

Gearing Up for 'Tour de Shuls' Bike Ride

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NEEDHAM — Over two years ago on a Sunday afternoon, Stephen Baum found himself heading south on his weekly bike ride. The countryside's beauty led him to Temple Israel in Sharon, where an idea popped into his head: All the temples in the region would make for a great bike route.

Baum, a member of the National Federation of Men's Clubs and current president of Temple Aliyah in Needham, came up with "Tour de Shuls," a cycling fundraiser to raise money for Camp Ramah's Tikvah Program.

The second annual "Tour de Shuls" will take place on Sunday, June 28. Swampscott residents Ben and Marcy Yellin participated in the bike ride last year because their 24-year old son Jacob attended the Tikvah program for 12 years. According to Marcy, the event was a great experience.

"A lot of people who were riding were doing it for training, so my husband and I spoke about the program and the reason for the fundraiser. It was a great way to get the word out," Marcy said.

The Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah, located in Palmer, Massachusetts, is a special-needs program. Since 1970,



Photo courtesy of Ken Turkewitz, New England Region Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, Tour de Shuls Chair 2009

Riders and supporters from Camp Ramah gather at last year's race.

the program has tried to meet the social and religious needs of developmentally challenged adolescents.

According to Howard Blas, director of the Tikvah program, it began in a time when other camps were not prepared to deal with special-needs children.

The eight-week program is geared to approximately 50 campers, ages 13-21, with mild to moderate mental retardation, autism, spectrum disorders and neurological impairments.

The program has all the basics of an overnight camp, such as swimming, boating, sports, art, and dramatics, with the addi-

tion of Jewish education, including Judaic classes, services and bar and bat mitzvah training.

Riders have the option of 10, 25, 50 or 75-mile bike routes. All routes begin and end at Temple Aliyah in Needham, and each route has stops at synagogues along the way.

The National Federation of Men's Clubs is an organization of 270 Conservative Jewish men's groups. Baum explains that the men's club has been supporting the Tikvah program and Camp Ramah for as long as he can remember. Ramah allows the New England region of the FJMC to meet and participate

in Jewish study, learning, prayer and sports on the campgrounds before the season begins.

The men's club has held raffles in the past to raise money for the program. According to Baum, a bike ride just seemed like more fun.

According to Blas, the event attracts both riders and people who feel connected to the Tikvah program.

"I would come out myself and ride, and I would bring some of my campers to cheer for the riders," Blas added.

The money raised contributes to various aspects of the Tikvah program, including building new wheelchair ramps, paving sidewalks, and creating scholarships for campers who come from all over the United States. Blas adds that the money could also go towards updating and fixing equipment and facilities, such as adding new washers and dryers, and purchasing prayer books.

According to Blas, the event not only raises money for the special-needs campers, but helps bring the community together as well.

"There is a lot of camaraderie among the riders, and it brings the shuls together too," he said.

More information can be found at tourdeshuls.org.