

Jewish center planned for Tech students

by [Hillary May](#) '12

The second night of Hannukah 2010 proved to be the coldest. Jewish students huddled outside Squires Student Center, trying to keep menorahs lit through Blacksburg wind and falling snow. For more than an hour, they sang holiday songs through chattering teeth, spun dreidels on the ice with shivering hands, and managed to keep their candles lit.

Why brave the weather? Candles aren't allowed indoors on campus, so no other option was available.

That will change soon. Virginia Tech's Jewish students—estimated to be about 4 percent of the student population—are awaiting the completion of the Malcolm Rosenberg Hillel Center for Jewish Life.



COURTESY OF HILLEL AT VIRGINIA TECH
Malcolm Rosenberg Hillel Center for Jewish Life at Virginia Tech

Hillel, an international Jewish campus organization, is the students' home away from home. More than just a campus synagogue, Hillel helps students to be a part of a cultural community on campus through recreational, educational, and service opportunities. Hillel has everything from outdoor programs and sporting events to weekly Shabbat services and a free trip to Israel. "Hillel helps Jewish students find each other and be a community," said Jake Aberman (electrical engineering '14).

In memory of her late husband, Diane Rosenberg recently donated a challenge gift of \$1 million to Hillel for the new building. Though neither of the Rosenbergs attended the university, they wanted to do something about the needs of the Jewish community at Tech, encouraging the students to "dream large." The center will be located on Toms Creek Road, right across from campus, and will offer a much-needed space.

Stephanie Mahoney (interior design '14), a transfer student from a school where the Jewish community was not as engaged as Tech's, said Hillel helped her get involved and feel welcome in Blacksburg.

Aberman, a freshman, agreed: "Especially for me, coming to a school where you only knew one or two people, Hillel is a great way to make friends and [attend services] and know you have something in common."

Mahoney thinks that the new building will draw more Jewish students to Tech. "Having a building shows that the Jewish community is taken seriously," she said. "It also will give Jewish students a permanent place to go."

Hillel's new center is exciting news for Sigma Alpha Epsilon Pi sorority and Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity, Jewish-interest organizations on campus. Both groups have members on Hillel's executive board and make a strong showing at events. Andy Greisinger (finance '12), the president of Alpha Epsilon Pi, stressed the connection between Hillel and Jewish-interest Greek organizations. "We helped at the groundbreaking for the new Hillel building. [We] always show a great attendance at Shabbat and Hillel events," he said.

Sue Kurtz, executive director of Hillel at Virginia Tech, emphasized how much this new center will mean to the organization. "It will be a welcoming place for everyone, and a place [that] will give the students an opportunity to be together in celebration of their culture and customs," she said. "It will give Hillel a focal point."

Hillel anticipates moving into the new center in spring 2012.

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