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Published October 16th, 2019

Chabad Center opens in Lafayette

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

The Chabad Jewish Center of Lamorinda hosted a grand opening ceremony on Sept. 19 to welcome the community to their new premises at 3574 Mt. Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette.

The center is under the spiritual guidance of Rabbi Yisroel Labkowski. The rabbi and his wife, Tzipora, are emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson.

Labkowski hails from Brooklyn, New York, and his wife, the rebbetzin, is from Israel. They married two years before coming to Lamorinda, and spent a year in Israel, then a year in Brooklyn. They have five children, and the oldest is 5 years old (no twins).

The Chabad center will consist of a Judaica Center where you can buy any Judaic item. For example, kiddush cups, tallit, menorahs, Mezuzahs and other Jewish items, all in different styles are available. There is also a Jewish art gallery featuring Jewish art from around the world.

A Jewish library/bookstore features a lounge area where visitors can sit and read or purchase an array of all different styles of Jewish books and cookbooks. Refreshments, including coffee and wine, are offered free of charge.

There are a number of other Chabads in the Bay Area, including one in Danville, a new one opening in Concord, two in Berkeley, and others in San Francisco and Oakland. The approach they practice is that Torah must be presented and experienced in a modern, relevant context and made available to each individual on their own level. The center's philosophy is in keeping with the Chabad-Lubavitch approach of joy, scholarship and unconditional acceptance and love for every Jew.

Chabad of Lamorinda has been in existence for about four years, during which time Labkowski says that they have connected with over 800 local Jewish families. Labkowski says that they have had one or two programs at Temple Isaiah in Lafayette and he had found it to always be a good mutual relationship. The Chabad center seeks to serve Jews of all backgrounds who want to learn more about their Jewish roots. Chabad offers a wide variety of educational and spiritual opportunities, including Torah classes and lectures, Shabbaton dinners and an array of family and social activities. Everyone is welcome regardless of their personal level of religious observance. Traditional Jewish values are brought to life in a joyous, nonjudgmental atmosphere.

All the activities offered by Chabad of Lamorinda are free, and the organization is funded wholly by donations from the local community. An important part of the community is the weekly Kiddush Luncheon that follows Shabbat morning services. The Hebrew School Program is under the leadership of Tzipora Labkowski. The children are taught, in addition to Hebrew reading and writing, the meaning of the heritage and the joys of being Jewish. Outings, contests and celebrations add further dimensions to the program. The Shul provides a full Bar/Bat Mitzvah program.

Religious services at the center are traditional, and are conducted in a casual atmosphere. Children

are included and most welcome. Many of those who attend cannot read Hebrew, yet, according to the rabbi, everyone feels at home. The prayer book is bilingual and various English readings are included in the service. Song and commentary add meaning and participation to the prayers.

Chabad of Lamorinda's mission statement says that the organization serves the Jewish communities in Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, and is dedicated to providing every Jew regardless of background, philosophy or level of commitment, an open door environment for strengthening and enhancing Jewish family life. Chabad serves individuals and families looking for an anchor and nonjudgmental, accepting, personalized Jewish experience. According to their website, Chabad offers "Judaism with a Smile," and a home away from home for everyone who walks through its doors.

For more information or to arrange a meeting with the rabbi, call the office at (925) 384-7242 or email: Info@ChabadofLamorinda.com.

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