

## Workshop weaves bread and tradition



Duluth's Ben Wallerstein, 13, weaves strands of dough while creating a challah loaf during the Bread and Torah Project workshop at Temple Israel in Duluth on Friday. Wallerstein's mother, Michele Wallerstein, said she brought her sons because "it is important for them to be here because not many people locally make challah bread from scratch anymore. It is important to keep the tradition alive and to teach it to the younger ones." Find more photos at [duluthnewstribune.com](http://duluthnewstribune.com). Photos by Clint Austin / [caustin@duluthnews.com](mailto:caustin@duluthnews.com)

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Unlike many bakers, Jonathon Rubenstein says there is no secret ingredient in his challah recipe or in the way he makes it. Except a lot of practice.

"If you want to do it well, you have to do it over and over again and be prepared to make a lot of mistakes," he said.

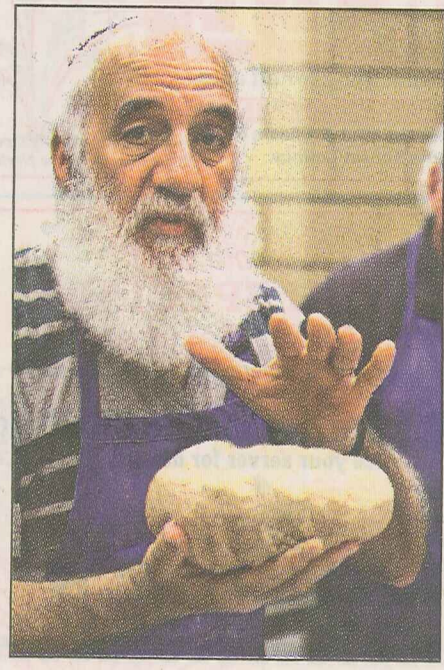
A bread maker, baking teacher and also a rabbi, Rubenstein was leading a challah-making workshop Fri-

day at Duluth's Temple Israel as part of the first Ilene Levin Scholars-in-Residence Program. Founded by temple member Steve Goldfine in honor of his wife, Ilene Levin, who died of cancer last year, the program was something the couple had planned together.

This first year includes Rubenstein and his wife, Rabbi Linda Motzkin, co-rabbis at Temple Sinai Reform Congregation in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Rubenstein also runs a

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**Rabbi Jonathon Rubenstein of Saratoga Springs, N.Y., demonstrates the consistency the challah dough needs to be during the Bread and Torah Project workshop. The workshop is a part of the first Ilene Levin Scholars-in-Residence program, in tribute to the Temple Israel member who died of cancer last year.**







Rabbi Jonathon Rubenstein of Saratoga Springs, N.Y., leads a group blessing for the challah dough during the Bread and Torah Project workshop at Temple Israel in Duluth on Friday. The workshop is a part of the first Ilene Levin Scholars-in-Residence program, in tribute to the Temple Israel member who died of cancer last year. Clint Austin / caustin@duluthnews.com

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nonprofit bakery.

Challah is a Jewish traditional braided bread used for special occasions and life-cycle events. In the workshop, Rubenstein taught the art of forming the dough and braiding it, as well as what it means to break off a piece and offer it to someone as a symbol of sharing the best of what was produced.

"Part of what we're doing is being mindful of what we're blessed with," he said.

Congregant Maureen O'Brien said she's made her own challah before, using a bread machine and braiding it afterward. But she said going through the whole process and listening to the lessons taught by Rubenstein were "wonderful."

"I hear so many people say, 'I hope to have my protein; I need my fiber,'" she said. "It's more than (that). This is very much a part of

our spiritual and cultural identity. This evening, when we have dinner, the challah will be on the table. When we eat, we will say a blessing and everybody will share of that loaf. It's about the community that's here, all together, baking this."

Motzkin's activities this week include work on a Torah scroll, a 16-year project that involves using turkey quills to write the first five books of the Hebrew Bible on deer hide. She is one of about a dozen women in the world skilled in the art. Participants in her workshops proofread her work, and to date, about 1,600 have worked on it.

And it can't have a single mistake, making her creative process the opposite of her husband's try-and-try again approach to bread making.

"Torah scrolls have to be perfect," she said. "It is an amazing privilege to be able to make something sacred, something holy, and to be able to join people together in community doing something holy."

Deborah Weckert took part in both workshops. Though she isn't Jewish, she said it was "a fantastic opportunity to participate in the proofing of the Torah. It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing."

She and temple member Mark Cohen took turns braiding the challah.

"There is something really basic about bread," Cohen said. "It's fun to have your hands in it."

Goldfine said it was Levin's idea to have Motzkin and Rubenstein — two of the rabbis who married the couple — for the first scholars program in her name. Rubenstein and Goldfine are also lifelong friends, and Rubenstein's father, Rabbi B.T. Rubenstein, was a rabbi at Duluth's former Temple Emanuel, a predecessor of Temple Israel.

"(Ilene) was always concerned about inclusiveness, sharing and teaching," Goldfine said. "I'm hoping this will be a lasting tribute to her."