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## Group finds meaning in baking bread

By Meg Hagerty [mhagerty@poststar.com](mailto:mhagerty@poststar.com) | Posted: Wednesday, September 8, 2010 1:15 am



Photos by Jason McKibben - [jmckibben@poststar.com](mailto:jmckibben@poststar.com)

Rabbi Jonathan Rubenstein leads a prayer over freshly risen dough prior to making loaves of challah with a kitchen full of volunteers at the Slice of Heaven bakery in Saratoga Springs Friday, August 27, 2010. The bakery, part of Temple Sinai, is a charitable project started by Rubenstein and his wife, Rabbi Linda Motzkin, six years ago and provides bread to members of the temple, assisted living residents, hospital patients, grieving families and a few local restaurants.

SARATOGA SPRINGS -- The enticing aroma of freshly baked bread wafted through the entrance to Temple Sinai on a recent Friday morning. You only needed to follow your nose to find the kitchen down the hall where about a dozen bakers were getting briefed on the day's production from Rabbi Jonathan Rubenstein.

Wearing a net over his gray and white beard and a faded navy baseball cap smudged with flour, the rabbi dumped a bucket of freshly risen dough onto a butcher block island and divided it with a bench scraper. After weighing portions on a scale, he distributed mounds of dough to his helpers, who then rolled them out into logs that would be braided into round and oblong loaves.



This is Slice of Heaven bakery, a charitable all-volunteer project of the temple begun six years ago by Rubenstein and his wife, Rabbi Linda Motzkin. For 11 months of the year, breads are made weekly for members of the temple, the community and a few local restaurants.

Through the Bread and Torah Fund, purchased loaves help to subsidize those given free to nursing home and assisted living residents, hospital patients and grieving families.

On special occasions like Rosh Hashanah, Temple Sinai ramps up its production of baked goods, making round loaves of white or wheat challah to symbolize the cycle of life throughout the year. "Rosh Hashanah is kind of about looking at our lives and how we can make ourselves and our relationships whole," Rubenstein said. "Along with Yom Kippur, they are two of the most widely observed holidays in the Jewish calendar." This 10-day period of self-reflection and introspection, Aseret Yemai Teshuvah, is meant to make amends for misdeeds, give credit for things done right and take positive steps to becoming better individuals.



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Mary Jane Baumbach has been a Slice of Heaven volunteer for four years during the summers when she is on break from her teaching job. Even though she is not Jewish, she said she thinks about her own life as she's kneading the challah for Rosh Hashanah. "You come out with this wonderful product that gives nourishment and joy, it sort of shows the completion of your whole year - the good parts, the bad parts. You put it altogether and you reflect on what came out of it and what you'll do next," she said.

Baumbach is part of a diverse group of bakers that also includes three clients of Living Resources, an organization supporting individuals with developmental disabilities, and Jerome Mopsik, 26, who was laid off from his job last November.

Working at Slice of Heaven keeps the Skidmore College graduate busy while he looks for another job in small business relations. Also, Mopsik enjoys the work the rabbis are doing to benefit the community.

In 2004, Rubenstein began bread baking just as a creative outlet. As he advanced, he wanted to see if he could develop a line of breads for charitable purposes and developed Slice of Heaven. Two local restaurateurs let him use their kitchens for production, which is where he got his start selling to the public and a few businesses.



Rubenstein said from the beginning his intention has always been to help hunger relief. "The very first check I wrote with the revenue I made went to the food pantry. As I expanded it, the intention was to bring people who could use some training, some instruction, some socialization. I've had these relationships with agencies for a long time. That's a big part of our mission as well," he said.

He acknowledged that people can easily buy challah at the grocery store, but eating special foods is a way of marking special occasions. People choose Slice of Heaven because they know the "spirit" is of the charitable project.

"It's very inclusive, the ingredients are chosen with a lot of care, we emphasize getting food from local producers. I think there's awareness that there has been thought that went into making the bread," Rubenstein said.

The rabbi said Rosh Hashanah shouldn't be the only time you practice reflection and atonement during the year. Rubenstein compared the holiday to being a home baker and going to a baking conference to learn new skills or practice those skills.

"The attribute of being able to seek forgiveness and personal improvements, that's something that we do all the time, but this period is like an intensive - so that learning new ways of doing those this period of repentance and then



you're putting yourself in an environment where you're open to things and you incorporate it into your life. So it's not like we have we go back to forgetting about it," he said.