

# Shaarey Zedek Congregation Receives \$2 Million Donation From Asper Foundation, Along With a Further \$1 Million From Gail Asper and Michael Paterson



By Bernie Bellan

In October 2021 Shaarey Zedek Congregation announced that it was about to embark on the first major renovation of the building since the 1970s. The capital campaign that was launched that year had as its goal to raise \$14 million.

In September 2024 we reported that the goal of the capital campaign had been increased to \$17 million, which now included a plan to construct a \$1 million child care facility.

This past Wednesday, June 4, Rena Elbaze, Executive Director of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, announced to a select audience of congregation members that the goal of the capital campaign, which had been increased to \$18 million, has been helped considerably as a result of two very generous gifts - \$2 million from the Asper Foundation and a further gift of \$1 million from Gail Asper and Michael Paterson.

In recognition of those combined gifts the synagogue auditorium will be named the “Asper Auditorium.”

In figures supplied to me by Elbaze it was noted that the total cost for the synagogue renovation came in at \$17,363,626, added to which there has been an additional \$636,000 in interest on a \$9 million line of credit issued to the congregation by the Royal Bank of Canada. According to those same figures, the congregation had used \$5 million out of that \$9 million line of credit.

To the end of April the capital campaign had raised a total of \$15,682,400, including \$9,682,400 in pledges from the community, \$3,000,000 in pledges from the Congregation itself (from the Congregation’s capital fund), and a \$3,000,000 grant from the Province of Manitoba.

Although the just announced gifts from the Asper Foundation, also Gail Asper and Michael Paterson will help considerably to meet the \$18 million goal of the capital campaign, the capital campaign is still \$3 million short of reaching its goal. As well, as former Congregation President and Chair of the L’Dor Va Dor Capital Campaign Neil Duboff explained in that September 2024 article, there is a further goal to raise an additional \$3 million, which will be used to restore funds that had been taken from the congregation’s capital fund.

As I noted in that September 2024 article, “The congregation has a capital fund, and \$3 million from that fund has been used for the renovations, but Duboff said he’d like to ‘raise funds to put that back’ because the ‘purpose of the fund’ is to ‘sustain the congregation’ to pay for things like ‘programming.’”

Now, with the \$2 million gift received from the Asper Foundation, along with the \$1 million gift from Gail Asper and Michael Paterson, the financial pressure on the congregation will be somewhat eased.

In other news related to the Shaarey Zedek, Elbaze announced that there will be a special naming ceremony later this month for the child care centre, which will be named the Tove and Larry Vickar Child Care Centre. The Vickars made a \$1 million contribution for the construction of the Child Care Centre.

Finally, Elbaze noted that Rabbi Carnie Rose will begin his official duties as a new rabbi for the congregation on July 1.

# Winnipeg’s Jewish Community Responds to Help People Evacuated from Wildfires

The Kavod thrift store is accepting donations of essential goods.

By John Longhurst

(June 5, 2025 / The Canadian Jewish News)



Abby Flackman and Tali Weinberg delivered donations from the Kavod thrift store in Winnipeg to wildfire evacuees. (Photo supplied).

Winnipeg’s Jewish community is stepping up to support people evacuated from wildfires in the northern part of the province.

B’nai Brith Canada’s Winnipeg chapter operates the Kavod thrift store, which is accepting donations of clothing, toiletries, diapers, pet food, infant formula and other essentials for evacuees.

“The response has been unbelievable,” said Aviva Tabac, community engagement manager for B’nai Brith Canada. “It’s overwhelming.”

The store, located on the edge of downtown, issued an appeal on May 30 in response to the evacuation to Winnipeg of over 17,000 people from northern cities and towns such as Flin Flon, Cranberry Portage and Sherridon and a number of Indigenous communities.

“People started coming with things to donate right away, and they’re still coming in,” said Tabac, crediting Jewish groups such as the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg and local media for helping to get the word out.

To deal with the response, the store had extended hours on Sunday, June 1. “I can’t believe how much stuff came in,” Tabac said.

Fortunately, the 2,000-square-foot store had space for the donations. The donated items were checked and sorted before volunteers delivered them to a main depot operated by the Manitoba Métis Federation for distribution to evacuees.

“It’s just the way Winnipeg works, we rise to the occasion when there are needs,” Tabac said, adding more donations are needed. “This is a marathon with the fires, not a sprint.”

The thrift store, which opened in fall last year, is the first one to be operated by B’nai Brith in Canada. “It’s a pilot project to see how well it might work,” Tabac said, adding that the organization might open additional stores in other cities in the country after seeing how the Winnipeg operation fares.

So far, the store—which has three full-time employees and volunteers—is doing well. “Our goal is to treat people who shop here with dignity and respect,” Tabac said, referencing the store’s name, ‘Kavod’, which means honour or respect in Hebrew. “We want them to feel uplifted and supported.”

Manitoba declared a province-wide state of emergency on May 28, due to the wildfires, which have burned a total of 534,869 hectares. In 2024, only 43,141 hectares had burned across the province, according to the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre.

In Saskatchewan, there are 243 wildfires, up from 172 in total last year. Between 10,000 to 15,000 people have been forced to evacuate their homes. So far over 600,000 hectares have burned, said the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency.

More than 4,500 Albertans have been evacuated due to 49 fires in that province, according to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency.