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Cemetery expansion gets go-ahead

By Rachel L. Axelbank

Spurred on by communal support that exceeded all expectations, the Jewish Cemetery Association of Massachusetts has announced that it will move ahead with its planned expansion of the Beit Olam Cemetery.

In January, demand within the Metrowest Jewish community for cemetery plots prompted JCAM to purchase a 9-acre parcel of land — to be dubbed Beit Olam East — that would add 7,700 cemetery plots to the approximately 2,000 already part of Beit Olam. To ensure the expansion's economic viability, the board of directors mandated that JCAM secure reservations for at least 1,000 plots by May. Although the order was considered rather tall, no one need have worried — reservations hit the 1,358 mark by May 1. As of press time, 1,271 had

been paid for.

"This was an impossible task — to sell 1,271 sites in four months is unheard of," said JCAM Executive Director Stan Kaplan.

He attributed the success of the drive to community support, including that of area synagogues, approximately 25 of whose congregations he addressed on the issue, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies President Barry Shrage, who sent a letter on the matter to members of the CJP community.

Above all, however, Kaplan cited the community's need. He himself has purchased 10 plots and mentioned another individual who purchased 50 plots. "This says something very important, that it's so important to the Jewish community to have a cemetery there when the time comes," Kaplan said. He added that the number of plots purchased is rising daily.

Beit Olam and its expansion hold additional appeal because, together, they are the only Jewish cemetery in the Metrowest area that serves Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and unaffiliated interfaith Jewish families and that recognizes patrilineal Judaism, according to a written statement from JCAM. Those purchasing plots were asked to elect in writing a preference for either a "traditional" (strictly Halachic) or "Reform" (inclusive of interfaith and patrilineal Jews) cemetery. The split was 40/60, Kaplan said, a statistic that is consistent with the existing plots in Beit Olam.

Its future secured by the \$3,200,000 already collected, Beit Olam East is now in the design stage. Current plans project a grounds layout in the shape of multiple Magen David similar to that of the current Beit Olam Cemetery.