

The Story of the GSJC Yahrzeit Board by Tom Holloway

The Story of the origin and creation of the GSJC Yahrzeit board begins during Janice Rustico's presidency, which occurred from May, 1997 through April, 1999. As a congregation, we had begun a quest to acquire the accoutrements a typical congregation should have. We had a borrowed Torah plus a portable one. We had acquired an Eternal Light from an artisan. The Bnot Mitzvah class of 1998 had donated a Torah stand. There were plaques denoting past presidents and the Bnot Mitzvah candidates going back to the beginning of our congregation (mostly derived from old Kippot in our basket).

What we lacked, was a proper way to honor our lost relatives, was a formal Yahrzeit board, such as every other congregation had. We discussed this at Board meetings and I volunteered to explore the feasibility of creating one for our congregation.

As we were a small (but mighty) congregation, the traditional bronze board and cast bronze plaques so ubiquitous in other congregations, was felt to be beyond our financial reach. This was also further demonstrated by the fact we were occasionally forced to be a nomadic congregation during those High Holidays which conflicted with Southington's Apple Harvest Festival.

A more modest and portable solution was going to be needed. We were throwing around ideas at a board meeting and felt another plaque-like idea was needed but the board felt strongly about having lights surrounding plaques to be highlighted. No such item existed and was going to have to be manufactured for us.

Luckily, my neighbor Ed Tuttle, owned a local machine shop. I approached him regarding the challenges facing this endeavor and he suggested purchasing the largest plaque we could find and modifying it to suit our needs. I approached our local trophy shop, Awards of Elegance, who was currently supplying engraved plaques for our other congregational items. The owner, Tom Bentz, was quite generous with us; he offered to sell his largest plaque (which would hold 200 plaques) at cost and purchase the Hebrew font so we could engrave the Yahrzeit plaques with names spelled in Hebrew.

This left us with the challenge of installing appropriate lights, creating an electrical distribution system, and a stand for the plaque. Ed Tuttle and I spent months of design time on the project. I located miniature sized bulbs and sockets and Ed created a CNC design to drill and route out the plaque from the rear. Ed fabricated strips of metal we used to tie the rows and columns of lamp sockets and I soldered them together. We purchased two stair balusters for supports and Mark Beal, then a congregant, created the base and legs. I fabricated a low voltage electrical system for the base and Ed created a brass plate for the controls. Finally, Alice Holloway created the velvet for the board. Rabbi Elliot L. Stevens provided the appropriate verbiage for the title plaque as well as the Holocaust plaque in the center. As a point of interest, the Yahrzeit board was also designed to be separated from its base and hung on a wall; this has never been done.

The entire assembly was finished and dedicated just as Janice Rustico's tenure as president was coming to an end in April, 1999.