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## State helps preserve Jewish history

By Kristin Erekson

A multi-thousand dollar endowment from the state is now helping to transform a crumbling, East Boston cemetery chapel into a museum honoring the historic Jewish community north of Boston.

Upon receiving \$50,000 from the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund on June 13, the Jewish Cemetery Association of Massachusetts (JCAM) Charitable Foundation is moving forward in its venture to create the Ohabei Shalom Hall of Remembrance, an exhibition that will allow visitors to experience the culture and lifestyle of Jews who had once lived along the Mystic River. The funding, which was approved by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, will be used to repair the roof and gutter system as well as provide structural stabilization for the Ohabei Shalom Cemetery Chapel, according to Stan Kaplan, executive director and past president of JCAM. The estimated completion date for the project is the fall of 2008.

"What you will see [in the museum] is a tour of Jewish commu-

nities in places such as East Boston, Chelsea, Revere and Malden," Kaplan said. "The goal is for people to see what life was like for the Jewish pioneers who came to this country."

The approximately \$2 million Mystic River Jewish Communities Project will fill the cemetery chapel — which is believed to be the oldest Jewish chapel in Massachusetts — with audio-visual aids that give visitors the opportunity to get to know the once thriving Jewish community of Greater Boston, Kaplan added. Individuals will also be able to walk, in a sense, from city to city via exhibits, which will feature pictures, maps, articles, and artifacts on the population, synagogues, and youth centers.

"This is a historic preservation project that will benefit the entire community," said Kaplan, who noted that \$150,000 for the initiative has already been raised.

Known as the "Mystic River Jewish Communities," the cities of Chelsea, East Boston, Everett, Malden, Revere and Winthrop, among others, had at one time the largest concentration of Jews in the

New England region, numbering at more than 30,000 people, according to a 1965 Jewish Population Study of Greater Boston sponsored by Combined Jewish Philanthropies. But with more Jewish individuals moving to Newton, Brookline and the South Shore over the years, roughly 7,500 Jews live in the Mystic River areas, according to a 1995 Jewish Population Study of Greater Boston sponsored by CJP.

State Senator Cynthia Stone Creem (D-Newton), who included an amendment in the State Senate's budget for a \$30,000 earmark for the Mystic River Jewish Communities Project, said she wants to see the completed Ohabei Shalom Hall of Remembrance become a tourist landmark. Stone Creem, whose father was born in East Boston, added that she also hopes the initiative will help her learn more about the history of her family.

Stone Creem said: "I feel it is important to make people aware that most Jewish people migrated to the Mystic River area when they arrived here."