

Scotch Plains family builds — and blogs — its first sukka



Mom and writer shares ups and downs of a DIY mitzva

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Lumber? Check. Fabric walls? Got 'em. Computer?
Ready to go.

The Lieberman family of Scotch Plains is not only creating its first sukka, but blogging about it at weboughtasukkah.blogspot.com.

Day by day, mom Jackie Lieberman will chronicle the ups and downs of building the makeshift shelter, a custom central to next week's celebration of Sukkot. The site already features photos of husband Eric and their two kids, Noah and Evelyn, hard at work.

“The thought of having our own sukka always appealed to me, but it wasn't until a friend of mine invited us into theirs that I began to realize how much fun we've been missing out on,” said Jackie, a writer, editor, and Jewish cooking teacher.

“Over the generations, it seems that a lot of us have let traditions like this one slide, never realizing how much we're losing when we do that. We envy our Christian neighbors who get to decorate Christmas trees and invite everyone over for holiday parties, and yet here's a holiday where we get to decorate and entertain and do all of those fun things and it seems we've totally forgotten about it.”

This year, Lieberman said, “I realize that I can buy those twinkly lights I've always wanted.”

For help, she turned to her rabbi, Rabbi Joel Abraham of Temple Sholom of Scotch Plains. He not only answered her questions, he gave three classes in September on Sukkot and the mitzva of building and dwelling in a sukka for her and others with similar questions.



Jackie Lieberman and her husband Eric, with their children, Noah and Evelyn, are building their first sukka this year.

Abraham also had another idea for spreading the word: “He asked me to blog about my experience, to share it with the congregation and anyone else who was interested.”

Inspiring builders

Inspired by an article in *NJJN* last fall, Lieberman was ready to consider any structure that met the basic requirements: that the structure be enclosed on at least two and a half sides, and that it have a roof of organic material through which the stars can be seen.

On one site, she read that rabbis once debated whether it was kosher to use parts of “a recently dead elephant.” Her response? “Ew.”

In the blog posts, she describes the steps, from acquiring a kit from thesukkahproject.com (not quite as described on a website) to seeking out pine boughs for the roof and decorative materials for the walls. The family plans to complete the booth on Sunday, Oct. 9, three days before the holiday.

Eric is a biomedical engineer and — according to his wife — extremely handy. “I’m not nearly as handy,” she added. But that’s the good part about blogging. Success is fine, but problems make for juicier material.

When non-Jewish readers expressed confusion, Lieberman added some background on Sukkot and the booths constructed by observant Jews.

“All around the world for thousands of years Jews have built these huts in their fields, in their yards, on the balconies of their apartments, on their college campuses, and anywhere else they happened to live or eat,” she wrote. “It’s a mitzvah (good deed, literally a commandment) to eat in the sukkah and live in it as much as possible during Sukkot.”

And for those readers taken aback by all this, she had a tart interfaith retort: “Think all of this sounds a little crazy? Well, look who’s cutting down trees to stick in their living rooms.”

“I’ve learned a lot about Sukkot and the traditions surrounding it — far more than I ever learned just talking about the holiday at the temple,” she told *NJJN*. “Many friends and acquaintances who have read the blog have come up and told me that they remember having a sukka as a kid, or that they have a sukka now and what they do with it. Some have told me that I’ve inspired them to think about building their own, although I don’t know if any of those people are actually doing it.”

Abraham told *NJJN*, “I was very excited not only that Jackie and her family had decided to build a sukka, but that she had decided to make her journey accessible to others. My hope is that other members of the congregation — and outside — will read her blog and decide that they, too, can build a sukka of their own.

“I look forward to eating in all of them.”

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