julie Kahn of Deerfield and Cantor Amy Zussman of Temple Jeremiah in Northfield.

Selah is, “a Hebrew word that often is found at the end of psalms,” Stoehr said.

Selah is “not really translatable,” Stoehr said, but is described as “musical instruction” that is expressed as possibly a grand finale of jubilation.



Cantor Amy Zussman of Temple Jeremiah in Northfield, and also a volunteer with the Selah choir, answers audience questions at the Sing, Spin and Shine, a Community Hanukkah Celebration on Dec. 10, 2023 in Northbrook at the Leisure Center. (Karie Angell Luc/Chicago Tribune)

“The idea of the name Selah is because each of these individuals make their own sound,” Stoehr said, adding some choral members are nonverbal.

“But we know that with their spirit and their joy and their hands and their feet and their smiles, they are creating something akin to music.”

Julie Kahn said about the Selah choir, “I’m just excited for the community to see this beautiful group of adults who love music and love Judaism and just love sharing their joy.”

Mady Fern of Northbrook, a former Northbrook educator, staffed a front entrance table as attendees came in.

About the Selah choir, “It is the most wonderful thing to give these people a voice,” Fern said.

Congregation Beth Shalom Head Rabbi Aaron Melman of Northbrook and Congregation Beth Shalom Assistant Rabbi David Chapman of Northbrook were among attending clergy.



The Selah choir of Congregation Beth Shalom of Northbrook is about to perform at the Sing, Spin and Shine, a Community Hanukkah Celebration on Dec. 10, 2023 in Northbrook at the Leisure Center. (Karie Angell Luc/Chicago Tribune)

Chapman grew up in Wilmette and is of the New Trier Township High School Class of 1999.

“They’ve been amazing partners,” Chapman said about the Northbrook Park District. “They’ve been great to work with and I think it’s been a wonderful collaboration.”

Over the last two high holiday seasons for Congregation Beth Shalom, part of the congregation’s children programming was held at the Leisure center, Melman said.

Approximately 1,050 households make up the membership of Congregation Beth Shalom. Members and staff come from outside of Northbrook, including Buffalo Grove, Deerfield, Highland Park, Glenview and Arlington Heights, as examples.

“We reach out to other North Shore communities who call Beth Shalom home,” Melman said.

Among amenities was a Hanukkah card making table where children were encouraged to make greetings destined for local senior citizens and families in Israel.



From left to right, Karen Achtman of Northbrook and daughter Jaclyn Achtman, 3, have completed a card at the greeting card making table at the Sing, Spin and Shine, a Community Hanukkah Celebration on Dec. 10, 2023 in Northbrook at the Leisure Center. (Karie Angell Luc/Chicago Tribune)

Chapman was acknowledged by a Beth Shalom congregant as the person who came up with the idea but the assistant rabbi shared the credit.

“It was a group effort,” Chapman said.

Attendee Lisa Dembo of Northbrook said about the card making activity that, “It’s a wonderful activity and very creative.”

Jaclyn Achtman, 3, of Northbrook colored a holiday card next to her mother Karen Achtman.

“She’s very into it and nice to do things for other people,” Jaclyn’s mother said.

At the cookie decorating station was the Ludwig family of Northbrook. Parents Ian and Abby Ludwig attended with their two sets of twins, Nash and Elsie, 3, and Miles and Theo Ludwig, 6, first-graders.

“It’s important for our kids to celebrate Hanukkah with the community,” Ian Ludwig said.



Hallie Levi, 5, a kindergartner from Northbrook, decorates her cookie at the Sing, Spin and Shine, a Community Hanukkah Celebration on Dec. 10, 2023 in Northbrook at the Leisure Center. (Karie Angell Luc/Chicago Tribune)

Victor and Rachel Smith of Northbrook accompanied their children Isabelle, 4, and Ryan, 6, a first-grader.

“We went to expose them to Judaism and let them find their way,” Rachel Smith said.

“We are an experience family, one thousand % of the way,” Smith added.

Hallie Levi, 5, a kindergartner from Northbrook, spent a considerable amount of time adding icing and details to her decorated cookie.

For Hallie’s mother Nikki Levi, the purpose of the event was, “We’re here celebrating Hanukkah,” which is, “special,” Levi added.

“But,” Levi said, “we’re here to support Israel and our Jewish family and stand united.”

Karie Angell Luc is a freelancer for Pioneer Press.

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- 2023
 - > December
 - > 11