
Beth El Temple to Host Bike/Walk/Run to Benefit Special Needs Campers

This Father's Day, many families will be kicking off the day's festivities with a bike ride, walk or run for a good cause.

On Sunday, June 19, [Beth El Temple](#), 2626 Albany Avenue, West Hartford, will host the Second Annual "Tour de Shuls" to raise money for special needs campers to attend the Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah in Palmer, Mass. More than 20 synagogues ("shuls" is Yiddish for synagogues) plus day schools and youth groups from throughout Connecticut and Massachusetts will participate.

Tour de Shuls began in the Boston area and has grown to include Massachusetts, Connecticut, Indiana and California. Last year, participants in Connecticut raised more than \$3,000.

Camp Ramah in New England offers the Tikvah Program to "meet the social and religious needs of developmentally challenged Jewish adolescents," according to the Tour de Shuls [website](#). "Tikvah" means hope in Hebrew, and Tikvah campers enjoy the complete summer camp experience.

Some 50 campers – aged 13-21 – are fully integrated into camp life under the supervision of specially trained staff. There is a Vocational Education Program for young adults aged 18-21 that teaches independent living skills and job training, as well as a post-Vocational Education program that employs some of these "graduates" in camp jobs.

A former Tikvah camper who will be eagerly volunteering at the event by handing out water and snacks is West Hartford resident Josh Starr. Josh began to attend the Tikvah program at age 14 and spent summers there until age 21. He learned to

handle responsibility by working in the camp's mailroom. Josh was born with Williams Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that has led to developmental deficiencies, said his father, Gary Starr, who is outgoing president of Beth El Temple.

Josh is now 29, lives independently in an apartment in West Hartford and takes the bus to CIGNA in Bloomfield where he works in the mailroom and delivers packages. He is also a musician who plays the drums and trombone and recently had the chance to conduct the [West Hartford Symphony Orchestra](#) for a piece entitled, "The Washington Post March." When he's not working, he volunteers at HARC in the Elderly Learning Enrichment Program.

About his camp experiences, Josh told a reporter: "I miss being there. The experience was like no other experience I ever had."

In another interview with Beth El Temple, Josh said: "Camp was an experience I will never forget. It taught me how to grow up, give me skills to learn how to be on my own," such as cooking.

The Tour de Shuls will kick off with Beth El's Rabbi Jim Rosen leading the send off and then joining in the 5K run. The event begins at 7 a.m., at Beth El Temple and ends there around noon. Lunch and entertainment by The Klezmen will be from 11 a.m.-2 p.m., at Beth El Temple.

There are five distances to choose from: Bike rides of 20, 35 or 50 miles or a 5K or 10K bike/walk/run. The five-kilometer ride/walk/run will travel from Beth El to the [Emanuel Synagogue](#), 160 Mohegan Drive, and back again. The 10-kilometer ride/walk/run will pass through the same loop twice. The lon-

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ger bike rides will traverse country roads, fields and woods. Riders will visit Farmington Valley Jewish Congregation-Emek Shalom, in Simsbury, and be treated to snacks.

Co-chairs for the event are David Diamond and Ari and Sharon Hartstein. Event sponsor is [Hebrew Health Care](#). For more information or to volunteer to help out at the event, visit www.tdsct.com. For more information about the Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah, visit www.campramahne.org.